Money talks: what bank employees in four banks in Hong Kong say about their work, language and training needs

Kheng-Suan Chew

PhD

University of York

Department of Educational Studies

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the use of English in four banks in Hong Kong by investigating the respective communicative tasks new graduate employees perform in English and Cantonese, the difficulties they have in using English and the solutions they adopt. It also investigates the differences in the proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees and the extent to which these differences in language use are a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures. Two illustrations drawn from one of the four banks – a senior managers' meeting and the discourses of a British Head of Department on English at the bank – explore how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. The study further examines the types of English language courses these employees received at university and their views on them. As regards English training in the workplace, the study aims to ascertain whether the banks provide English training to their employees and whether and to what extent employees are interested in receiving such training.

Interviews of 16 employees from four banks were conducted and transcribed, yielding valuable information about the employees' work and language use. This was supplemented by a questionnaire completed by the employees. In one of the banks, proceedings at a meeting of senior managers and an interview with the Head of the Corporate Communications Department provided more data on banking Discourse. The lack of access to the employees' written documents meant that the interview data had to be carefully scrutinised to learn **what** the informants said and **how** they said it.

The key findings are the following: English is used at work in interesting and diverse ways, with 10 employees reporting difficulty in either writing or speaking in English; the most common solution adopted by them for overcoming their English difficulties is to pass their writing to their supervisors for correction; the four banks represent different types of banks with different corporate cultures, banking Discourse and use of English at work; English courses at university are generally inadequate and unsatisfactory; the four banks do not provide adequate English training to their employees; and the employees display varying degrees of interest in receiving English training for work.

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Introduction

1. The aims of the study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the use of English in four banks in Hong Kong by investigating how new graduate employees use English to carry out their work. The study investigates which communicative tasks these employees carry out in English and which tasks in Cantonese; what difficulties the employees have in using English and what solutions they adopt to overcome them. It also investigates the differences in proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees and the extent to which these differences in language use are a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures. Two illustrations drawn from one bank – a senior managers' meeting and the discourses of a British Head of Department on English at the bank – explore how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. The study further examines what types of English language courses these employees received at university and their views on them. In the area of English training in the workplace, the study aims to find out whether banks provide English training to their employees and whether and to what extent employees are interested in receiving such training.

2. Reasons for my interest

I have been teaching English – specifically, Business English – for more than twenty years, the last eighteen years to university students in Hong Kong. One of my major responsibilities as a Business English teacher at the Hong Kong Baptist University is to design and run the Business English course for first year students studying for the degree of Bachelor of Business Studies (BBA Honors). This is a compulsory forty-hour course taught to more than three hundred BBA students every academic year, which aims to improve their English language skills for business studies and business communication. I am therefore very familiar with the common skills and topics taught in Business English courses.

There is the widespread perception today among Hong Kong employers and the general public that the English language standards of university graduates are not good enough to meet the needs of the economy. Employers have in the past decade become increasingly dissatisfied with the English language standards of the university graduates that they employ (American Chamber of Commerce Survey, 2001; Chew, 1999; Hong Kong Census & Statistics Department Survey, 2000; Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, 2001; *South China Morning Post*, September, 1999; Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, 2003; *South China Morning Post-TNS* Opinion Leaders Survey on Education in Hong Kong, November 2006). The business sector is alarmed that the poor English standards may cause the city to become less competitive not only vis-à-vis its traditional rival, Singapore, but even vis-à-vis some cities in mainland China where standards of English are improving fast (*South China Morning Post*, May 1999 and December 2002).

This is what decided for me the field and theme of my PhD research: I would study the English standards of university graduates in the workplace. After further consideration, I decided to investigate the English standards of bank employees, since the financial sector is one of the pillars of the Hong Kong economy, with Hong Kong having one of the world's most developed and modern banking systems, in which the use of English is very important. Given my long classroom experience, I had no doubt it would be interesting and instructive to look **outside** the academy to see how university graduates were faring in English in the real world after leaving the academy.

Even as my study of workplace English was in the preliminary stages, I had the opportunity to participate in a large-scale collaborative project conducted by and across five local universities. It was entitled *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong* It investigated the scenario **within the academy** regarding the adequacy and efficacy of the English courses offered to undergraduate students in the Business faculties. The fact that I was teaching Business English naturally helped. I brought into this project my own preliminary findings about workplace English. (I refer to this project in Chapters 3 and 7.) I can therefore venture to claim familiarity with both sides of the issue, so to speak.

3. Research strategy

After deciding to locate my research site at the banks, I sent out letters to twenty banks in Hong Kong in June 1999 requesting their participation in my study. Most of the banks did not even bother to reply. A few did reply but declined to take part in the study for various reasons. Fortunately, through my repeated attempts and through the contact gained in one bank, I eventually managed to get the consent of four banks to participate in the study. The collection of data started in the summer of 1999, but subsequently there were personnel changes in one of the banks involved, and further access was denied. I also found that I could not control the number of employees who could be interviewed. The number of visits I could make was also dictated by the banks.

4. Research techniques

I interviewed a total of 16 employees in the four banks. Each of these interviews lasted about one hour and they have been transcribed so that there are more than 16 hours of work description and details about the informants' language use. The informants were also asked to a complete a questionnaire detailing various aspects of their work and language use. I used a modified version of the questionnaire used by Bhatia and Candlin in their study of the communicative needs of legal professionals in Hong Kong (Bhatia and Candlin, 1998). In one of the banks, I was also given the rare privilege to attend a meeting of the senior management, interview the Head of Department for his views about English discourse in the bank, and to generally observe the work of his department. However, none of the banks granted me access to any of their written documents. Consequently, I have had to maximise the data that I **was** able to collect by closely examining the interview transcripts in order to finely distil **what** the informants were saying and **how** they were saying it. I elaborate on the benefits gained in Chapters 4 and 5.

5. How this thesis makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge and understanding of this research topic

This is an original and important study because to my knowledge, there is no other study on the use of English by bank employees in Hong Kong. There have been a few other studies on banks, but these have looked at management issues and issues of power relations and distance (Lee, Pillutla and Law, 2000; Lam, Aryee, and Schaubroeck, 1999). There are a few other studies on workplace language in Hong Kong in other sectors such as the textile and clothing industry (Li and Mead, 2000), the construction industry (Evans, 1999), and one study on a large multinational airline corporation in Hong Kong (Bilbow, 2002). Therefore, although Hong Kong's role as a major international financial centre is so crucial, there has been no study specifically to investigate the English language use and needs of bank employees in Hong Kong. This study will, I hope, fill this gap. Although my findings cannot be generalised for all banks in Hong Kong, I believe that they do shed light on the situation in these four banks and may lead to future action to rectify some of the present language shortcomings.

6. Synopsis of chapters

Chapter 1 traces the various aspects of the historical spread of English across the world to become the dominant world language today. I first give a personal account of how I came to learn English as an illustration of the spread of English through colonialism. I then examine the views of different scholars and their analysis and predictions for the future (spread) of English. I also discuss how as English has spread, so different varieties have evolved, challenging the notion of the superiority of white native speakers as teachers of English today.

Chapter 2 provides the Hong Kong context to my study starting with a brief background on Hong Kong politics, economy and the banking sector. I then discuss the education scenario in Hong Kong: both its historical evolution and the present-day issues such as public examination results in English, the medium of instruction issue, Hong Kong English, educational reforms, benchmarking language teachers, and complaints from the business community about the low English standards of university graduates. Finally, I discuss the debate on falling English standards.

Chapter 3 presents the literature review to put my study in its theoretical context and to provide a clearer framework from which I can analyse the discourse (in both capital *D* and small *d* ways) in the four banks. I begin by reviewing the literature on the various approaches to studying language use with particular interest in narrative analysis as a means of analysing my interview data. I then provide short discussions of different studies on institutional talk, discourse(s) in the workplace, business discourse, meetings, business discourse applications to language teaching, and language use in the Hong Kong workplace to bring together all the relevant, useful and usable approaches so that each may contribute towards the methodological approaches adopted in this study and the subsequent analysis of my data.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology adopted in this study. I begin by restating the aims of the study and its rationale, as well as my motivation in conducting it. I then set out my research questions. In explaining the research approach adopted, I discuss the difficulties encountered from choosing banks as the research site and justify the methods I employ – the interview used in combination with the questionnaire – and how they are sequenced in the study. Then I discuss the role of the interviewer and my interviewing methods with examples from the text. Next, I describe the difficulties of transcribing the data, the evolution in the presentation of the data and checks carried out to ensure the data is valid. Finally, I discuss the role of ethics in this study.

Chapter 5 actually begins the presentation and analysis of the data. I first explain how the interviews with the 16 employees turned out to be more important although I also used a questionnaire. After presenting the overall information about the employees in a tabular format I explain the transcription conventions followed by me. Then I present what may be called a verbatim report on my interviews with the 16 employees: what each of them told me is presented in a particular structured format and order, the communicative tasks that each performs, in his or her respective position – both in English and Chinese – are presented in self-explanatory diagrams which, I believe, are both interesting and revealing. The findings from this section are summarised. I then discuss the language difficulties of each of the employees and the solution that he or she adopts for these difficulties. The findings from this section are also then summarised.

Chapter 6 considers the institutional or organisational context of this study, within the Hong Kong setting. After briefly discussing the role of a bank in a modern economy, it examines the four banks that participated in this study to find out the differences in their corporate culture, international orientation and exposure, staff recruitment, and the use of English by their staff to perform their duties. The chapter then focuses on one bank, AB Bank, to explore two illustrations of how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. The chapter ends with a brief mention of some subsequent changes in the Bank.

Chapter 7 focuses on the important issue of training, looking at it from the point of view of the 16 employees. I quote extracts from the transcripts of my individual interviews with them to present their views about the English language courses they attended at university. I also discuss my findings on English training at the four banks, and the employees' interest in such training. In view of the unprecedented recent changes in the workplace, I discuss the literature on training in the workplace and relate this to my findings in the four banks, and more broadly, to what is taking place in Hong Kong. I discuss the five-university project on *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong* as an example of what universities can do to investigate, identify and rectify existing inadequacies within the academy. The chapter concludes with my own views: first, on what universities can do for improving English skills in general and, secondly, what banks themselves (in their capacity as employers) can (and should) do for improving the English skills of their employees.

Chapter 8 restates the main aims of this study, and the research questions. Then I summarise the findings of the study according to the five research questions posed. This is followed by an appraisal of the study and its methods – the minuses and the pluses, including the reasons why this study is significant. Finally, I discuss the implications for practice and further research and emphasise the need for a partnership between the academy and the workplace.

Chapter 1: The global spread of English

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a broad survey of how the English language has come to be what it has become by the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first: virtually *the* global language. I begin at a personal level, giving an outline of how I came to learn English, and then give a brief sketch of the phenomenal spread of English throughout the world, including the different theories expounded by different scholars, as well as the various linguistic, cultural and social issues that have arisen as a result. In regard to the number of people who speak English, I discuss the concepts of the hierarchy of languages and the three concentric circles of English; I also discuss at some length the hypothesis that Mandarin could challenge the position of English as the dominant international language. Next, I discuss the notion of different varieties of English and in order to have a comparative perspective in which to view my present study, conducted in Hong Kong, I discuss some of the contemporary debates about English in Singapore. Finally, I discuss how the emergence of different varieties of English as well as the fact that there are now more users of English outside the inner circle has necessitated a re-examination of the notion of white native speakers a the best models of users (or speakers) and teachers of English.

1.1 A personal account

The story of how I came to learn English may provide an interesting illustration of how English has come to be spoken by some 850 million people all over the world today, a figure that I have obtained by adding all the figures provided by Crystal (1997) in his book *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* on the number of people who speak English as their first language, their second language, and fluently as their foreign language. As a fourth-generation Singaporean Chinese of *Peranakan* roots[1], I grew up speaking Malay, English and Hokkien, a dialect from the southern Chinese province of Fujian. Once I started going to school, however, first to a kindergarten, then to the primary, followed by a secondary convent school run by Irish Catholic nuns, it was English almost exclusively. This continued all the way up to junior college level and then, on to several of the best universities in the United States of America. English was not only the medium of instruction in my entire schooling experience, it was also the language I used at home with family members and it was, to all intents and purposes, my "first" language. It was Mandarin that I studied as my "second" language at school. In Singapore, English is one of the four official languages, the other three being Mandarin, Malay and Tamil (a south Indian language), but it (English) is by far the most important. It may be noted that English is, naturally, not the mother tongue of the local population, which, according to the 2000 Census of Population, comprises of Chinese (76.8 percent of the population), Malays (13.9 percent), Indians (7.9 percent) and others (1.4 percent) referring to Eurasians and Europeans.

My knowledge and use of English were further enhanced when I took a Master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the US, and embarked on a career as an English teacher, first in Singapore and then in Hong Kong. This, in brief, is the story of a Chinese girl growing up in Singapore, a British colony from 1819 to 1965. It may not be too typical of other Chinese girls growing up in Singapore in the 1950s, for mine was not a typical family[2] and my father had,

[1] The term *Peranakan* refers to the community of ethnic Chinese settlers in the Straits Settlements of Malacca , Penang, and Singapore, who arrived from the southern province of Fujian, China in search of better fortunes. They are also sometimes referred to as Straits Chinese or the *Baba* (for the menfolk) and *Nonya* (for the womenfolk). The most distinct aspect of Baba culture today is their language called Baba Malay. It is a Malay-based creole originally developed from bazaar Malay and it has distinct and systematic linguistic features. It has many Chinese loanwords as well as Indonesian and English loanwords. This is the everyday language of the Baba, although the more English-educated ones also speak English among themselves. The older generation of womenfolk dress in Malay-style sarung kebaya and their cuisine is a unique mixture of Chinese and Malay food. Other than language, dress and food, there is not much acculturation with Malay culture. Many of the Peranakan men performed jobs as intermediaries between the British colonial masters and the local population, and some of them attained high social status as part of the elite in the Straits Settlements. For more information on the Peranakan or Baba community, see Clammer, J.R. (1980) *Straits Chinese Society*; and Tan, C-B. (2000) Socio-cultural diversities and identities in K. H. Lee and C-B. Tan (eds) *The Chinese in Malaysia* (pp.37-70). New York: Oxford University Press. For an up-to-date and comprehensive account on the Baba community in Singapore, see Rudolph, J. (1998) *Reconstructing Identities: A Social History of the Babas in Singapore.* Aldershot, Brookfield USA: Ashgate.

[2] The story of how my great-grandfather came to Singapore from a village near Amoy in the southern province of China in the late 1870s after first working for several years in Bangkok is told in our family

for a brief period in his career, also been an English teacher in a famous Chinese high school in Singapore in the early 1940s. Yet this personal account of how I came to learn English and then to make a living from teaching English, provides just one interesting example of how diverse the spread of English has been across the globe in modern times.

I met my husband while studying in the United States. He is an Indian who grew up in Penang, another city from the former British Straits Settlements[3] and part of the former British colony of Malaysia, and the language we use to communicate with each other is English. Our son has grown up with English as his first language and he is studying Mandarin in school as his second language. Thus I have used my life story to show how the use of English has continued into the next generation.

1.2 The spread of English

The spread of English, like that of other prestigious languages in history, has come about through various ways like political domination, trade, colonisation and emigration, education, religion, and the mass media. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, English was spread by British colonisation, conquest and trade. A militarily powerful nation may get to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain and expand it. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world's leading industrial and trading country. By the end of the century, however, the population of the USA (at that time approaching 100 million) was larger than that of any of the countries of Western Europe and **its** economy was the most productive and fastest growing in the world. And the USA spoke English. British colonialism may have sent English around the globe, but it was US economic supremacy and the superpower status of America in the twentieth century that maintained and promoted the status of English around the world. Economics replaced politics as the chief driving force.

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album entitled *Chew Boon Lay – A Family Traces Its History* compiled by Ong, C.I., Chew, K. C., and Chew, E.(2002).

[3] The three cities of Penang, Malacca and Singapore together formed the administrative unit called the Straits Settlements during the period of the British colonisation of Malaysia from 1786 to 1963.

There is the closest of links between language dominance and power: political, economic and technological, as well as cultural power. Today, English has penetrated deeply into the international domains of political life, business, safety, communication, entertainment, the media and education. Several domains such as the computer software industry, science, medicine and international finance have come to be totally dependent on it. Table 1.1 shows how diverse and influential the major international domains of English are at the end of the twentieth century. All this has led Crystal (2003) to state that, "the momentum of growth has become so great that there is nothing likely to stop its continued spread as a global lingua franca, at least in the foreseeable future" (p.x).

Table 1.1 Major international domains of English [slightly modified version of what is found in Graddol (1997)]

1	Working language of international organisations and conferences
2	Scientific publication
3	International banking, economic affairs and trade
4	Advertising for global brands
5	Movies, TV programmes and popular music
6	International tourism
7	Tertiary education
8	International safety (e.g. 'airspeak', 'seaspeak')
9	International law
10	As a 'relay language' in interpretation and translation
11	Technology transfer
12	Internet communication

The eagerness of the rest of the world to use English has resulted in many humorous, to put it mildly, examples of English use. Bryson (1990) in his chapter "English as a world language" (pp. 179-195) gives countless examples of *funny English* (my words) as the language is used, adapted, nativised, and downright mangled "to make the somewhat obvious observation that English is the most global of languages." To cite just one such example, he writes:

> I have before me a brochure from the Italian city of Urbino, which contains a dozen pages of the most gloriously baroque and impenetrable English prose, lavishly garnished with misspellings, unexpected hyphenations, and twisted grammar. A brief extract: "The integrity and thus the vitality of Urbino is no chance, but a conservation due to the factors constituted in all probability by the appropriate framework of the unity of the country, the difficulty od [*sic*] communications, the very concentric pattern of hill systems or the remoteness from hi-ghly developed areas, the force of the original design proposed in its construction, with the means at the disposal of the new sciences of the Renaissance, as an ideal city even." It goes on like that for a dozen pages. There is scarcely a sentence that makes even momentary sense. (p. 181)

Pennycook (1994) makes an attempt to understand the position and role of English in the world and how English attained them. This attempt is an exploration of the implications of the spread of English in its global or universal expansion and its local contexts. He talks about *the worldliness of English.* The term worldliness is, of course, derived from the term *worldly*, but it is understood here in a particular and specific sense, very differently from what we normally understand by that term. By *worldliness*, the author primarily means the "cultural and political implications of the spread of English" (p. 6). To understand the *worldliness* of English, it is necessary to understand English globally. Again, *global* here means not only *around* or *across* the world, but also *in* the world, i.e. how English is used in different parts of the world. Pennycook states that "English is embedded in multiple local contexts of use" (p. 7) and "bound up in a wealth of local social, cultural, economic and political complexities" (p. 7).

Pennycook traces the history of the spread of English through the world and shows how this process was intertwined with the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire through the nineteenth century. (There was a more or less parallel process taking place within Britain—the birth-place of English—namely that of the standardisation of the spoken as well as written forms and structures of English and it was this standardised version of the language that was disseminated into the world through various imperial mechanisms.) Specifically citing the example of India, Pennycook narrates how colonial education and language policies facilitated and ensured the spread of English in India. In contrast, the educational policy of the colonial government in Hong Kong was different, in that it never saw the training of an elite English–speaking group of locals as an educational and political objective.

A remarkable fact about the post-war world in the second half of the twentieth century, and now the twenty-first, is that even as colonialism and imperialism formally ended and former colonies became free nations, the hold of the colonial language has been progressively increasing, rather than diminishing. Now English is seen to be making inroads even in China and Japan; in the process, it has veritably emerged as *the* international or global language. A commonly held view in regard to this phenomenon is that the spread of English was "natural, neutral and beneficial" (op.cit, p. 9). As Pennycook explains, it is said to be natural because despite the initial colonial imposition, the subsequent expansion of English is now seen as a result of inevitable global forces; neutral because English is now said to have got detached from its original (Anglo-American) cultural contexts and therefore is now seen as a neutral and transparent medium of communication; and beneficial on the assumption that international communication occurs on a cooperative and equal footing. However, Pennycook points out that such a view of the spread of English:

> needs to be investigated as a particular discursive construct. To view the spread as natural is to ignore the history of that spread and to turn one's back on larger global forces and the goals and interests of institutions and governments that have promoted it. To view it as neutral is to take a very particular view of language and also to assume that the apparent international status of English raises it above local social, cultural, political or economic concerns. To view it as beneficial is to take a rather naively optimistic position on global relations and to ignore the relationships between English and inequitable distributions and flows of wealth, resources, culture and knowledge. (pp. 23-24)

Brutt-Griffler (2002) examines the twin notions of language spread and language change of *World English* – a term she prefers as it is "simpler and more direct" (p. 15) instead of *English as an international language, English as a global language*, or *English as a world language*: terminology which, according to her, is "based on and appropriate to a functional definition" (p. 15) – from the eighteenth century to the postcolonial era from the socio-political, historical and linguistic perspectives. She introduces the concept of *macroacquisition*, which she defines as social SLA (second language acquisition). Social SLA is to be distinguished from individual SLA, the traditional way of discussing SLA. The very idea of a language becoming a world language implies the process of language spread and Brutt-Griffler argues that language change and spread cannot be successfully explained by the theory of linguistic imperialism as put forward, for example, by Phillipson (1992). Instead, the process is best explained by her concept of macroacquisition, in which the acquiring speech community is the main actor who brings about this language spread and change. Through this argument, Brutt-Griffler contends that bi/multilingual speech communities play a vital role in the shaping of the English language. Macroacquisition integrates the concepts of language spread and change by viewing language change as a process of second language acquisition by a speech community, rather than the individual second language (L2) learner. It also rejects the notion of the primary input as that coming from native speakers. According to her, this approach to World English is able to explain how a language can be "appropriated" by its speakers. She outlines the two ways in which a bilingual speech community can emerge, referring to these two ways as *Type A* and *Type B macroacquisition.*

Type A macroacquisition results in the development of a new speech community and occurs when speakers of different mother tongues simultaneously take part in the acquisition of a common second language, as in the case of the spread of English within "second language" settings in Africa and Asia. It takes place in a multilingual setting in which the acquired language serves as a unifying linguistic resource, the speakers otherwise belonging to separate mother tongue speech communities. Examples of nations with Type A macroacquisition of English are Nigeria, South Africa, India and Singapore.

Type B macroacquisition, on the other hand, transforms a monolingual mother tongue speech community (or a section of it) into a bilingual speech community. It generally occurs in a predominantly monolingual setting in which one mother tongue dominates. She cites speech communities in Japan, Mexico and Jordan as examples of Type B macroacquisition.

Brutt-Griffler is keen to point out that the two types of macroacquisition, Type A and Type B, differ from the traditional ESL-EFL (English as a second language-English as a foreign language) dichotomy. In the macroacquisition concept, the differentiation between Types A and B consists not in the functions that the language plays in the given setting, but in whether there is the sharing of a common mother tongue. To provide two concrete examples, the Singapore speech community, as an example of Type A macroacquisition, does not share a common mother tongue, while the Japanese speech community, as an example of Type B macroacquisition, shares a common mother tongue. Furthermore, the bilingual speech community that emerges from Type A macroacquisition shares only one common language (English), whereas the bilingual speech community that emerges from Type B macroacquisition shares both languages (English and Japanese). Brutt-Griffler details how the concept of macroacquisition departs on other counts from other concepts previously used in the discussion of English as a world language, and her book makes a significant contribution to the study of world Englishes by providing a useful framework to explain the changes in English as it has spread across the world.

1.3 English and culture

The British Empire is over, but the implementation of English-medium education in many former British colonies has been accelerating the spread of English to a wider section of the population. Then again, the international prestige of English and the popularity of Anglo-American culture have given the English language associations of status, power and affluence. It is fashionable to speak English. According to Baker and Prys-Jones (1998), communication in English is regarded by many learners of the language as a means of communication to an economic or political (rather than a cultural or social) end. He cites the example of how when the Japanese speak English to the Singaporeans, American or British culture is absent from the discourse. The English spoken, and the behaviour in the interaction, is Asian. In such situations, the stigma of a colonising English is replaced by a positive attitude about the multinational functionality of English. However, it seems to me that such a situation cannot hold true for long because as one becomes more and more fluent in a particular language, one imbibes more and more of the cultural baggage that comes with the language unless this process is moderated by one's mother tongue or the learning of another foreign language. For example, Pattanayak (1996) points out that in India, English is "the carrier of values antithetical to indigenous cultures and results in the atrophy of cultures" (p.150).

Indeed, in discussing the disadvantages of the use of English, Baker and Prys-Jones (1998) state that the spread of English has been connected to the decline and death of many indigenous languages. However, this view is rejected by Graddol (2006), who states that the spread of global English is not the direct cause of language endangerment. He argues that the decline in language diversity began before the rise of English as a global lingua franca, and that English has the greatest impact on national languages higher up the linguistic 'food chain' and not on the languages spoken by smaller communities of people in different parts of the world.

Some scholars have also pointed out that the dissemination of Anglo-American culture has caused the weakening and eradication of local, indigenous cultures. The widespread use of English means that Anglo-American culture, Anglo-American institutions and Anglo-American ways of thinking and communicating are spread far and wide to peoples all over the world and of different cultural origins. The dangers of this homogenisation of world culture are raised by Phillipson (1992, 1998), and Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996), two advocates of linguistic human rights.

On the other hand, other scholars such as Kachru (1983) see the universal role played by English as something positive. He says that "for the first time a natural language has attained the status of an international (universal) language, essentially for cross-cultural communication. Whatever the reasons for the earlier spread of English, we should now consider it a positive development in the twentieth-century context" (p.51).

Graddol's (1996) view differs somewhat from Crystal's (2003) and he (Graddol) argues that "the global spread of English has complex roots and is not a simple and unstoppable process that will lead ultimately to a single, homogenous global culture" (p.182), adding that "the spread of English creates difference as well as similarity; creates fragmentation as well as uniformity" (p 182). He stresses that although colonisation was responsible for the first stages of the spread of English, and provided a basis for its further global development, in the twentieth century new forces and processes came into play. Technological developments, economic globalisation and improved communications have all played a role in the new global flows of English. In his latest and recent study, Graddol (2006) points out the unique and unprecedented role of English in our world today: "On the one hand, the availability of English as a global language is accelerating globalisation. On the other, the globalisation is accelerating the use of English" (p.22). Elsewhere he states:

> English has at last become (sic) of age as a global language. It is a phenomenon which lies at the heart of globalisation: English is now redefining national and individual identities worldwide; shifting political fault lines; creating new global patterns of wealth and social exclusion; and suggesting new notions of human rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (p.12)

1.4 English: numbers and circles

1.4.1 A game of numbers

A discussion on English as a global language must necessarily include some figures on the number of users and comparisons with other major languages in the world, although it is very hard to establish exact numbers. If we look first at the major languages in the world today, we see what several scholars refer to as a hierarchy of languages. Graddol (1997) conceptualises the world language hierarchy in the following way, with English and French at the top of the pyramid even though the position of French is declining and English is clearly the world's most important lingua franca:

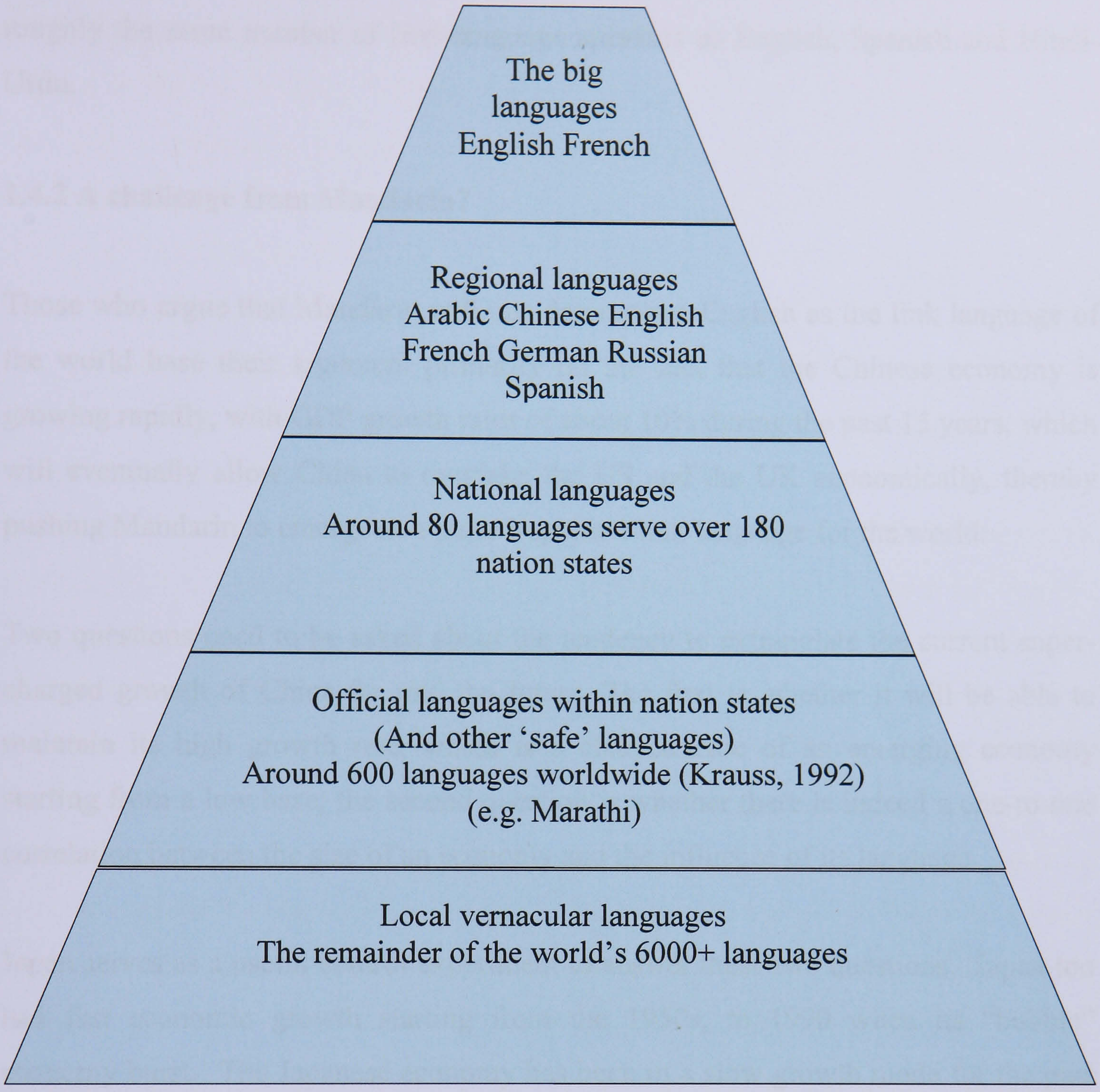

Figure 1.1 The world language hierarchy

Another way of comparing the world's major languages is in terms of the numbers of their native speakers and from this perspective, it is Chinese (used here to refer to Mandarin) that sits at the top of the rankings. Chinese will remain the largest language in terms of native speakers in the world with more than one billion native speakers. Mandarin is also now enjoying popularity as a foreign language, and several countries in Southeast Asia are re-establishing their Mandarin-speaking credentials. Fifty years ago, English was clearly in the second place after Chinese. Today, however, Spanish has grown to roughly the same size as English in terms of the number of native speakers. Hindi-Urdu also has roughly the same numbers of first-language speakers as Spanish and English (Graddol, 2006). Arabic is growing faster demographically than any other world language and by 2050, it will have roughly the same number of first-language speakers as English, Spanish and Hindi-Urdu.

1.4.2 A challenge from Mandarin?

Those who argue that Mandarin will one day replace English as the link language of the world base their argument primarily on the fact that the Chinese economy is growing rapidly, with GDP growth rates of about 10% during the past 15 years, which will eventually allow China to overtake the US and the UK economically, thereby pushing Mandarin to emerge as a more important link language for the world.

Two questions need to be asked about the tendency to extrapolate the current super-charged growth of China far into the future. The first is whether it will be able to maintain its high growth rate, which is a characteristic of an emerging economy starting from a low base; the second question is whether there is indeed a one-to-one correlation between the size of an economy and the influence of its language.

Japan serves as a useful control experiment to answer these two questions. Japan too had fast economic growth starting from the 1950s, to 1990 when its "bubble" economy burst. The Japanese economy has been in a slow growth mode for the past 15 years and yet it remains the second richest economy in the world, just behind the US and ahead of China. But no one is seriously saying that Japanese is going to replace English as the link language of the world despite the fact that the world is awash in Japanese consumer goods, everything from Sony to Toyota.

What in the end determines the usefulness of a language as an international lingua franca is not the number of speakers, nor even the size of the country's GDP compared to the rest of the world, but the desire of the rest of the world to emulate the economic and social systems of the country where the language originates. English is dominant in the world now because the rest of the world wants to emulate the economic, cultural and even the political systems that are prevalent in the US. This is where the power of English is derived from.

Articles in the media about the big increase in young people learning Mandarin in schools in the UK and the US have led some people to ask whether Mandarin will challenge the status of English as a global language. An article published in *BBC News*, entitled *Mandarin learning soars outside China* (09/01/2007)[4] reports that the figures for UK and US students enrolled in Mandarin programmes have gone up from just 6,000 in 1998 to 50,000 today. There are also reports of the Chinese government setting up *Confucius Institutes* around the world to promote the learning of Mandarin. *Newsweek* (August 20-27, 2007) reports that Beijing estimates that more than 40 million non-native speakers now study Mandarin worldwide. But as the same article points out, this figure pales next to the number of people learning English. The article entitled *Even in China, English is King* reports that in China alone, some 175 million people are now studying English in the formal education system. In 2001, Beijing mandated that English classes start in the third grade (at age nine) instead of in high school (at age 12), as was the case previously. Schools in many big cities have begun teaching English at age six. In total, China's English-language training market is estimated to be currently a $2.6 billion industry and growing at a rate of 12 percent a year, as reported in the *Newsweek* article. *The Economist* (April 12th 2006) gives a figure of $60 billion a year, the world's largest market for English-language services comprising everything from books, teaching materials and tests to teacher training and language schools. Figures of students learning English in other parts of Asia all tell the same story. In Vietnam, an estimated 90 percent of all foreign-language learners are studying English. In South Korea, there is so much desire to learn English that there are at least 10 "English villages" where students can practice their language skills. At one Korean university, English majors outnumber Chinese majors by more than 2 to 1. In Taiwan, 3 million students now study English in its schools compared with 1 million in 2001. In Japan, 3.6 million high school students are studying English compared with just 22,000 studying Mandarin. The same picture emerges for the rest of the world.[5] Graddol (2006) estimates that by 2010, roughly 2 billion people will be studying English around the world. All these statistics lead several experts to conclude that the pre-eminent position enjoyed by English in the world today will remain for a very long time to come. The same *Newsweek* article quotes

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[4] Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/624476.stm (accessed on 15 August 2007).

[5] For current estimates of people learning English in Europe and South America, see *Newsweek* (2007) *Even in China, English is King.* August 20-27.

Stephen Krashen, a second language acquisition professor at the University of Southern California, who says, "The impression is that 'Mandarin fever' is rampant and spreading, but a close look shows this is an exaggeration. The dominance of English as an international language is growing." Another academic, David Nunan, who heads the English Centre at the University of Hong Kong, is also quoted in the same article. He says, "Chinese will not challenge English any time soon. English will remain the dominant global language for at least the next 50 years because of its pre-eminent position as the language of science, technology, tourism, entertainment and the media."

The fact of the matter is that China itself is trying to emulate the business and cultural systems of the US and is busy transforming its banking system from the "socialist" model to the US model. In 2006, most of the major banks of China, including the Bank of China, the Bank of Communications, and the country's largest bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, have been listed in the stock exchanges of Hong Kong and New York. These banks are employing many consultants to modernise their banking systems. This being the case, there seems little possibility of the rest of the world's financial systems starting to use Chinese as a working language. Talking about Japan, in terms of assets, Japanese banks are still very large and come second only to the US, but this has not made Japanese a working language in international finance. Instead, Japanese banks maintain an "international" department, which is sometimes headquartered in London rather than in Tokyo, to conduct their international operations. It is also interesting to note that German and Swiss banks such as the Deutsche Bank and UBS respectively, which are large and well-capitalised and bigger than many banks in the UK, also conduct their investment banking operations, the lucrative part of banking, from London rather than from Frankfurt or Geneva.

Therefore, it seems clear that English will continue to be the language of commerce and international finance and its supremacy as the world's link language will remain unchallenged. This is one of the main reasons why I have chosen to investigate the use of English not just in any economic sector or workplace, but in the banking sector in Hong Kong. The literature review in Chapter 3 will highlight the relevant literature on English in professional contexts, language use at the workplace, and business discourse, against which background my study of English use and discourse in the banking sector in a Hong Kong context is played out.

1.4.3 The expanding circles of English

It was the sociolinguist Braj Kachru who twenty years ago introduced the useful notion of 'three concentric circles' to describe the global community of English speakers and the different ways in which the language has been acquired and is currently used. The 'inner circle' represents societies such as Britain, the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where English is the 'first language' of a majority of the population; the 'outer circle' represents societies such as India, Singapore, Malawi, Ghana and over fifty other territories where English has become part of the country's chief institutions, and plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting; and the 'expanding circle' represents societies such as China, Japan, Russia, Greece, Egypt, Brazil, etc. where an ever-increasing number of people recognise the importance of English and are learning it as a 'foreign language'. Crystal (2003) points out that the term 'expanding' reflects its origins in the 1980s. Today, a change in the term 'expanding circle' to 'expanded circle' would better reflect the contemporary scene. Figure 1.2 shows the three circles as originally conceived by Kachru, with estimates of the numbers in each circle provided by Crystal (2003).

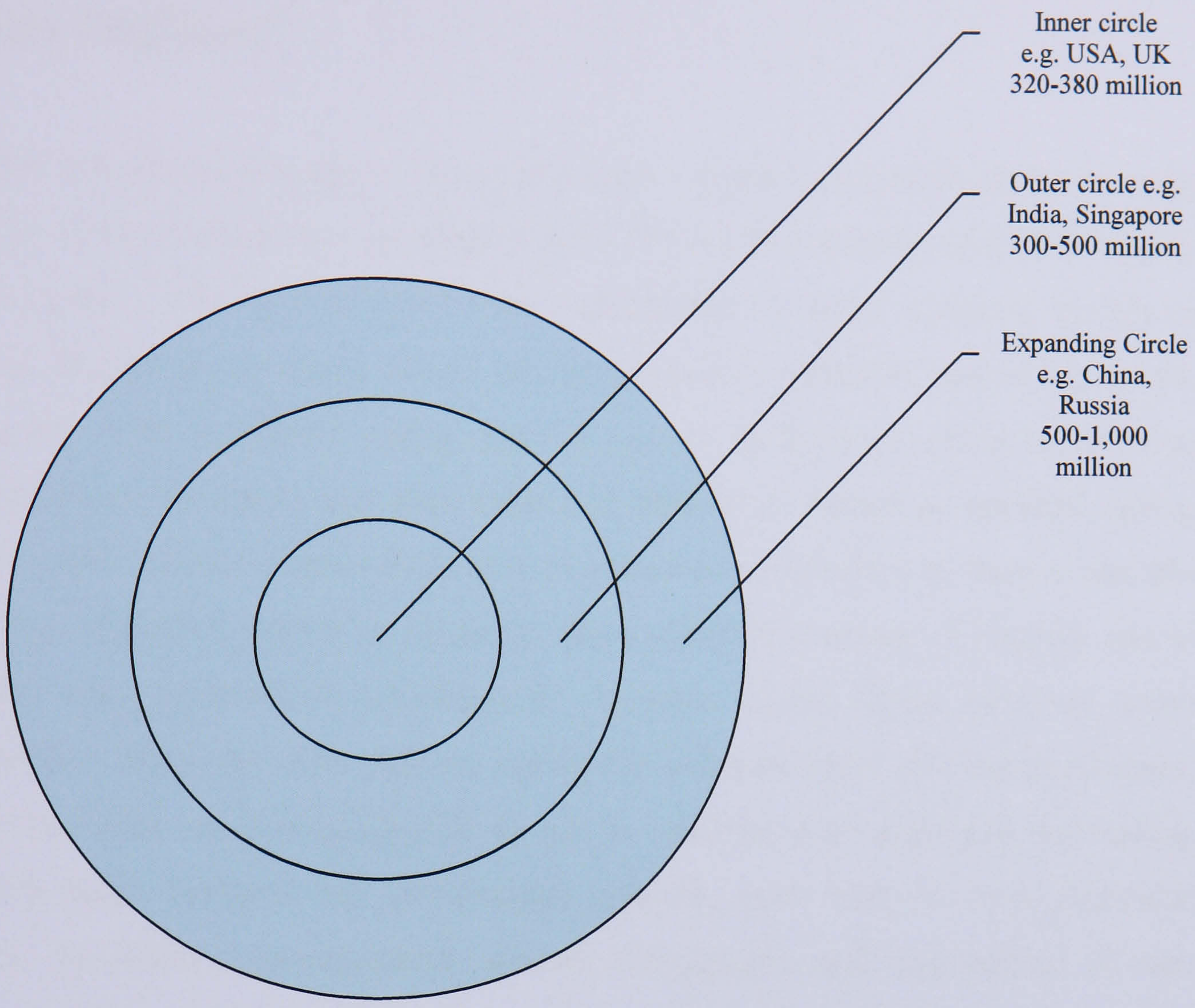


Figure 1.2 The three circles of English

Today, however, this model is failing to capture the increasing importance of the outer circle, and the degree to which 'foreign language' learners in some countries, especially in Europe, are becoming more like second language users. Moreover, the traditional definition of 'second language user' as one who uses the language for communication within his/her own country is no longer accurate in our highly globalised world of contacts in English with other English-speaking peoples all over the world. Kachru (2005) himself has recently proposed that the 'inner circle' is now better conceived of as the group of highly proficient speakers of English – those who have 'functional nativeness', regardless of how they learned the language or how they use it.

1.5 Many Englishes?

As English has spread throughout the world, many varieties have evolved, thus raising the call in many quarters for a standard variety for use in education and international communication. The tendency has been traditionally to adopt standard British or American English as the norm, and to use these types in textbooks and in the media. Also, many of the influential ruling elites of former colonial countries received an English-medium education and were taught by British or American teachers during colonial times. Some of them were also educated in universities in Britain and the USA. They therefore tended to adhere to these standard versions of English and to regard all other varieties as sub-standard. In more recent times, however, some linguists have taken the view that the distinctive characteristics of various national, regional and local varieties of English should be recognised as legitimate and having their own stable features and autonomous systems, each with its own particular grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, idioms, orthography and conventions of use. All these features represent a distinctive national and ethnic identity.

The case of English in Singapore and the colloquial variety of Singapore English known as Singlish is an interesting example of this tension between the insistence on a standard variety of English that is internationally intelligible on the one hand, and the desire to accept and codify a regional variety that is unique to a given nation-state (or, indeed, to a part or region within a nation-state, such as, for example, an individual state of India), on the other. Singlish shows a high degree of influence from other local languages such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Malay and Tamil. Those rejecting Singlish claim that is not 'proper/good' English. Those who support it argue that Singlish is part of Singapore's heritage and has a distinctively local flavour and its use in literary works keeps Singaporeans in touch with their rich culture. The Singapore government's position, however, is clear. Goh Chok Tong, then Prime Minister, in his address to the nation had this to say:

> We cannot be a first-world economy or go global with Singlish....The fact that we use English gives us a big advantage over our competitors. If we carry on using Singlish, the logical final outcome is that we, too, will develop our own type of pidgin English, spoken only by three

> million Singaporeans, which the rest of the world will find quaint but incomprehensible. We are already half way there. Do we want to go all the way? (1999 National Day Rally Speech)

In another instance, the Prime Minister expressed the hope that the future generation of Singaporeans no longer speaks Singlish:

> Singlish is not English. It is English corrupted by Singaporeans and has become a Singapore dialect....Singlish is broken, ungrammatical English sprinkled with words and phrases from local dialects and Malay which English speakers outside Singapore have difficulties in understanding... we should ensure that the next generation does not speak Singlish. (*The Straits Times* 29 August 1999)

This led the State to initiate the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) on 29 April 2000 in order to "check a trend in which younger Singaporeans are beginning to feel that it is perhaps a way of identifying themselves as Singaporeans if they speak Singlish" (*The Straits Times* 31 March 2000). The Singapore government's stance that Singlish is 'broken, ungrammatical English' and should be marginalised and made invisible illustrates a case of intra-language discrimination where the State acts to protect what it considers to be good English and attempts to impose a language shift on a large segment of the community, even to the extent of engaging in linguistic genocide (Wee, 2005).

Language serves different functions and the variety of language one chooses will differ according to the function it is serving. And so it is with Singlish. As a Singaporean who has lived away from home for more than twenty years, I do sometimes find it difficult to understand Singlish when I go home for a visit. My view is that there will be a continuum along which English is, and would be spoken and used in Singapore, with standard English of a more international variety for use in schools, the media, the workplace and for communication with the rest of the world at one end, and Singlish in its most up-to-date (for it is always changing with the times) and earthy version for use with family, friends, and in more intimate settings at the other end of the continuum. Educated Singaporeans will be able to speak and use English along this continuum, easily switching from standard English spoken with a Singaporean accent and intonation patterns (more or less strongly accentuated as the case may be), to Singlish when they wish to relax with close friends or mingle with common folks, in acts demonstrating a shared identity and culture.

The Singapore case is an interesting and concrete example of how English has taken on local forms as it spreads across the globe and is increasingly adopted as a first or second language in multilingual societies with other languages operating at the same time. As Crystal (2003) puts it, "there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English" (p. 189) and that "the balance between the competing demands of intelligibility and identity is especially fragile" (p. 190).

Perhaps particularly in terms of English accents, the traditional view is now changing. For example, Graddol (2006) says:

> One of the more anachronistic ideas about the teaching of English is that learners should adopt a native speaker accent. But as English becomes more widely used as a global language, it will become expected that speakers will signal their nationality, and other aspects of their identity, through English. Lack of a native-speaker accent will not be seen, therefore, as a sign of poor competence. (p.117)[6]

It is also particularly fitting to quote Kachru (1992), who has led a sustained academic campaign for a non-Eurocentric approach to the study of *world Englishes*, a term he and some other linguists coined to refer to the varieties of English found outside the inner circle. He advocates a re-think towards the teaching of English worldwide, calling for a two-fold 'paradigm shift' in approaches to English studies:

> First, a paradigm shift in research, teaching, and application of sociolinguistic realities to the functions of English. Second, a shift from frameworks and theories which are essentially appropriate only to monolingual countries. It is indeed essential to recognize that World Englishes represent certain linguistic, cultural and pragmatic realities and pluralism, and that pluralism is now an integral part of World Englishes and literatures written in Englishes. The

[6] It does not, however, mean that this more enlightened view is subscribed to by the majority of learners who commonly express the desire to be taught by someone with blond hair and blue eyes, traits that they perceive as markers of 'native-ness'. There is a dismaying lack of appreciation of the teacher's mastery of English, much less of any ability to evaluate their teaching credentials. For example, a newspaper article, *English school criticized for wanting blond-hair instructors* carried in the *South China Morning Post* on 12 February 2007, reported that an English-language school in central Japan posted a recruitment advertisement seeking only instructors with "blond hair, blue or green eyes".

> pluralism of English must be reflected in the approaches, both theoretical and applied, we adopt for understanding this unprecedented linguistic phenomenon. (p. 11)

This debate – on which model of English, and whose English, is the best – extends to the written form too. It may be observed that some of the most powerful and vibrant literature in English comes from writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, Amy Tan, Jung Chang, Chinua Achebe and others who would not, in the traditional view, be considered "native users" of the language.

According to Brutt-Griffler (2002), the different varieties of English have to be understood in terms of "world language divergence and convergence" (p. 177). She states:

> There are (at least) two contexts defined by speech communities in World English. One is the local (or national) speech community that plays the essential role in divergence. The second is the international speech community that forms the basis of convergence. (p.177)

She further asserts that "World English, rather than a variety, constitutes a sort of center of gravity around which the international varieties revolve" (p. 177) and because of this "centripetal force", she thinks that English would maintain its essential unity despite the emergence of different varieties. I believe there is considerable force in this argument.

It seems quite probable that in the not too distant future, the world will see a new form of English, what Crystal (2003) calls World Standard Spoken English (WSSE), which will be used when people of different nationalities and educational training communicate with each other in the international arena, and regional varieties or dialects of English when they communicate with each other in intra-national contexts. This WSSE is not something dissimilar from the written standard English that we use today and which unites writers of English all around the world. Greenbaum (1996) makes the interesting assertion that although good English is sometimes equated with correct English, the two concepts are different. According to him, correct English implies conformity with the norms of the standard language. Good English is **good**

use of the resources available in the language. He says, "We can use a non-standard dialect well and we can use the standard language badly" (1996, p. 17).

As English, the global language, is growing – in numbers of speakers, domains of use, economic and cultural power – two things are happening in tandem: first, the rise of non-English people who speak English; and second, the decline of the native speaker of English. Graddol (1999) discusses the issue of decline from three perspectives. First, there is a simple demographic decline in the proportion of people in the world speaking English as a first language and this decline will continue into the future. Second, the internationalisation of English means that now and in the future, it will be a language used mainly in multilingual contexts as a second language and for communication between non-native speakers. Third, the decline of the native speaker also stems from a changing ideological discourse about languages, linguistic competence and identity. To this I would like to add a fourth perspective – that the traditional notion of native-speaker is also changing, as people whose parents and forebears did not speak English but who have been raised with English as their first language through schooling or emigration to the US, UK, Australia, or New Zealand, come to speak and use the English as their language, with what is now termed as native-speaker competence. The numbers of such people in our truly globalised world can only grow larger. Graddol (1999) talks of the current debate about the 'cult' of the native speaker: do native speakers have privileged access to an understanding of the language, and are they therefore more reliable informants and teachers? He points out that the special status accorded to native speakers is long standing. This is clearly evident in many places around the world, including Hong Kong, where English teachers are imported to teach in local schools under the Native Speaker Teachers Scheme (NETS). Many local English teachers believe that the native speaker has correct judgements of grammaticality and many parents (who want their children to learn English) believe that the native speaker has correct articulation and pronunciation. On the other hand, there are others in the field of education such as Kirkpatrick (2007) who refute such thinking and argue that the hiring of English teachers should be made based on the following two important considerations:

- that the specific teaching and learning contexts and the specific needs of the learners in those contexts should determine the variety to be taught; and
- that multilingual non-native teachers represent ideal teachers in many ELT (English language teaching) contexts (p. 3).

Kirkpatrick (*op.cit.*) argues that as learners of English worldwide are learning the language in order to communicate with other speakers of English in the outer and expanding circles, the appropriateness of sticking solely or largely to native speaker models and cultures needs to be questioned. He advocates, instead, the use of multilingual local teachers who are expert users of English.

McArthur (2002) too makes the point that it is advantageous for learners to be provided with a model that harmonises well with the sounds and rhythms of the mother tongue. He states that "students should perhaps, as a matter of principle, learn a kind of English that is easiest for them" (p. 450). In discussing the teaching of speaking and listening skills, he says:

> … learners should start with a spoken target that has cognates in English but does not place too great a burden on them in terms of their own speech systems and with a listening target that over time exposes them to as many varieties as possible of spoken English, so that they will be more or less prepared for the diversity of the real world. (p. 450)

The engaging writer, Bill Bryson, in his book entitled *The Mother Tongue: English & How It Got That Way* (1990) talks about the delights of experiencing "a variety of vocabulary, accents and other linguistic influences" in the English TV viewers hear when they watch programmes broadcast in their living rooms. He goes on to say:

> If we should be worrying about anything to do with the future of English, it should be not that the various strands will drift apart but that they will grow indistinguishable. And what a sad, sad loss that would be. (p. 245)

And what a big, big loss it would be if the many varieties of English that exist today in **all the Circles of English** should be wiped out if educators and others cannot shake off the old notions of "correct, native-speaker" English and fail to appreciate what it truly means when our global community speaks of English as a world language.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has presented a broad survey of the global spread of the English language. I began with a personal account of how I came to learn English. I then gave a brief sketch of the phenomenal spread of English throughout the world, and the different scholarly views on the spread and change of English, as well of the underlying linguistic, cultural and social issues. I also discussed the question whether Mandarin could pose a challenge to English. I then discussed the notion of different varieties of English and in order to provide a comparative perspective to Hong Kong, I discussed some of the contemporary debates about English in Singapore. Finally, I discussed how the different varieties of English, as they are used by greater and greater numbers of non-native speakers, have led some linguists and educators to call for a rethink of the traditional notion of native speakers as being the best models of users (or speakers) and teachers of English. All this naturally and logically leads to a discussion of the specific Hong Kong context – historical, institutional and linguistic – of my study. This follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The Hong Kong Context

2.0 Introduction

Following the discussion in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the specific Hong Kong context in which my study was conducted. It begins with some brief facts about Hong Kong's political system and economy and then gives a short history of the financial and banking sector up to the present. The chapter then focuses on education first giving a brief history of colonial policies and practices up to the Second World War, the post-War years and the end of colonial rule. Using wide-ranging data, the chapter then highlights some salient issues in education – public examination results in English, the medium of instruction (MOI) issue, dollars and cents about education, Hong Kong English, educational reforms and benchmarking language teachers. The chapter next discusses the frequent complaints from the business community about the low standards of English in Hong Kong. Finally, it revisits the debate on the falling standards of English in Hong Kong.

2.1 Hong Kong: background information

2.1.1 Political System

Hong Kong was a British crown colony until 1 July 1997, when it was returned to Chinese sovereignty. Under the policy of the 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of autonomy from the Mainland and continues to have its own legal system, currency, customs, and immigration authorities. Only national defence and diplomatic relations are under the central government in Beijing. In the Joint Declaration signed by the People's Republic of China and Britain in December 1984, China agreed that Hong Kong's economic and social systems shall remain unchanged for a period of 50 years (until 2047). Hong Kong is governed under the Basic Law approved in 1990 by the National People's Congress of China. The chief of state is the president of China. There is a chief executive, who is advised by an executive council as well as by a 60-member legislative council that is partly elected and partly appointed.

In 2003, concerns about the proposed anti-subversion bill that would have eroded the freedom of the press, of religion and of association arising from Article 23 of the Hong Kong Basic Law in combination with the unpopularity of the government under Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa, and public dissatisfaction about the poor state of the economy, all resulted in half a million people taking to the streets in a large-scale demonstration on 1 July. This was the largest protest aimed at the government in the history of Hong Kong.

On March 10, 2005, Tung Chee Hwa tendered his resignation to the State Council, and Donald Tsang, the Chief Secretary for the Administration of Hong Kong became the acting Chief Executive. Tsang subsequently took over as the Chief Executive for a period of two years; he was elected unopposed because the two other candidates challenging him did not receive enough nominations to stand in the election.

2.1.2 Economy

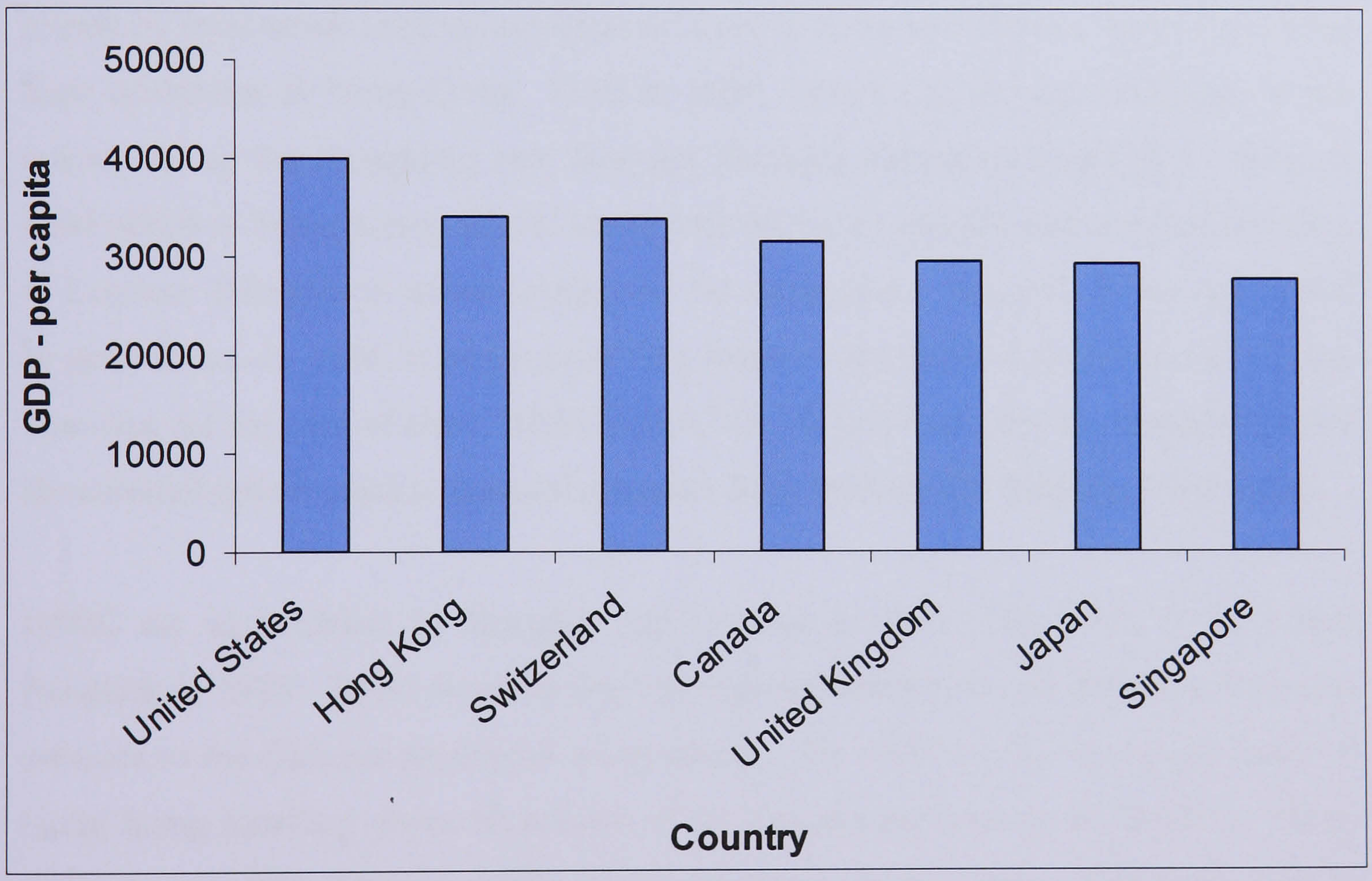
Hong Kong has a bustling economy highly dependent on international trade. It is one of the world's freest economies, as well as the world's tenth largest trading entity and has the world's 11th largest banking sector (Wikipedia, 2005). Natural resources are limited and food and raw materials have to be imported. In terms of GDP output, Hong Kong is one of the richest places in the world. The following table shows Hong Kong's ranking in the world among a selected list of countries.

Table 2.1: Rank Order of GDP per capita

Country	GDP - per capita ($)
United States	40 100
Hong Kong	**34 200**
Switzerland	33 800
Canada	31 500
United Kingdom	29 600
Japan	29 400
Singapore	27 800

Source: United States Central Intelligence Agency *The World Factbook* (accessed on 24 February 2007)

Figure 2.1 Rank order of GDP per capita



The Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) that came into effect on 1 January 2004 allowed Hong Kong service providers to enter the mainland market at least one year ahead of their foreign competitors. It also allowed Hong Kong professionals to practice on the mainland as well as Hong Kong permanent residents to set up retail stores in the adjacent Guangdong Province (where many Hong Kong people still have family ties). Also starting from July 2003, individual travellers from some cities in China were allowed to visit Hong Kong on individual tourist visas (as differentiated from group tourist visas), resulting in a boost for the tourism industry and retail business in Hong Kong. In 2004, the revival in both external and domestic demand led to a strong upswing in Hong Kong's economy and a GDP growth of 8.2% thus ending the 68-month deflationary spiral (Wikipedia, 2005).

2.1.3 Financial services sector and banking

2.1.3.1 A brief history

Banking and financial institutions were set up in Hong Kong soon after it became a British colony in 1841, mainly for financing the entrepôt trade with China.[7] Initially, the large agency houses such as Jardine Matheson performed the banking activities, joined by joint-stock banking companies based in India and Britain, which expanded their operations to Hong Kong. Then in 1865, British and foreign merchants in the colony set up the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). With its head office in Hong Kong, HSBC could take decisions quickly and without referring to London. This gave it an advantage over its competitors. In 1865, it was authorised to issue notes. In 1866, it began providing loans to the colonial government; its first loan was for the sum of about HK$100,000.[8] In 1872, it took over the management of the colonial government's financial accounts from the Oriental Banking Corporation.

HSBC set up branches in Shanghai and London in 1865, Yokohama in 1866 and Bangkok in 1888. Apart from serving the regional traders, it also provided financial services to the Chinese provincial governments. By 1880, it was the largest bank in Hong Kong handling about 50 percent of all banking services in the territory. There were many other Chinese banks in Hong Kong, which were essentially family businesses catering for the special financial needs of the Chinese and provided a vital link between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.

During the Second World War, the Hong Kong banks transferred their head offices to London. After the War, the number of banks in Hong Kong multiplied: from only 28

[7] See Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu (1990) *Banking in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong.
[8] For more on the history of banking in Hong Kong, see Chan, Cheuk Wah (2002) *The Politics of Banking in Hong Kong*. PhD dissertation, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

(16 foreign and 12 Chinese) banks, it went up to about 143 in 1947-48.[9] This was largely due to the flight of Chinese capital because of the civil war on the mainland. In 1948, the first Banking Ordinance was issued to regulate the registration and licensing of banks. Many small banks could not fulfil the requirements with the result that by 1960, the number of banks fell to 86.

In the mid 1960s, there was a banking crisis, with a run on three banks and several bankruptcies. HSBC as well as Chartered Bank declared unlimited backing for the troubled banks and the Government imposed the Emergency (Bank Control) Regulation, which set limits on cash withdrawals from banks. Hang Seng Bank, the largest local Chinese bank, was acquired by HSBC, which bought 51 percent of the former's share capital in 1965 (increasing it to 61 percent in 1986). Stability was thus restored in the banking industry; at the same time, the market position of HSBC was considerably strengthened and it became the largest banking group in Hong Kong.

The colonial government did not issue new bank licenses from 1967 to1977, except the one in 1972 to Barclays Bank International Ltd, which was permitted to open one office only. However, by the mid 1970s, a large secondary sector had grown up due to foreign banks and local Chinese banks banding together to set up deposit-taking companies which focused on corporate banking in order to operate under the regulatory constraints and compete against the well established banks. In 1981, a three-tier system was set up by ordinance and financial institutions were structured as licensed banks, licensed deposit-taking companies (DTCs) and registered deposit-taking companies.

The banking industry suffered another crisis in 1983 following the collapse of the real estate market. The details need not detain us here; however, discussions and debates during this period led to a new Banking Ordinance in 1986, which forms the basis of the regulatory framework today. In 1990, this Ordinance was further amended. In 1993, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), the central bank of Hong Kong was set up to carry out monetary policy, maintain the stability of the Hong Kong dollar, manage the Exchange Fund and the Land Fund, exercise prudential

[9] See Chan, Cheuk Wah (2002) *The Politics of Banking in Hong Kong*. PhD dissertation, Chinese University of Hong Kong, p. 64.

supervision of and promote efficiency in the banking system, regulate interest rates and develop payment and settlement arrangements.

2.1.3.2 The 1984 Sino-British Declaration and the transition

In anticipation of decolonisation and the eventual transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the Sino-British Declaration was signed in Beijing in 1984. It spelt out China's promise of autonomy for, and 50 years of unchanged capitalist system in, Hong Kong. This was to be accomplished by applying two formulas proposed by Deng Xiao-ping: "one country, two systems" and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong". During the period 1984-1997, in the process of the drafting of the Basic Law codifying these promises and as the remaining years of British rule passed by, both Britain and China wanted to influence the shape of the post-1997 political economy of Hong Kong. Britain was particularly eager to leave a democratic mechanism in Hong Kong's political system before its departure, so as to prevent China from strongly manipulating the ex-colony after the Handover.[10]

The power relations among the major banks in Hong Kong changed during the transitional period. The Bank of China group continued to raise its profile rapidly by investing heavily in Hong Kong's manufacturing and services industries, including the property market. It increased its loans to Hong Kong companies for investment on the mainland. It commissioned the well known Chinese-American architect, I. M. Pei, to construct its magnificent 70-storey headquarters in the Central district of Hong Kong at a cost of US$260 million, and sited it adjacent to the equally iconic HSBC headquarters. By the mid-1980s, the Bank of China group (including its sister banks in Hong Kong) had become the territory's second largest bank just behind the HSBC group (including Hang Seng Bank). The position of these two banks remain the same today, with Standard Chartered Bank in the third place.

[10] See Lane, K. P. (1990) *Sovereignty and the Status Quo*. San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press.

2.1.3.3 The contemporary scenario

Hong Kong can be said to have been the financial capital of East Asia from the mid-nineteenth century, but its international importance steadily grew especially after the Second World War. Now, it is well placed to benefit even more from the boom in the financial services sector around the world. Hong Kong has the twin advantages of having inherited the British banking tradition and being backed by the booming economy of the Chinese hinterland. The financial services sector and the banking industry constitute one of the four pillar industries that have been identified by the government as key drivers of Hong Kong's future economic growth. In his speech at the Economic Summit in September 2006 and in his Policy Address, Donald Tsang, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, emphasised the need "to consolidate and enhance Hong Kong's position as an international financial centre in the Asian region".[11]

Hong Kong is currently the 12th largest international banking centre in external assets, the sixth largest foreign exchange market in turnover, the ninth largest stock market in market capitalisation and Asia's second largest fund management centre in assets-under-management.[12] At the end of 2003, Hong Kong had 134 licensed banks, of which 121 were foreign-owned banks. Of the world's top 100 banks, 75 have operations in Hong Kong, while 81 subsidiaries or related companies of foreign banks operate as restricted licensed banks and deposit-taking companies. A further 87 foreign banks have local representative offices.

The financial services sector as a whole employs about 5 percent of the total Hong Kong workforce, with more than half of that employed in the banking industry. The financial services sector contributes about 12 percent of the total economic output (or GDP), with banking accounting for nearly 70 percent of this.[13] If Hong Kong's role as an international financial centre is compared to other international financial centres such as London and New York, there is still room for further growth and expansion. Such expansion would lead to higher economic growth and living standards, given the sector's relatively high productivity that supports highly paid jobs. But if these highly

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[11] Hang Seng Bank Limited (2006) *Hang Seng Economic Monthly*. October.
[12] Ditto.
[13] Hong Kong Monetary Authority (2006) *Hong Kong Monetary Authority Quarterly Bulletin*. March.

paid financial sector jobs were to be filled by professionals from outside Hong Kong because of the inability of the local education system to provide sufficient and suitable talent, Hong Kong's labour problems could be aggravated.[14] The situation could also become politically sensitive, especially since political consciousness in Hong Kong seems to be rising after the 1997 Handover. However, lack of good English language skills, or at least the inadequate numbers of staff proficient in English, is in fact, a major roadblock faced by Hong Kong in realising its aspiration of becoming a truly global financial centre.

2.2 Education in Hong Kong

2.2.1 A brief history of education in Hong Kong

The island of Hong Kong was obtained by the British as a result of the First Opium War (1840-1842). Through subsequent treaties signed in 1842, 1860, and 1898 the rest of what is today known as Hong Kong was ceded to the British. In 1842, Hong Kong had a population of only 5,000 and only a few village schools existed. This situation changed with the arrival of the British. Different Christian missionaries opened schools to impart their faith. The missionaries imported educational philosophies, curricula, and teaching methods from their countries of origin but British traditions dominated, as they shaped the views of the government too. At the same time, Chinese private schools also flourished. Excerpts from the Hong Kong Government's Education Department Annual Report for 1924 reveal that the colonial administration was not interested in educating the Chinese masses beyond the basic level:

> The number and circumstances of British children in this distant Colony make it at once feasible and desirable to provide them all with an education in Government schools as nearly as possible equal and similar to what they could find at home [...] Other communities for which separate provision for education is needed are the Portuguese and the Indian [...] The problem of Chinese children is different. Their numbers are so large that it is impossible for the Government to take charge of the education of all. The principle adopted is to endeavour to set a good standard of

[14] Ditto.

work in Government Schools while giving assistance by grants or subsidies to all private schools which meet the required modest standard of efficiency. (1925, p. 2)

It was not until the 1935 Burney Report and more significantly, after the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong from 1941-45, that the government acknowledged the importance of the provision of vernacular primary education, which would benefit the majority of the population.

For approximately a century after the British occupation of Hong Kong, the teaching in schools reflected the colonial relations. The headmasters and senior teachers who planned, developed and implemented the curriculum were non-Chinese, usually of British, European or American stock. For the day-to-day running of the schools, they made use of the services of "Chinese assistants" who received far inferior employment terms. They were frequently former pupils and continued to be supervised by the non-Chinese staff. [15]

The first university, the University of Hong Kong, was set up by Governor Frederick Lugard in 1912 not just for the needs of the local community but also for those from China. It was argued that Chinese parents in Hong Kong or on the mainland could educate their sons at the university at a fraction of the cost of sending them to Europe, and that the institution would function as a "British university on Chinese soil." [16]

Even before this time, however, there were signs of strong feelings of Chinese nationalism. This increasingly challenged colonialist attitudes in Hong Kong in the period that lasted roughly from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War. Its impact on education in Hong Kong can be seen clearly in the growing numbers of vernacular schools founded in this period. Secondary school

[15] For example, at the turn of the century, the Education Department's official definition of grades of schools made clear the different attitudes towards European and Chinese teachers. "An Upper Grade School means one in which at least part of the Staff is European. Lower Grade Schools are those under purely native management" (*Hong Kong Government Gazette*, June 30, 1905, p. 1023). That such attitudes were shared by Colonial Office personnel in London can be detected in the dismissive minute written by an official about a qualified Chinese headmaster's application to be treated as equal to expatriate staff: "I don't think that the fact that Mr. Hee has found an Englishwoman foolish enough to marry a *Chinaman* (italics mine) is an argument for increasing his salary (as Headmaster of Wanchai District School)" (Colonial Office Files Series 129, "Hong Kong: Original Correspondence," File 341, p. 342).

[16] See B. Mellor, *The University of Hong Kong: An Informal History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1980), vol. 1: N.H. Ng Lun, *Interactions East and West*, p. 126.

students even took part in the 1925-26 general strike and boycott of British goods. The Japanese made use of anti-colonialist feelings in their propaganda and attempts to legitimise their occupation of Hong Kong from 1941-45, which itself differed little from crude colonisation.

The population of Hong Kong increased from about 600,000 in mid-1945 to an estimated 2,317,000 in 1950. In 1961, the Census recorded the figure of 3,129,648 and this figure increased to 3,133,131 in 1964. The impact of this population increase on the provision of schooling is illustrated by the rise in total school enrolments from about 4,000-7,000 at the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945 to 100,000 in March 1947; to 150,000 in March 1950; to 200,00 in 1953; to 500,000 in 1960 and all the way to over 800,000 in 1964 (Sweeting, 2004, pp. 142-143). The British Secretary of State for the Colonies realised then that:

> It is now clear that the refugees are here to stay, and permanent provision must be made for them.[17]

In the immediate post-Second World War years, attempts were made to provide educational opportunities for children and young persons who had little or no fluency in English. The gap between their secondary education at vernacular schools and the admission requirements at the University of Hong Kong created a problem, especially at a time when higher education alternatives in China or Taiwan were restricted or discouraged because of fears of political indoctrination. This led to a radical change in government policy over higher education in the vernacular. Instead of taking the view that the University of Hong Kong should remain the sole institution with degree-granting powers and should be invited to take on the added responsibility for tertiary education in the medium of Chinese, the Government now began to see the value of providing financial support to some of the Chinese post-secondary colleges. It also eventually led to the establishment of a second university in1963 with Chinese as the main medium of instruction.

[17] See "Education in Hong Kong since the War", under a cover-letter dated 30 November 1955; in CO1030/54.

The two decades after the Second World War saw decolonisation movements in various parts of Asia and Africa, and the emergence of the People's Republic of China along with the demise of Britain as a world power. By this time, primary education was almost entirely conducted in Cantonese. An attempt by the Hong Kong government in 1946 to extend the use of Cantonese as the medium of instruction to the first two years of secondary education was resisted successfully by the mainly missionary-sponsored grant schools, on which the government depended so heavily for secondary education in the first postwar years.

Since the late 1950s a growing number of primary school leavers have chosen to study in English-medium (EM) Anglo-Chinese secondary schools (ACSSs) rather than in Chinese-medium (CM) Chinese middle schools (CMSs). In 1958, CMS students constituted approximately 45 percent of the total enrollment in schools at the secondary level. But industrialisation and economic considerations in the 1970s persuaded parents to seek educational opportunities for their children in Anglo-Chinese schools rather than CMSs. Because of its status as a British colony, English has always been the official language of Hong Kong. Chinese was only granted official status in 1974. English was the language of administration, government affairs, and jurisprudence and enjoyed high social prestige. It was seen as the passport to better economic and social opportunities. When it came to choosing schools for their children, Hong Kong parents wanted their children enrolled in English-medium schools. By 1987, less than 10 percent of secondary school pupils were attending schools in which the official medium of instruction was Chinese (Education Department Annual Report, 1986-7, pp. 46-47). For a detailed look at the decline of CMSs during the period from 1958 to 1983, please refer to Table 2.2 in Appendix 1.

The change from elitist education to mass secondary education in the late 1970s cast doubts about the quality of education, particularly about language standards. The linguistic insecurities of pupils and teachers led to major discrepancies between what a school officially claimed as its language policy and what actually happened in the classroom. The teaching that was carried out in the vast majority of these so-called English-medium Anglo-Chinese schools was more a mixed code of Cantonese and

English (Johnson, 1983; Johnson, Shek and Law, 1991; Li, 1996 and 1998; Luke, 1998), with much of class time spent in translating English textbooks into Chinese.

This in turn led to the further lowering of standards in both languages. The Llewellyn Report (Llewellyn *et l.*, 1982) on education recommended mother-tongue education in the early years of schooling. A series of reports published by the Education Commission also recommended the use of Cantonese as the medium of instruction. The Joint Declaration signed by China and Britain about the future of Hong Kong further served to reinforce the importance of Chinese in the education system and also the future importance of Putonghua. Somewhat paradoxically, it also seemed to strengthen the case for Cantonese as the medium of instruction for the majority of schools in Hong Kong.

2.2.2 The end of colonial rule

When colonial rule ended in the other former British colonies, it led to a form of independence either through peaceful or violent means. In the case of Hong Kong, the end of colonial rule led directly to the restoration of China's sovereignty in 1997. *Yet adequate preparations had not been made by any of the three parties – Britain, China, and Hong Kong itself - for this hitherto unprecedented event.* As Lau (1990) points out, "With only seven years remaining before 1997, Hong Kong is still in search of an organized group of political leaders who can be trusted by the people of Hong Kong and the two governments to make the arrangements stipulated in the Sino-British agreement and the Basic Law work."

Societies approaching decolonisation share a vision of their future as one in which they will gain freedom and independence from the colonial power. This applies especially to the institution of education, which often spearheads the task of nation-building (Fagerlind and Saha, 1983). With the formal signing of the Sino-British Declaration in 1984, Hong Kong's predominant vision of its future was one of continued stability and prosperity within a framework that would permit a great degree of autonomy under the sovereignty of China. Accordingly, the society's expectations of education also began to show signs of transformation, as the problem of reconciling capitalism, socialism, and patriotism became more pronounced.

Following the June 4 1989 Tiananmen crackdown by the Chinese government, hundreds of thousands of secondary and postsecondary students, teachers, and administrators joined demonstrations in protest. Hong Kong's population looked to the British government to press for a speedier pace of democratisation, something that Britain had neglected to do during the colonial years, even as Beijing rejected its appropriateness in the few years leading up to the change in sovereignty and viewed British motives with suspicion. Flowerdew's (1999) article "Face in cross-cultural political discourse" provides an interesting discussion of Sino-British relations over Hong Kong during the years leading up to the change of sovereignty in 1997. It makes the often overlooked point that in spite of its universality, face is nevertheless subject to cultural variation in its application. What constitutes a desirable face may vary across cultures. Flowerdew uses the Chinese concept of face as developed by Bond and Hwang (1986) and applies this to Governor Patten's conduct in his dealings with China. In this way, he offers a possible interpretation of Patten's behaviour from the perspective of Chinese face, and argues that China's actions were likely to have been motivated by face concerns while Patten demonstrated great insensitivity to China's sense of face.

2.2.3 Public examination results in English

One of the best ways to see the standard of English of Hong Kong students is to look at the English results obtained in Hong Kong's public examinations. We shall first look at the English standards of Form 7 students, i.e. at the completion of their secondary school education, and just before they apply for admission to university. Table 2.3 shows the results in the Use of English examination released by the Hong Kong Examinations Assessment Authority (HKEAA) for the period from 1996 to 2004. The HKEAA does not provide a breakdown of each grade from A to F (my suspicion is that this is due to the unflattering reality that the largest percentages obtained are for the bottom grades of D and E), but from the information it released, I have calculated the figures presented in Table 2.3. One can see that a big majority of the students, around 64 percent, score grades 'D' and 'E' throughout the period. On the other hand, those scoring grades 'B' and 'C' cluster at just around 14 percent, and just about one percent of the students score grade A.

For the exact figures for grades A to F and Unclassified for 2004, which I have calculated from the information released by the HKEAA, please see Table 2.4 in Appendix 2.

Table 2.3: 1996 – 2004 HKALE statistics of day school candidates' results in Use of English (AS level)

		Day School Candidates								
Subject (Level)	**Examination Year**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**
Use of English (AS level)	No. sat	24 041	24 434	24 905	25 949	26 702	27 112	27 353	27 288	27 392
	A%	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.8
	B + C%	14.4	14	14.3	14.1	14.3	14	14.3	14.1	14.7
	D + E%	62.7	62.7	63.6	63.8	64.3	64.6	64.7	64.3	64.1
	F + UNCL%	21.8	22.2	21.0	20.9	20.3	20.2	19.9	20.7	20.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

It was reported in the newspaper that in the 1997 Advanced Level examinations only 41 percent or 12,000 candidates achieved Grade D or better in English, a mandatory subject for university admission. However, there were 14,500 university places available (Kwok. SCMP. July 11, 1997). This meant that some unqualified students would be admitted to university, resulting in a lowering of standards for university entry. Every year throughout the years 1996-2004, students scoring grades D and E constituted more than 60 percent of all examination candidates. With the admission of these students into university where previously they would not have made it, universities were accepting a majority of applicants with a very low proficiency in English who would not be able to perform adequately at the level required for studies in English.

The consequences of their poor English results are highlighted by a newspaper report of a survey of 155 first-year undergraduates' English vocabulary conducted by a researcher at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), which showed that these students were entering university with inadequate vocabulary for academic study. Arthur McNeill, director of CUHK's English Language Teaching Unit was quoted as saying that the results of the survey were "very worrying" as incoming students had a vocabulary of fewer than 5,000 words. Most students knew most of the words at the 2,000 most-frequently-used-word level but they knew fewer than half at the 3,000-word level and less than a third at the 5,000-word level. According to McNeill:

> Students who know fewer than 3,000 words can be expected to find many of their academic texts difficult to understand. At any rate, their reading speed is bound to be curtailed if they encounter many unfamiliar words. They are not understanding familiar words when they hear them. They need an enormous expansion of vocabulary, and more sentence-level grammar. (quoted in Forestier. SCMP. July 16, 2005).

For a full report of the newspaper article, see Appendix 3.

A look at the English examination results for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) taken by Form Five students shows that they were not much better than the HKALE English results taken by Form Seven students. Table 2.5 shows that for English Language Syllabus B results during the years 1996 to 2004, only two percent of the candidates scored a grade A, and an average of seven percent scored the combined grades of B and C. However, those who scored grades D and E combined constituted an average of 54 percent. What is equally dismal is that those who failed or got an unclassified rating (this means that the score is so low that it is not even recorded on the student's certificate) were a sizeable 30 to 40 percent during the period. As can be seen in Table 2.6, the results for English Language Syllabus A – the easier of the two papers – during the same period show that an even smaller percentage of candidates scored grade A (under or just over one percent), but slightly more than half of the candidates failed or had an unclassified rating.

Furthermore, Table 2.5 shows that the number of students sitting for the Syllabus B examination – the more difficult of the two papers – was 64,086 in 1996 but had fallen to 50,978 in 2004. This represented a 24 percent fall in the number of candidates during this period. On the other hand, Table 2.6 shows that the number of candidates for the Syllabus A examination increased from 7,499 in 1996 to 22,933 in 2004. This is a very dramatic increase of 206 percent. The change in the proportion of candidates taking these two papers during this period indicates that more and more candidates were opting to sit for the easier paper compared to previous years. This is also one of the consequences of the switch to Chinese as the medium of instruction (MOI) in the majority of schools starting from 1998.

Table 2.5: 1996-2004 HKCEE statistics of candidates' results in English language (Syllabus B)

Day School Candidates										
Subject	**Examination Year**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**
English Language (Syllabus B)	**No. sat**	64 086	64 386	66 816	67 376	66 064	61 151	58 843	55 127	50 978
	A%	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.3	2.3
	B + C%	6.4	9.3	8.3	8.0	7.9	7.1	6.8	6.6	6.3
	D + E%	48.8	47.8	49.9	51.4	54.4	58.3	59.0	57.4	61.6
	F + UNCL%	42.8	40.8	39.7	38.5	35.4	32.2	32.0	33.7	29.8
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Figures calculated from HKEAA statistics

Table 2.6: 1996-2004 HKCEE statistics of candidates' results in English language (Syllabus A)

Day School Candidates										
Subject	**Examination Year**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**
English Language (Syllabus A)	**No. sat**	7 499	8 369	9 558	10 852	13 316	14 824	15 889	18 652	22 933
	A%	1.2	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	1.1	1.0
	B + C%	12.3	11.7	10.5	11.2	10.6	10.4	10.7	11.6	12.2
	D + E%	34.4	36.8	32.7	35.2	34.0	35.0	34.0	35.3	35.7
	F + UNCL%	52.1	50.7	56.2	53	54.8	54.1	54.7	52	51.1
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Figures calculated from HKEAA statistics

The detailed examination results for the 2004 HKCEE English Language Syllabus B can be found in Table 2.7 in Appendix 4. They show that the biggest category of students is the 'E' grade students at 35.1 percent. The performance by students is dismal, with only 11.4 percent getting grades 'A', 'B' and 'C' combined. A total of 30 percent fail or get an unclassified rating. The detailed results for the 2004 HKCEE English Language Syllabus A examination can be found in Table 2.8 in Appendix 5. They show that the performance is even poorer with the largest category of students, 36 percent, in the unclassified category. More students (totaling 51.1 percent) failed the exam than those who passed (totaling 48.9 percent).

For the first time in 2007, Form Five students sitting for the HKCEE English examination are assessed differently. Instead of the previous two syllabuses, A and B, now there is only a single syllabus with a single set of standards. Examination scores are reported from Levels 1 to 5 with the best performance awarded a Level 5, a departure from the previously reported grades A to F and unclassified. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is also adopting standards-referenced reporting instead of norm-referenced reporting as in the past. It hopes that by doing this, it will be possible to compare students' performance over different years so that it may answer criticisms from the public about declining standards of English. With the adoption of this year's new system of assessment, it is no longer possible to directly compare this year's performance with the old system of grades. It may be too early to evaluate whether the new system is an improvement over the old, but already questions are being asked about what the real intentions behind the change are, with one critic asking the following question:

> The abolition of the more difficult Syllabus B, plus the improved results under the new grading system, cannot but fuel suspicion that changes have been made to conceal a decline in standards, and to adjust grading downwards in line with deteriorating performance. (Regina Ip lau Suk-yee, *South China Morning Post*, 27 August 2007)

From the foregoing discussion, it can be seen that **much more** should be done to improve the students' scores in English during their secondary school years before they move on to the higher forms and to university. While it may not be totally accurate to say that students' English standards have fallen, it is plainly evident that with greater numbers of students being admitted into university, entry levels have fallen in order to accommodate larger numbers of students. When these students graduate from university, there will be a corresponding increase in the number of graduates whose English standards are lower as compared to graduates in the past when university entry was much more strictly regulated and only the more competent students were admitted.

2.2.4 The Medium of Instruction (MOI) issue

The government favoured the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction as has been noted earlier. In 1997, it issued a policy statement whereby starting from the 1998-1999 school year, the medium of instruction (MOI) in secondary schools would be changed from English to Chinese (i.e. Cantonese) except in those schools where students and staff could demonstrate that they possessed adequate English competence to learn and teach in English. As a result of this policy, only 114 schools (henceforth referred to as EMI schools) were granted the permission to use English as the medium of instruction while close to 300 schools had to use Chinese as the medium of instruction (henceforth referred to as CMI schools). This policy caused a great deal of controversy and protests from students and parents because it was seen as discriminatory in favour of the relatively fewer older and more established schools which catered primarily for the children of middle-class professionals. Any move or legislation, therefore, to bring about differential opportunities for the learning of English would cause widespread resentment and insecurity among parents and this opposition has continued to this day.

The government's argument, however, was that students could learn better in their mother tongue. In its *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools* issued in September 1997, it provided its reasons for this policy as follows:

> Educational research worldwide and in Hong Kong have shown that students learn better through their mother tongue...The educational benefits of mother-tongue teaching include:
>
> - Mother-tongue teaching has positive effects on students' learning
> - Most students prefer learning in the mother tongue

- Students learning in the mother tongue generally perform better than their counterparts using English as medium of instruction (MOI); and
- Students of traditional Chinese-medium schools consistently achieve a higher pass percentage than the territory-wide average in both Chinese Language and English Language in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. This shows the positive impact of mother-tongue teaching on the learning of Chinese and English as a subject.

It even went on to categorically reject any political motive in its move to enforce using the mother tongue as MOI. The then Director of Education, Mrs. Fanny Law, said:

> Our objective is to educate our young people to be biliterate and trilingual [...] I can assure you that the decision was based purely on educational grounds and after careful assessment of the students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach effectively using English as the medium of instruction. *There is no hidden agenda; no political motive* (Law 1999). (italics mine.)

Parents, however, had different views. In a survey carried out by Bolton and Luke (1999), parents were asked whether they would like their children to attend a Chinese-medium or English-medium school. Sixty-three percent said they would send their children to an English-medium school while only a small minority, 6%, said they would choose a Chinese-medium school and the remaining 31% had no opinion. Parents were asked to state one primary reason for their choice of medium of school. The reasons for their preference for English-medium education are presented in the table below.

Table 2.9

Reasons for parental preference for English-medium education

Question: As a parent (or potential parent), why would you like your children to attend on (sic) English-medium school?

Reason	**% of those who stated a preference for English-medium education**
Better work opportunities	33.0%
A need for English in society generally	30.2%
English-medium schools offer better opportunities for the learning of English	17.1%

Study and/or work abroad	4.4%
English-medium schools offer better quality education	1.6%
English is an effective teaching medium	0.1%
Other reasons	13.5%
Total	**100.0% (N = 771)**

(Bolton and Luke, 1999, p. 192)

It can be seen from the table that for the vast majority of the respondents, the reasons are pragmatic – better job opportunities, the need for English in society, and the fact that English-medium schools offered more opportunities for learning English. With the implementation of the MOI policy, parents started to look for alternatives to CMI schools and those who could afford to do so, sent their children to the local international schools or to schools overseas. Lu (2003) states that international schools in Hong Kong attracted thirty percent more applicants in 1998 after the government announced its new MOI policy.

A reader of the *South China Morning Post* expressed sentiments that clearly encapsulated the views which commonly appeared in the press at that time:

> With Hong Kong now being a Special Administrative Region of China, Cantonese is gaining in importance. Now the Education Department wants to use Cantonese as the medium of instruction in our secondary schools. I am a secondary student and my school has been told it must switch its medium of instruction [...] We all know that English is the international language. Changing the medium of instruction will reduce our exposure to English and our opportunities to speak it. This will have a detrimental long-term effect, as the standard of English of Hong Kong people gradually declines. [...] Also employers prefer to employ people who are good at English. Unemployment will be a serious problem for those students who completed their studies at Chinese schools. Why? Because employers will only take young people coming from the elite schools [...] Whatever the Education Department may think, both parents and teachers know that English remains an important language. Whatever change it makes, English will still be the most important language internationally. (Tang. SCMP. December 13, 1997)

For another reader's views expressed nearly eight years later, see K. M. Mak (SCMP. February 14, 2005) "Hong Kong needs bilingual system for schools" in Appendix 6. In addition, some academics and researchers entered the debate and asserted that Hong Kong would benefit from a bilingual or trilingual educational policy (So, 1987, 1992; Lu, 2001, 2003; Lee, 2002).

2.2.5 Education: dollars and cents

Hong Kong has a complex education system and a large education budget, the largest recurring expense in the government's budget. In 2002/03 the approved public spending on education amounted to HK$59.4 billion, representing 23.8 per cent of the total public expenditure (Information Services Department, HKSAR Government, October 2003). Education is the biggest public expenditure item. The Government provides nine years of free and universal basic education from the age of six to 15.

There are 15 schools operated by the English Schools Foundation (ESF), which was established in 1967 to provide education to English-speaking children. There are also around 55 international schools, which offer different non-local curricula and are open to children of all ethnic groups. These ESF and international schools are popular with those families who can afford the monthly tuition fees of HK$8,000 to $14,000.

To cope with the development of a knowledge-based economy and a corresponding manpower demand, in 2000 the Government set a policy target to enable 60 per cent of the senior secondary school leavers to have access to post-secondary education by the academic year 2010/11. The overall participation rate in post-secondary education for the 17-20 age cohorts has increased from around 30 per cent in 2000 to 48 per cent in 2003. Hong Kong has 11 degree-awarding higher education institutions, eight of which are funded by the Government through the University Grants Committee (UGC). Seven of the eight are universities and the remaining one is a teacher training institution. Three other degree-awarding tertiary institutions are not funded by the UGC. They are either publicly-funded or self-financing.

In 2002/03, a total of 60,933 full-time students and 17,798 part-time students pursued sub-degree, undergraduate and postgraduate courses. After a period of rapid expansion of the eight UGC-funded tertiary institutions during 1991-1995, the tertiary sector has entered a period of consolidation since 1995. First-year-first-degree places at the eight institutions have remained at the level of 14,500 per annum since then, equivalent to about 18% of the relevant age group.

At the same time, the Government says it also strives to make available to working adults further opportunities for higher education through the Open University of Hong Kong. Adult education courses are also provided by the Vocational Training Council (VTC), the various universities and private institutes. To this end, the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) subsidizes adults with learning aspirations who wish to pursue continuing education and training courses. Eligible applicants are reimbursed 80% of their fees, subject to a maximum sum of HK$10,000 on successful completion of a reimbursable course or module(s) forming part of the course.

2.2.6 Hong Kong English

The HKSAR government's goal in language policy in schools is "biliteracy and trilingualism" meaning that it hopes to produce students who are literate in the two written languages of English and standard written Chinese (SWC) and trilingual in the three spoken languages of Cantonese, English and Putonghua. In reality, however, "mixed code" is extremely pervasive. This is the use of English words in Cantonese structures resulting in "intra-sentential code-switching" (Li 1996 and 1998; Luke 1998; Yau 1997). Mixed code is frequently used in the classroom for various pedagogical and instructional purposes.

Li's (1999) paper updates the study of Luke and Richards' (1982) on the functions and status of English in Hong Kong. He describes the macro-sociolinguistic situation as that of polyglossia with increasing bilingualism, representing a change from "diglossia without bilingualism" described in the 1982 study by Luke and Richards.

After 1997, the language choice in government meetings and press conferences is Cantonese. In day-to-day government administration and in the civil service, Li (1999) states that:

> with few exceptions, oral communication tends to be dominated by Cantonese or mixed code, whereas formal internal written communication such has memos or notices tend to be in English. In addition, SWC may also be used in communications with junior employees who know little or no English." (p. 73).

However, the change from a manufacturing economy to a service economy means that there are more jobs and positions requiring employees to speak at least some English so that they can interact with English-speaking clients. To sum up the role played by English in the Hong Kong workplace, Li (1999) states that the skills needed are "more receptive than productive and where productive skills are required, needs for writing far exceed those of speaking" (p. 76).

In Chapter 1, we saw how English spread to the rest of the world giving rise to nativised varieties such as Singlish in Singapore. In Hong Kong, however, many scholars have argued that the local Chinese do not use English for intra-ethnic communication and thus, "indigenous forms have not developed" (Li, 2000, p. 50). One respect in which Hong Kong differs from other British colonies is that after more than 150 years of colonial rule from 1842 to 1997, the use of English amongst Hong Kong Chinese is not as pervasive as might be expected. For example, Kirkpatrick (2007) who has been teaching in Hong Kong for many years, states that "the role of English as a *lingua franca* is not as pronounced or obvious as in places such as Singapore, primarily because the overwhelming majority of the people are Chinese, most of whom speak Cantonese" (p. 141). This is a common perception by observers and scholars alike, some of whom make statements such as: "English has never penetrated society at large in Hong Kong and has only ever been widely used in the formal contexts of government, education, law and written business communication" (Flowerdew, Li and Miller, 1998, p. 203); or that Hong Kong is "essentially a monolingual Cantonese-speaking society where English is used in only a restricted number of domains" (So, 1992, p. 79); or that there is "no social or cultural role for English to play among Hong Kong Chinese; it only has a role in their relations with expatriates and the outside world" (Johnson, 1994, p.182); and other similar remarks made by other academics (Fu, 1987; Yu and Atkinson, 1988; Yau, 1989; and Bruce, 1990). While the great majority of Hong Kong Chinese know that English is important, they learn it as a school subject and feel uncomfortable to use it among themselves. However, this situation may be changing as more and more Hong Kong children are educated in international schools locally as well as are sent overseas to schools in the United Kingdom or the United States for the primary reason of acquiring mastery over English.

As for the standard of English spoken by many Hongkongers, one British teacher who was recruited to teach in Hong Kong schools under the Native English Teachers Scheme (NETS)[18] introduced in 1998 to raise the English level of students, has this to say:

> Anson Yang ("Setting an example," May 31) pointed out the quirky Hong Kong pronunciation of the letter "e" as "yee". Unfortunately, this is not the only letter of the English alphabet to suffer from a uniquely Hong Kong rendition.
> We also have our local names for f (effie), h (aitchoo), l (ello), r (arlo), s (eesie), x (exie) and z (ee-zed). The letters b and d are often replaced by the English words, "boy" and "dog", as in the phrase, "second floor, two dog".
> These localized labels, combined with an appalling lack of knowledge of the alphabet's sound system, leave Hong Kong badly wanting when it comes to the basics of English-language competency. Will this be rectified? Not as long as we have officials who are intent on cutting funds for early childhood education at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, and making a mess of the recruitment and retention of native English-speaking teachers in local schools. [...]
> (Bunce. SCMP. June 8, 2005).

Hung (2002), in his study of the phonology of Hong Kong English, calls it "a system *in its own right,* on a par with other 'New Varieties' of English, such as Singaporean and Malaysian English" (p.191) and which is partly the product of interaction between two languages, English and Cantonese.

2.2.7 Hong Kong educational reforms

Mok and Chan (2002) look at how the process of globalisation has affected educational development in Hong Kong and in particular how popular ideas of

[18] The Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme was started in all public sector secondary schools in 1998 as one of the measures to improve the English proficiency of students. At present about 470 NET teachers are teaching in secondary schools and another 310 in primary schools.

postmodernism, economic rationalism and managerialism have impacted on education management. Cheng (2002) writes that Hong Kong's educational reforms:

> [...] largely followed the international trend, but perhaps with a time lag. Such a campaign for quality education was preceded by almost twenty years of quantitative emphasis. [...] The piecemeal approach saw little success in terms of implementation, yet has caused a general confusion among front-line educators, and has indeed contributed to a cult of measurement which has not stopped the decline in quality. (p. 41)

Table 2.10: The quantitative era: A chronology of educational expansions

1965	White Paper on Primary Education
1970	Compulsory Education
1973	The Education Green Paper
1978	Nine-Year Compulsory Education
1980	Higher and Vocational Education
1982	Establishment of Vocational Training Council
1986	Expansion in Higher Education
1989	Further Expansion in Higher Education

(Cheng, 2002, p. 44)

Cheng points out that the decline in the standard of language has been "the most conspicuous". The decline in language competency among students was first felt by employers (see section 2.3). It was also felt by the tertiary institutions. There was a generally perceived decline in the language standard among university graduates. This decline was not limited to English, which is understandably a foreign language for most of the students. There was also a significant perceived decline in competency in Chinese language.

In Hong Kong, a number of educational reforms in the past decades have improved different aspects of education such as curriculum, language teaching, student guidance, student streaming, school management, teacher-student ratios, physical environment and teacher education (Cheng, 2002; Education Commission, 1984-1997; Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991). Although these efforts aimed at improving quality and accountability, they suffered from a poor understanding of the complex nature of education, proper implementation and monitoring of performance. As a result, the cumulative effect of all these efforts is often problematic and doubted by the public.

2.2.8 Benchmarking language teachers

One of the reasons for the low English standards of students even after twelve or more years of English lessons in school was the quality of the English teachers. According to Carless (2004), the teaching profession in Hong Kong does not yet exhibit a high degree of professionalism in training and qualifications. He cites Education and Manpower Bureau statistics for 2002, which state that at the primary school level, 52.4% of teachers do not hold degrees and 9% are untrained. Many subjects are taught by teachers not trained in that particular subject. For instance, a substantial 41% of English teachers are not trained to teach English.

Starting from the 2000/01 school year, the government tried to lift standards by introducing proficiency tests in English and Putonghua for all English and Putonghua teachers in local primary and secondary schools, except for those employed under the Native-speaking English Teachers Scheme (NETS) and those in international schools All serving English and Putonghua teachers are expected to meet the language proficiency requirement before the end of the 2005/06 school year by (a) attending authorised training courses and passing the internal assessments by the respective institutes, or (b) sitting for the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers jointly administered by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA) and the Education Department (ED), or (c) a combination or (a) and (b). A training grant was offered to these teachers to cover the cost of attending courses for upgrading their language skills. The objective of these language assessments was to determine a teacher's English language ability for the effective teaching of English in primary and secondary school classrooms in Hong Kong.

While the public were generally in favour of the move to benchmark the standards of language teachers, the teachers themselves and their union, the Professional Teachers' Union, strongly opposed the move. The following letter, however, to the editor of the *South China Morning Post* sums up the public's lack of sympathy for the teaching profession's resistance to improving their perceived poor language skills:

> The Government's decision to test the language skills of primary and secondary school teachers and to set language benchmarks for teachers is a positive step towards improving the language skills of students.
> Legislator Cheung Man-kwong, who is the president of the Professional Teachers' Union, advocated that existing teachers should not be required to take these tests.
> If Mr. Cheung truly has the interests of the students of Hong Kong at heart, the first thing he would do would be to find ways to help those teachers who may not pass these language skill tests, to upgrade their skills.
> If he thinks there are no problems with existing teachers' language skills, then he should be one of the first to welcome these tests, just to show the public that the fault of the deterioration of our students' language skills does not lie with our teachers' own language skills. [...]
> (Woo. *SCMP.* March 19, 1997)

In 2005, 35 percent of Hong Kong's nearly 15,000 English teachers had not yet passed the benchmark test compared with 19 percent of about 6,600 Putonghua teachers (Chan. *SCMP.* May 28, 2005). The results of those who have taken the language proficiency tests[19] are shown in Table 2.11 and they indicate that the teachers' English proficiency, particularly in writing and speaking, is not high.

[19] The Education and Manpower Bureau publishes detailed information on the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) including the background, syllabus specifications, explanatory notes, specimen examination papers in full for the reading, writing, listening, and speaking components, answer keys, scales and descriptors, assessment reports for the various examination dates, commonly asked questions and answers, and so on in their website http://www.emb.gov.hk. Look under the *Teachers' Development* link.

Table 2.11 Proficiency assessment for teachers (English language)

Proficiency attainment* rates of candidates in:

	Reading		**Writing**		**Listening**		**Speaking**		**Classroom Language Assessment**	
	Candidates		**Candidates**		**Candidates**		**Candidates**		**Candidates**	
Year	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Sept 2001	398	85.68	387	33.33	376	68.35	351	50.71	93	89.25
Sept 2002	662	55	708	29	670	39	679	58	266	91
Mar 2003	1968	63	1998	41	1985	72	1878	45	1123	89
Sept 2003	1858	68	1986	32	1801	63	1856	46	709	85
Mar 2004	2177	71	2727	40	2268	49	2421	47	1923	88
Sept 2004	1494	66	2145	28	1801	71	1770	43	1005	90

* *Scoring '3' or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and '2.5' or above on any one scale and '3' or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers.* Source: Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language). Assessment Reports for 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Education and Manpower Bureau. Teachers' Development link. http://www.emb.gov.hk

2.3 Complaints from the business community

Lord (Lord and Cheng, 1987) who some years ago was the Dean of the Arts Faculty where I am presently teaching says:

> What Hong Kong needs is a guaranteed minimum of language education for everyone and, on top of that, a flexible range of opportunities beyond this minimum. The key words here are "flexible" and "range". *For those who stay on at school after Form 3 and ultimately progress into tertiary education, the problem largely takes care of itself.* (1987, p.12) (emphasis mine).

While these guidelines sound workable, the English standards of university students show that Lord's optimism is misplaced. A study by Ho (1979) cited in the same book edited by Lord and Cheng (1987) found that the majority of his subjects' English ability was below the requisite standard of university education at the University of Hong Kong although these students nonetheless were able to obtain their university degrees. More recently, the results of a study carried out on the English vocabulary of first-year students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong were also found to be "very worrying" as we have noted in section 2.2.3.

Since the mid-1990s, employers have begun expressing their dissatisfaction with local graduates. Reporting on a 2004 business confidence survey published by the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce which showed that 75 percent of respondents believed English levels to be below expectations, Ball (2004) writes:

> Hong Kong is developing into a service centre to Asia and the world, and it needs to develop its English skills in sync. Hong Kong is competing with places such as Singapore for this role and often loses out to Singapore because of poor English skills. Multinationals must have staff fluent in English to operate at maximum efficiency. With no change in the education system, the government and the private sector will have to keep investing for years to come to ensure Hong Kong's English skills stay where they are, let alone improve. (*SCMP*. October 16, 2004)

A 2006 public survey on education to find out the views of business decision makers/opinion leaders also found that they commented unfavourably on the English ability of local university graduates. For a discussion of this finding, please refer to

Chapter 7, section 7.4.1, and also see Appendix 15 for the full details of this survey. James Tien, a prominent businessman, Legislative Councilor and chairman of the Liberal Party which represents the city's business interests referred to the fact that many global companies had moved their regional bases from Hong Kong to Shanghai because the standard of English was better there and said, "This tragedy is created by ourselves" (Lam. SCMP. May 27, 1999). The same article also pointed out that businesses were complaining that they had difficulty recruiting graduates because many were unwilling to speak English in job interviews. The same problem was also being experienced in the legal profession, according to a prominent local lawyer and then Democratic Party leader, Martin Lee.

It was because of the strong complaints frequently aired by the business community that the idea of instituting an independent, standardised English competency test for university graduates was proposed by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) in order to help employers identify recruits who could meet their language requirements. This eventually culminated in the use of the International English Language Tests (IELTS) in 2001 as a means of measuring the English proficiency of graduating students across the various tertiary institutions in Hong Kong.

One factor which had led to the lower English standards of university graduates was the very rapid expansion of tertiary education that took place starting from the mid 1980s. Figure 2.4 and Table 2.12 show the great increase in the number of students entering as first-year students in the universities of Hong Kong after 1985 when fewer than 4,000 students were admitted to university. By 1998, the number of students entering university had risen to about 14,500 representing a four-fold increase. In 1985, fewer than 4% of the eligible age group entered university or only one in 25. However, by 1998, the figure had jumped to 18.6% of the university eligible age group or one in five (Chew, 2000). In order to deal with the students' language inadequacies, a few university administrators and academics were in favour of extending university education to four years with the first year of studies for intensive English language enhancement. But the idea of a four-year university education was considered too costly at that time to be feasible. However, it is now going to be implemented in the 2012 academic year, after an intervening gap of more than 15 years.

Figure 2.4

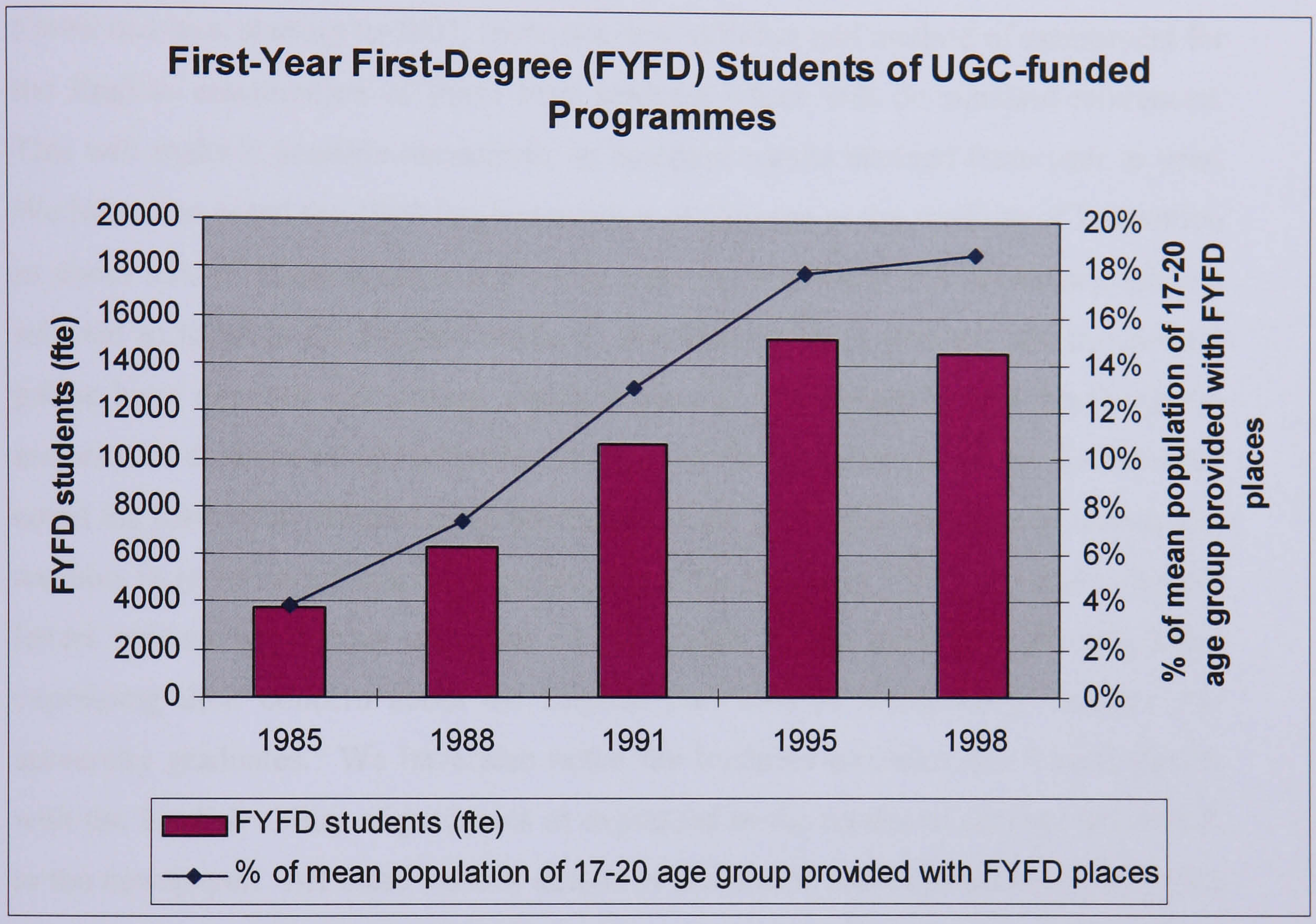

Table 2.12 First-year first-degree (FYFD) students of UGC-funded programmes

	1985	**1988**	**1991**	**1995**	**1998**	**Average annual percentage change 1985 –1998**
First-year first-degree (FYFD) students (fte)	3779	6322	10665	15070	14488	10.9%
Percentage of mean population of 17-20 age group provided with first-year first-degree places	3.8%	7.4%	13.0%	17.8%	18.6%	

Source: Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics June 1999

2.4 The debate on falling English standards

In this section 2.2 on education in Hong Kong, we have noted the consistently poor English results of students sitting for the public examinations in Forms Five and Seven and how starting in 2007, there is a new syllabus and method of assessment for the English examination of Form Five students which will be standard-referenced. This will make it possible henceforth, to compare results attained from year to year. We have also noted the 1998 implementation of Chinese as the medium of instruction in about 350 of Hong Kong's secondary schools, with only 114 secondary schools selected to teach in the English medium, and how students, parents, and the general public have opposed this policy, which is seen as discriminatory and depriving the majority of students of opportunities to improve their English. We have furthermore noted the institution of benchmark proficiency tests for English teachers to ensure that teachers in government schools meet the minimum standards. We have also noted the letters written by various segments of the public to the local English newspaper expressing their concern about the English standards of Hong Kong students and university graduates. We have also noted the business community's dissatisfaction with the English ability of graduates as expressed in the results of surveys and letters to the newspaper. All these various strains of discussion and information point to the fact that the English standard of Hong Kong students and university graduates is a cause for community concern.

Have English standards fallen over the past one to two decades? Some academics, most notably, Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998), present two arguments to refute what they call the "monolingual myth" and the "falling standards myth". First, they point to the fact that there is a rise in the total number of respondents claiming to speak English 'quite well', 'well', and 'very well' from 6.6% in 1983 to 33.7% in 1993. This represents a five-fold increase during the ten-year period. At the same time, the percentage of those stating that they did not speak English 'at all' dropped from 33.1% to 17.4% during the same period. This represents a near-halving of those who knew no English at all. Some of these arguments are presented in articles and paper presentations using expressions such as the "monolingual myth" or the "invisibility myth" (Bolton, 2000) or "the myth of falling standards".[20]

Although we have noted the statements made by other scholars in section 2.2.6, as for example So (1992), that "Hong Kong is essentially a monolingual Cantonese-speaking community" (p.79), Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998) challenge this "monolingual myth" by citing data from a 1993 survey[21]. The data is as follows: (1) 56% of the population report having an English name, and 17% report having an English name on their identity cards; (2) 53% report using English to write words on a cheque; (3) 30% either report that they or a close family member were planning to emigrate to an English-speaking country; and (4) the vast majority report observing high levels of Chinese-English code-mixing in various societal domains: home (45%), friends (75%), work (79%), in public (83%), and school (90%).

Bolton and Lim (2000) state that "from an empirical perspective, very little hard research was conducted on the issue of 'falling' language standards during these years, and what was done was inconclusive at best" (p.433). The authors, academics in the English Department at the University of Hong Kong, were responding to media criticisms that 'The decline in English standards is clearly visible at the University of Hong Kong' (Time, 16 September 1991); and to an article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* which stated that:

> Founded in 1911 and still the colony's premier institution of higher learning, the university today has become a symbol of the decline in local English standards in Hong Kong. [...] To democratize Hong Kong's system of higher education, the government expanded enrolment to 18% of the relevant age group from about 7%. Here at the University of Hong Kong, that has meant a jump to 12,965 students today from about 7,000 only 10 years ago. [...] And because the university no longer reflects simply the cream of Hong Kong society, the general level of English has declined as the numbers have increased (McGurn. 1996 p.43)

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[20] Bolton used this expression in his joint presentation with Bacon-Shone at the *Symposium on Bilingualism: Linguistic, Psycholinguistic and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* organised by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Hong Kong on 18 June 2005 which I attended.

[21] The 1993 Sociolinguistics Survey of Languages in Hong Kong was conducted by the Social Sciences Research Centre (SSRC) of the University of Hong Kong. A total of 870 telephone interviews were successfully conducted.

In response, Bolton and Lim (2000) assert that:

> [...] the young people who enter the English Department of the University today are drawn from the top 10 to 20 percent of English achievers from the territory's secondary schools, and our best students are impressively bilingual and bicultural, in spite of the fact that they often come from homes in housing estates where little or no English is spoken (p. 435).

But as we have seen from Table 2.3 in section 2.2.3, the public examination results in the Use of English for the period from 1996 to 2004 reveal that only one percent of the students get grade A, 14 percent get grades B and C, and more than 60 percent get grades D and E. Therefore, the top 10 to 20 percent of English achievers from the secondary schools are still not very good.

At the *International Symposium on Bilingualism* held at the University of Hong Kong on 18 June 2005 that I was fortunate enough to attend, Bolton (2005) again tried to refute the "myth of falling standards" with statistics from the Hong Kong Government Censuses and language surveys done during the period from 1911 to the present. He looks at the literacy rates of females in the mother tongue in 1931 which stood at about 18% and compares this with the literacy rate of females today which stands at 100%, and concludes that language standards have risen greatly. But these figures are for literacy rates in the mother tongue, and do not touch on the issue of falling or low English standards. It is not very useful to cite low literacy rates from 74 years earlier because Hong Kong society then was very different from what it is today. The Hong Kong of that era **did not need** the English speakers and writers that it does today. Bolton himself points out that "Hong Kong society has been one of constant change – economically, politically, and socially". One very dramatic indicator of change has been its very quick transformation from a poor and backward refugee community into one of the richest cities in the world. In 1966, the per capita income was US$410. In 1996, the per capita income had grown to US$23,000, and today the per capita income stands at US$34,000. The economy has changed from a textile and plastics manufacturing economy to a service economy and an international financial centre. Therefore, the empirical data cited by Bacon-Shone and Bolton that those who profess to know English 'well' and 'very well' have remained at about 8% in total during 1993 and 2003, remain grossly inadequate to meet the present day economic demands of Hong Kong. Bolton himself concludes his presentation by stating that there has been a "shortfall at the high end where the percentages have stood still in the past ten years". In a newspaper interview carried on the same day as the Symposium, he said:

> But society and the economy have evolved. There is a much greater demand for high proficiency in English than 20 years ago. The absolute numbers of good English speakers have risen, but not fast enough to meet the expectations of the business community (Forestier, SCMP. June 18, 2005).

This then is the crux of the matter. While it may be inaccurate to say that English standards have fallen because it has not been possible to measure the results with an instrument over the past several decades, the negative perception of the general public and the business community has legitimate grounds. As Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998) state, "more people than ever are speaking 'good' English, and more people than ever are speaking 'bad' English" (p. 84). What the Hong Kong community sees are the larger numbers of 'bad' English speakers (and writers). The standards of English have not risen to meet the challenges presented by Hong Kong's present day needs. This is corroborated by my study on the use of English in four banks which finds that, among other things, 10 out of 16 employees report having either writing or speaking difficulties at work.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented, from various viewpoints, the specific Hong Kong context in which my study was conducted. Against the backdrop of some brief facts about Hong Kong's political system and economy, I presented the historical background of Hong Kong's financial and banking sector. I then focussed on education in Hong Kong, detailing the educational policies and practices from colonial times to the present. On the basis of wide-ranging data, I discussed some salient issues in education – public examination results in English, the medium of instruction (MOI) issue, dollars and cents about education, Hong Kong English, educational reforms and benchmarking language teachers. I also discussed the complaints from the business community about the low standards of English in Hong Kong. Finally, I discussed the debate on the falling standards of English.

Before proceeding to the methodology and the further specifics of my study, I shall present in the next chapter a survey of the published literature relevant to my study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the global position of English and the Hong Kong context discussed in the last two chapters, this chapter surveys the relevant literature on discourse studies to provide the theoretical context for my study, and a clearer analytical framework for examining my findings on bank employees' language use in four banks in Hong Kong. My aim is to move from the bigger picture of how language is used and the study of how it is used; funneling down to the study of workplace and business discourse; and finally moving to studies of language use in the Hong Kong workplace. In doing so, my purpose is to show how various approaches to studying language use and in particular, narrative analysis, may be used to further the analysis of my own study. I will begin my literature review by examining the various and competing definitions of discourse analysis by linguists and sociolinguists, who have in turn been influenced by studies in anthropology and sociology. I will then go on to discuss critical discourse analysis (CDA), a type of discourse analytical approach that primarily studies the interrelationship between language and power in social and political contexts, outlining some of its main ideas as well as criticisms about its limitations. I will next discuss genre analysis, another type of discourse analytical approach, highlighting just some of the main ideas on genre analysis, and a few of its applications. Following this, I will discuss narrative analysis and show how some aspects of this theory could be usefully applied to the way I analyse my interview data. I will then go on to give a brief overview of the following in turn: talk at work: institutional talk; discourse(s) in the workplace; business discourse; spoken discourse – meetings; how the study of business discourse may be applied to language teaching; language in post-colonial Hong Kong; and finally, two studies conducted on language in the Hong Kong workplace. By bringing together all the relevant, useful and usable threads from a wide variety of past studies, approaches, theories and lessons, I hope that each can contribute towards the methodological approaches adopted in this study, namely the face-to-face interview supplemented by a questionnaire, and the subsequent analysis of the data collected in order to gain a better understanding of what goes on in the language domain of a banking workplace in Hong Kong.

3.1 Discourse analysis

The field of discourse analysis is, simply put, vast and continuously expanding and evolving. It covers a myriad number of issues on **any** aspect of language use and a myriad number of disciplines including linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociology, communication studies, psychology, artificial intelligence, rhetoric, literary and cultural studies, and others. The prodigious amount of research activity in discourse analysis reflects its multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary characteristics. Stubbs (1983) sounds a word of caution by saying that:

> I can only point out that no one is in a position to write a comprehensive account of discourse analysis. The subject is at once too vast, and too lacking in focus and consensus. (p.12)

Rather than attempting to summarise the immense literature on discourse analysis over the last five decades or so, I will highlight and refer to the work and ideas of some prominent scholars. I will do this by referring to my readings of the writings of some researchers and academics on discourse analysis, many of these with titles such as *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* or *Discourse Analysis* which I have found to be very useful in my gaining an understanding of the subject. I do this as a launching pad for the later forays into the theories of the original thinkers and theoreticians.

First, how is discourse analysis defined? Gee (2005) tells us in the preface to the new edition of his book that he hopes he has "added greater clarity" (p. xi) but quickly goes on to say that "In human communication, clarity is a hope that is almost always bound to be frustrated" (p. xi). Even so, I have found Gee to be a very clear writer. He states that his book is:

> … an introduction to *one* approach to discourse analysis (the analysis of language-in-use). There are many different approaches to discourse analysis (see for example, Schiffrin 1994; van Dijk 1997a, b; Jaworski and Coupland 1999; Wodak and Meyer 2002; Fairclough 2003;

Tannen *et al.* 2003; Rogers 2004), none of them, including this one, uniquely "right". Different approaches fit different issues and questions better or worse than others. And, too, different approaches sometimes reach similar conclusions through using different tools and terminologies connected to different "micro-communities" of researchers. (p.5)

Johnstone (2002), on the other hand, uses a different definition. She states:

> The approach I take in this book is different. I treat discourse analysis not as a discipline (or as a subdiscipline of linguistics) but as a systematic, rigorous way of suggesting answers to research questions posed in and across disciplines throughout the humanities and social sciences and beyond. In other words, I see discourse analysis as a research method that can be (and is being) used by scholars with a variety of academic and non-academic affiliations, coming from a variety of disciplines, to answer a variety of questions. (p.xi)

Johnstone's way of approaching discourse analysis is based on the work of her teacher, A. L. Becker (1995). She states that only Schiffrin (1994) treats discourse analysis primarily as a methodology, as she does.

In contrast, Brown and Yule (1983) provide the following definition:

> The analysis of **discourse** (emphasis in original) is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs. While some linguists may concentrate on determining the formal properties of a language, the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for. While the formal approach has a long tradition, manifested in innumerable volumes of grammar, the functional approach is less well documented. Attempts to provide even a general set of labels for the principal functions of language have resulted in vague, and often confusing, terminology. (p.1)

Furthermore, according to Stubbs (1983),

> The term *discourse analysis* is very ambiguous. I will use it in this book to refer mainly to the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring connected spoken or written discourse. Roughly speaking, it refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers. (p.1)

Widdowson (1995) delivers an acerbic retort to this, and I quote:

> ...Stubbs tells us that the terms 'text' and 'discourse' are 'often ambiguous and confusing'. How true. One might suppose that this would be a good reason for distinguishing them more explicitly. Instead we get remarks like 'one often talks of "written text" versus "spoken discourse" and "discourse" implies length, whereas a "text" may be very short'. These comments seem curiously uncritical. It is surely the purpose of intellectual analysis to counter such loose talk. As it is, the ambiguity and confusion remain, more firmly established by being so readily indulged. (p. 136)

Interestingly, Coulthard (1985), in his *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Second Edition* does not actually provide any definition of discourse analysis. He agrees with Brown and Yule (1983) that labels are problematic. His work serves as a useful introduction to the analysis of verbal interaction by examining the relevant research drawn from a range of disciplines. He states:

> ...in writing an introduction to discourse analysis I am not, paradoxically, describing only the work of researchers who consider themselves discourse analysts – many of those mentioned here would be bemused or annoyed by the label. Rather, what I have tried to do is draw together in the first six chapters research from many disciplines – philosophy, psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, conversational analysis, anthropology, ethnography of speaking, phonetics and linguistics – which is useful to anyone interested in the analysis of situated speech or *spoken discourse.* Labels are always difficult; I have chosen to maintain a distinction between spoken *discourse* and written *text,* but this is by no means a universally accepted distinction; ... (p. 3)

Thus, discourse analysis is defined in many different ways by different researchers and it is a very active research arena with two main strands – the study of texts and the study of interactive events. The former refers to not just written texts, but the study of sound recordings and transcriptions of spoken language as well, while the latter refers to the problems and successes people have using language in their interactions with one another. The field of discourse analysis is so vast because it can be used to answer different kinds of questions to do with the processes of language itself such as: What is linguistic competence? How do words, sentences and utterances have meanings? How does language change? How do people learn language? Discourse analysis can also be used to answer questions about the roles of language in human cognition, art and social life such as: Why do people tell stories? Why do they have conversations? How do people adapt language to specialised situations and settings like classrooms, courtrooms and clinics? What is persuasion and how does it work? Discourse analysis can also be used to answer questions about human life, social relations and communication such as: How can we understand dominance, oppression or solidarity? How is personal identity shaped? How is social identification formed? How are decisions made and resources allocated? How is social adaptation or conflict resolution accomplished in public and private life? In sum, discourse analysis can help in answering any question that could be asked about human activity in society. In trying to answer all these different questions, we see once more the necessarily interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary nature and methods of inquiry in discourse analysis. Indeed, as Tannen (2001) puts it, "work in discourse analysis is now so diverse that 'discourse' is almost a synonym for 'language'" (p.3). She and her co-editors assert that "the vastness and diversity of discourse analysis is a great strength rather than a weakness. Far from its being a liability to be lamented because of the lack of a single coherent theory, we find the theoretical and methodological diversity of discourse analysis to be an asset" (Schiffrin *et al.*, 2001, p.5). Thus, we have come a full circle from where we started with the quotation from Stubbs (1983) about the lack of a focus and consensus.

With such a large body of the literature in front of me to survey, I perused The Handbook of Discourse Analysis edited by Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton (2001). This volume of 41 articles presents an overview of discourse analysis, theoretical and methodological issues in the field, empirical studies of discourse as social and linguistic practice and explores how different disciplines have become interested in discourse. It makes significant contributions to current research and is an authoritative guide to the central issues in discourse analysis today. It is therefore surprising that it has nothing specifically on business discourse. A check in the index led me to a brief mention by Grimshaw (2001) of Boden's (1994) study of organisations where she examines the role of talk in constituting, reproducing and modifying social organisations, and how members contribute to that constitution, reproduction and modification through talk, in the dual nature of discourse as pointed out in Johnstone's (2002) framework below. This mention appears on pages 762-763 of the Handbook. In a discussion on narrative in institutions by Linde (2001), there is also a brief mention made of research in institutional settings which focus on other forms of institutional discourse (with narrative described only in passing) wherein meetings are examined; these are the studies by Wasson (1996) and Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997b). Linde points out that the most important description of narrative in work settings is Orr's (1990, 1996) study of how copier repair technicians conduct their work. It is also very interesting to note that there is a discussion of legal discourse, medical discourse, political discourse, discourse and media, discourse in educational settings, discourse and racism and so on, but no discussion of the discourse of doing business. In the section on genre, there is also nothing on business genre(s). This, I think, is a glaring omission.

In order to make a comparison, I also consulted the first Handbook of Discourse Analysis edited by Van Dijk (1985). This is an extensive though rather dated handbook. Its four volumes are arranged according to disciplines of discourse, dimensions of discourse, discourse and dialogue, and discourse analysis in society. In Volume 3, there is a discussion of classroom discourse, courtroom interaction (discourse), the discourse of news interviews, among others. In Volume 4, there is discussion of political discourse, plea bargaining discourse in the courts, and separately, on interaction between judge and defendant, doctor-patient discourse, among others. But again in the 1985 Handbook, there is no discussion of business discourse.

For business discourse, therefore, we have to turn to more recent books and works specifically on business discourse, and not surprisingly with titles such as *Business Discourse, Asian Business Discourse(s),* and *Business Discourse: Texts and Contexts.* I will highlight and refer to the work of some scholars in the field of business discourse in order to determine what kinds of research have been carried out in the workplace, and to examine the nature and language of work, and as a means of comparing my own research with what has been done by other researchers in the field.

The texts on discourse analysis mentioned above have led me to the theories and works of pioneers and leading scholars in the field of conversation analysis and its subdivisions, dating from the 1960s, such as, among others, Sacks (1972) on membership categorisation devices, Hymes (1972) on speech events, Schegloff (1972) on sequencing, Garfinkel (1967) on ethnomethodology, Goffman (1981) on the Interaction Order, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) on turn-taking for conversation, Gumperz (1982) on interactional sociolinguistics, Labov and Waletzky (1967) on the structure of personal experience narrative (PEN), Schaefer (1980) on narrative analysis, and Hymes (1981) on the organisation of oral narrative. Their research and theories have contributed greatly to the way discourse is studied today.

To sum up the multiple and two-directional facets of discourse, Johnstone (2002) provides the following very useful framework to show how discourse is shaped by its context, and how discourse shapes its context:

- Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world.
- Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language.
- Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants.
- Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse.
- Discourse is shaped by its medium, and discourse shapes the possibilities of its medium.
- Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes. (p. 9)

3.2 Critical discourse analysis: language and power

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), a type of discourse analytical research, primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. Scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, and Paul Chilton, to name just a few, who work in the theoretical context of CDA focus on the ways in which people's discursive behaviour is less the result of free choice and more the result of external sociopolitical pressures, than people are led to believe. According to Blommaert (2005), Fairclough's *Language and Power (1989)* is "commonly considered to be the landmark publication for the 'start' of CDA" (p.23). In this book, Fairclough takes an explicitly Marxist perspective to analyse the 'powerful' discourses of Thatcherite political rhetoric and offers a synthesis of linguistic method, objects of analysis, and political commitment that have become the characteristic features of CDA. Van Dijk (2001) concurs when he states that CDA "aims to offer a different 'mode' or 'perspective' of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout the whole field (of discourse studies)" and critical discourse analysts "take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (p. 352).

Fairclough (1989/2001) proposes a new approach to language, called *critical language study* (CLS), in which *critical* means aiming "to show up connections which may be hidden from people – such as connection between language, power and ideology" (p.4). He characterises CLS as not just another approach to language study...but "an alternative orientation to language study" (p.10). He defines discourse as "language as a form of social practice" (p.16) and takes the reader through an interesting discussion of the Sausurean distinction between *langue* and *parole*, explaining why he prefers to focus on discourse as defined by him. He explains that "language is a part of society and not somehow external to it...language is a social process...and language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned by other (non-linguistic) parts of society" (pp.18-19). He postulates "two major aspects of the power/language relationship, power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse" (p.36) and elaborates other aspects such as power in cross-cultural encounters; social struggle in discourse; and discourse, common sense and ideology.

In the second edition of the book, he discusses such ideas as language in the new world order, globalisation of discourse and the discourse of globalisation. He contends that powerful dominant discourses and ways of using language are emerging and they are spreading across different domains of social life and – through the 'globalisation of discourse' – across different countries. His analysis is relevant for my study in many ways; on the one hand, it offers important theoretical insights about language and discourse and about CLS and CDA; on the other hand, it has the interesting discussion of the globalisation of discourse and the discourse of globalisation. The financial or banking sector is one of the torchbearers of globalisation and it is probably the one workplace where (or whose) discourse is getting more and more globalised, and enacted in the emerging 'global' language, English. It is, therefore, always worthwhile to analyse the role and position of English in the financial workplace anywhere, as I do with reference to that in Hong Kong. In any setting where English encounters another language (or more than one of them), as it does in Hong Kong, cultural or cross-cultural issues and the concomitant issues of power relations and power play are bound to arise. The issue of globalisation has been formulated as an important preoccupation for CDA, and Fairclough offers interesting insights on this.

Fairclough (1992) is perhaps the most elaborate and ambitious attempt towards theorising the CDA programme. In this book, he constructs a social theory of discourse, drawing on the works of Foucault, and he provides a methodological blueprint for CDA in practice. He provides a three-dimensional framework for conceiving of, and analysing discourse. The first dimension is *discourse as text,* that is, the linguistic features and organisation of concrete instances of discourse, including choices and patterns in vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure should be systematically analysed. The second dimension is *discourse as discursive practice*, that is, discourse as something which is produced, circulated, distributed, and consumed in society. In looking at the wider social aspects of a piece of text, Fairclough distinguishes between *manifest intertextuality* (i.e. overtly drawing upon other texts) and *constitutive intertexuality* or *interdiscursivity* (i.e. texts are made up of heterogeneous elements such as genres, discourse types, register and style). An important aspect of *manifest intertexuality* is discourse representation[22] – how quoted utterances are selected, changed and contextualized. The third dimension is *discourse as social practice,* that is, the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate. This refers to the fact that when hegemonies change, this process can be witnessed in discursive change. The ways in which discourse is being represented, re-configured, re-spoken, or re-written shed light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles in power relations, attempts at control and resistance against regimes of power.

[22] For further contributions to the study of discourse representation, see M. Baynham and S. Slembrouck (eds) (1999) Speech representation and institutional discourse, Special Issue, *Text*, 19(4), 439-592.

It would, however, be wrong to see CDA as the only possible critical perspective on language in society. Some criticisms of CDA have been that it is too narrow in its scope of description, explanation and interpretation of discourse. Foremost among the critics of CDA is Widdowson. In a series of exchanges between Widdowson and Fairclough, Widdowson (1995)[23] makes this criticism of CDA:

> To the extent that critical analysis is committed, it cannot provide analysis but only partial interpretation. What analysis would involve would be demonstration of different interpretations and what language data might be adduced as evidence in each case. It would seek to explain just how different discourses can be derived from the same text, and indeed how the very definition of discourse as the pragmatic achievement of social action necessarily leads to the recognition of such plurality. But in CDA we do not find this. There is rarely a suggestion that alternative interpretations are possible. There is usually the implication that the single interpretation offered is uniquely validated by the textual facts. ... But this very persuasive effect is indicative of its limitation: it is itself a critical discourse and as such it is interpretation, not analysis. (p. 144)

Fairclough (1996)[24], in a reply to Widdowson's criticism, has this to say:

> One preliminary point to be made about Widdowson's article is that its target is confusingly unclear. He defines his 'main purpose' in the article as to show that the name 'critical discourse analysis' is a contradiction in terms – because CDA is interpretation, and therefore not analysis (p. 159). But a large part of the article is taken up with a critique of those who fail to distinguish text and discourse. I have always made this distinction in my work, and actually in a way which is roughly similar to Widdowson's, though with important distinctions I return to. So, what are we to make of this sentence: 'There has been confusion, I have argued, about the nature of discourse (as distinct from text) and about analysis (as distinct from interpretation) and I have suggested that this confusion is bred of commitment' (p. 171)? Commitment is the cardinal sin of CDA according to Widdowson, so in this summing up the confusing of text and discourse is quite illegitimately laid at the door of CDA, whereas earlier in the article it is attributed to others. It is similarly unclear how the comments on language education relate to the critique of CDA. (p. 148)

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[23] The original article is Widdowson, H. G. (1995) Discourse analysis: A critical view, *Language and Literature,* 4(3), 157-172. I have, however, read it in Toolan, M. (ed.) (2002) *Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical Concepts in Linguistics, Volume III, Concurrent Analyses and Critiques* (pp.131-147). London and New York: Routledge.

[24] The original article is Fairclough, N. (1996) A reply to Henry Widdowson's "Discourse analysis: A critical view", *Language and Literature*, 5(1), 49-56. I have, however, read it in Toolan, M. (ed.) (2002) *Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical Concepts in Linguistics, Volume III, Concurrent Analyses and Critiques* (pp.148-155). London and New York: Routledge.

And so on.[25]

Other critics such as Schegloff (1997) point out that CDA analysts tend to assume the *a priori* relevance of aspects of context in their work by projecting their own political biases onto their data and analysing the data accordingly. Within the CDA camp itself, scholars such as Van Dijk (2001) admit that methodological and theoretical gaps remain despite a large number of empirical studies on discourse and power. Toolan (1997) also argues for CDA to critique some of its own theoretical distinctions such as that between description and interpretive explanation, to be more critical of the text linguistics it uses, to look for stronger evidence in its presentation and argumentation, and to be bolder in its prescriptions of correcting or reforming specific hegemonising discourses. A final criticism of critical discourse analysts and their work is that they have restricted their analyses to their own societies and have taken a Eurocentric and US-centric approach, and as such, their theories may have little relevance for or interest to researchers and students in other parts of the world. Any general approach to discourse, particularly in an era of globalisation, needs to be more cosmopolitan, less parochial, and to take diverse societies into account and to account for this diversity, if it is to be relevant and serve as a critique of the present world system. Perhaps studies such as this one can provide ideas for non-Eurocentric and non-US-centric field work.

3.3 Genre analysis

Scholars and researchers have defined *genre* in different ways. Bazerman (1988) suggests that a genre is associated with a pattern of regularity that includes not only repeated features in multiple texts, but also regularities in the production and interpretation of those texts and in the social relations of writers and readers. He states that "These regularities encompass when and how one would approach a test tube or a colleague, how one would go about reading a text, as well as how one would

[25] For the full length exchanges, please see footnotes 1 and 2, and also for Widdowson's follow-up reply to Fairclough, see Widdowson, H.G. (1996) Reply to Fairclough – Discourse and interpretation: Conjectures and refutations, *Language and Literature*, 5(1), 57-69. This article is also reprinted in Toolan, M. (ed.) (2002) *Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical Concepts in Linguistics, Volume III, Concurrent Analyses and Critiques* (pp.156-169). London and New York: Routledge.

draw a diagram or frame an argument" (p. 314). The regularities associated with a genre provide a community with the rhetorical stability needed to construct a particular type of knowledge effectively. Genre can therefore be seen as a way of ensuring the production of what could be called 'community-based' discourse, a discourse whose meaning is created by and for the collective or group. Other definitions of genre have tended to emphasise its goal-directed or purposive aspect. Martin (1985) asserts that "genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (p. 250) while Miller (1984) argues that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (p. 151). Swales (1990) identifies genres as a class of communicative events or activities with a shared set of communicative purposes informed by the discourses that currently construct the disciplinary community. Similarly, Bhatia (1993) extends this notion and defines professional and academic genres as:

> It is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalised with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purpose(s). (p. 13)

Building on the work of earlier scholars, Pare and Smart (1994) define genre as "a distinctive profile of regularities across four dimensions: a set of texts, the composing processes involved in creating these texts, the reading practices used to interpret them, and the social roles performed by writers and readers" (p. 147).

In Bhatia's (2004) *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-based View*, he takes the discussion forward. His principal aim in this book is to understand, analyse and explain the tension, distance or the "wide gap between genre analysis of texts in published literature [in which the integrity and purity of individual genres are emphasised] and the variety of rather complex and dynamic instances of hybridised genres that one tends to find in the real world" (p. xiv). In other words, he aims to shift the focus from the classroom to the actual organisational and professional situations or contexts. Indeed he says:

> I would like to turn by back on the ideal world, as it were, and try to face the real world of discourse, which is complex, dynamic, constantly developing and often less predictable. There are regularities of various kinds, in the use of lexico-grammatical, discoursal and generic resources; there are rhetorical situations, which often recur, though not exactly in the same form or manner; there are expert and well-established users of language in specific disciplinary cultures who try to exploit, appropriate and even bend generic expectations in order to be innovative and effective in their use of language. (p. 25)

Bhatia asserts that genre knowledge allows one to enjoy certain liberties in diverse institutional and professional contexts. While the uninitiated genre writer is constrained to conform to the conventions and rhetorical expectations of the relevant professional community, the experienced genre writer is able to break conventions to create new forms to suit specific contexts. He points out that:

> [...] this privilege of exploiting generic conventions to create new forms becomes available only to those few who enjoy a certain degree of visibility in the relevant professional community; for a wide majority of others, it is more a matter of apprenticeship in accommodating the expectations of disciplinary cultures. (p. 185)

It would seem to me that generic conventions by virtue of their stability require most writers on most occasions to adopt these conventions *in order* to be effective writers, and creating new forms, as described by Bhatia would only be done for very good reasons and in order to achieve very practical rather than aesthetic goals.

Askahave and Swales (2001) provide a stimulating discussion on whether the earlier notion of communicative purpose is still valid as a means of determining if a particular discourse falls within a particular generic category. Their paper presents three examples – shopping lists, response (or thank you) letters to recommendations (written by professors) and company brochures – to illustrate the difficulties of ascribing communicative purpose as a means of placing these three texts into particular genre types. They then offer two frameworks for genre analysis – one that is text-driven and the other that is context-driven. In their proposed framework or schema, Askehave and Swales (2001) place communicative purposes at a later stage in the genre analytic process, under the newly coined term of *repurposing the genres.* They suggest that the new framework or *procedures* (as it is referred to) offer several advantages to the analyst including the following:

- making the investigation sensitive to the evolving and dynamic nature of genres
- encouraging assessment and potential recalibration of any genre set
- focusing on the highly contemporary issue of how technological advances affect the way in which genre-exemplars are perceived and ranked in relation to their mode of transmission.

In sum, according to the authors, their new procedures "point to the fact that genre categorization, as an issue of applied linguistic practice, is more a matter of extensive text-in-context inquiry than straightforward textual or transcriptal scrutiny on the one hand, or introspective system building, on the other" (p. 209). It would be interesting to see the results of the application of these new procedures by other researchers in genre analysis.

The business letter genre is explored in Gillaerts and Gotti (eds) (2005), a book entirely devoted to this genre. The editors emphasise the fundamental importance of the business letter as a genre in business communication. They observe that interest in the genre has been revived since the introduction of the Internet. The new digital format of the letter, the e-mail, has partially taken over the multiple functions of the traditional business letter and it has also eclipsed the fax.

To illustrate the changing framework of business genres, Bargiela-Chiappini (2005) presents a semiotic analysis of a commercial website and examines the concept of genre in general and the 'business letter' in particular. She draws upon the analytical frameworks of other researchers such as Lemke's (2002) concepts of hypertextuality and hypermodality; Iedema's (2003) notion of resemiotisation; Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal theory of communication; and Miller's (1984) notion of genre as social action. She discusses how the traditional promotional letter genre is re-packaged and re-interpreted as a hypermodal discourse of a UK banking website. This new discursive form is becoming increasingly pervasive as more and more banks around the world cut back on providing face-to-face services and Internet banking becomes more widespread. The same phenomenon can be seen in Hong Kong's modern banking sector today.

In my search for banking-related literature, I found Dossena's (2006) paper in which she analyses the linguistic means employed in nineteenth-century letters addressed to and issued by officials of the Bank of Scotland. These letters were on matters involving legal controversy. The writer explores the link between the deployment of politeness strategies and devices encoding stance, which in the letters she examined, were seriously face-threatening. She states that in nineteenth century letters, social and psychological proximity between interlocutors was primarily conveyed by the forms of address employed in the salutations and in the closings. Her study found that the 'perceived' social status of encoders and recipients appeared to be a far stronger conditioning factor than age, gender and actual status. The encoder wrote very differently depending on whether he was addressing a client, a business partner, or an agent. The interesting point that emerges from this study is that other than higher degrees of formality adopted in the salutations, closings and expressions of sentiment in the nineteenth-century Bank of Scotland correspondence, banking correspondence does not appear to have changed significantly to this day and that the social status of encoders and recipients is still the comparatively more significant factor.

3.4 Narrative analysis

In this section, I will discuss the researchers whose work and writings have provided a framework for the way I collected my data, analysed it and wrote it up. While theories of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and genre analysis show how other researchers apply them as their operating frameworks for their studies, my review of the literature showed that some aspects of narrative analysis theories could be applied to my study for it is possible to view my interview data as some form of stories or narratives. In making my informants talk about their work, they are creating narratives. According to Webster and Mertova (2007), "Narrative is not an objective reconstruction of life – it is a rendition of how life is perceived. As such, it is based on the respondent's life experiences and entails chosen parts of their lives" (p.3). This was particularly true of one of my informants, Smith, Head of the Corporate Communications Department in AB Bank. He chose to talk about the part of his life that was relevant to the topic of the English language skills and standards of bank employees. Thody (1997) suggests that as an extension to interviews, stories are rich in authentic, live data and they are an "unparalleled method of reaching practitioners' mindsets" (p.331). It would be true to say that we are better able to understand the bank employees' mindsets through the stories that they relate to me in their interviews.

Cortazzi (1993) states that there are "several levels of narration: the life as lived then; ...the life as told to the researcher, presented to a particular audience in a social context for a particular purpose; ..." (p.14). Hence, I use the term "narration" in this sense – what my informants told me and my piecing together of what they told me. Furthermore, Cortazzi (1993) states that "Narrative analysis, can, therefore, be seen as opening a window on the mind, or, if we are analyzing narratives of a specific group of tellers, as opening a window for outsiders on their culture" (p.2). I should like to point out that the bank employees in my study are therefore to be viewed as a specific group of tellers who, through their talks, have opened a window for outsiders into their banking culture. By studying their response to my questions about how they use language at work, I am piecing together the commonalities that can be drawn about how this group of people use language in banking. These interview accounts are from 16 bank employees plus one Head of Department in the Corporate Communications Department. Through their accounts, I am piecing together many stories to form the larger picture of what goes on in the language domain of a banking workplace in Hong Kong. The greater significance comes from the aggregate picture and to a lesser extent, from the individual stories. In this way, my data analysis differs from how other researchers analyse narratives in their studies, for example, Riessman (1993) or Baynham (2003) both of whose studies are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Riessman (1993) is an illuminating study on narrative analysis. Using three examples that centre on women's health concerns reflecting her special interest in this issue, she gives three different methods of doing narrative analysis, each one clearly described. The first example is anthropologist Ginsburg's (1989) study of a group of women activists in an abortion struggle and uses the method of a life story with a strong and privileged authorial voice. The second example is sociologist Bell's (1988) study of DES daughters and uses the method of linking stories in a single interview with the researcher closely examining the language of the interviewee and the narrative structures that the interviewee employs to construct her experience. The third example is Riessman's (1990) own study on the emotional difficulties associated with divorce and how they were voiced differently by women and men and uses the method of analyzing the poetic features embedded in a personal narrative. All three examples highlight how narrative analysis is a slow and painstaking approach requiring attention to detail and nuances in the organisation of speech and text.

In another study on narratives, Baynham (2003) argues for the centrality of spatial orientation in the construction of narrative. He asserts that "narrative action [...] is not set against a backdrop of space and time coordinates, it is crucially constituted in space and time" (p. 365). He approaches the issue by reformulating the questions and asking "How are spaces and times, understood as semiotic resources, involved in the construction of narrative?" (p.352) and following from this first question, poses a second question, "How can space/time orientation be understood as constitutive of narrative action?" (p.352).

Using interviews with migrants from Morocco to London, U.K. Baynham shows, in the narrative by Z., how "information circulates across geographical distance [and is] mediated both by humans (sic) beings and artefacts such as letters" (p.357). There is a "chain of social connections that can close distance" (p.358). There is also a temporal aspect in Z's narrative because Z. "who has played such a central part in the successful migration story through her networking role in social space, turns out to be the last to get the work permit, after both the friends that she has helped" (p.358). In this narrative, "the space that has been invoked [...] is clearly a social space, a space shaped and inhabited by social relations, the network of contacts that enable Z. and her friends to achieve their purposes" (p.358). There is the additional geographical space of the "sending and receiving countries in migration processes, a landscape without an understanding of which, the narrative itself would not be fully comprehensible" (p.358). From this illustration, Baynham shows that the "implication for the discourse analysis of narrative is quite clear: that any analysis should be able to deal with the role of time space orientation both in constituting narrative action and in the construction of identities in narrative" (p.358).

Using two other narratives by M.B. and Z.A., Baynham makes a compelling case that historical time, calendar time, and the individual's own life time in the former and "relational" time within the family in the case of the latter are central to the construction of the narratives, and not simply as a temporal backdrop. I agree that in stories of migration and settlement, which as Baynham succinctly points out "are crucially about dislocations and relocations in time and space" (p.364), space/time orientation occupy a central position.

On the subject of interviewing as a research method, Mishler's *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (1986) is a detailed discussion of how the interview is a form of discourse and he presents several methods for the analysis of interviews as narrative accounts. His central idea is that respondents' accounts can be understood as narratives, or stories. He argues that "answers" to questions often display the features of narratives. He says:

> Clearly, they may be elicited by direct questions to "tell a story," but they also appear as responses to narrow questions about specific topics and in individual's reports in in-depth interviews of significant life experiences and events. When interviewers allow respondents to speak and when investigators are alert to the possibility and look for narratives, their ubiquity is evident. (pp.105-106)

Mishler (1986) further states:

> Rather, a stronger case can be made that the apparent absence of narratives in reports of interview studies is an artifact of standard procedures for conducting, describing, and analyzing interviews: interviewers interrupt respondents' answers and thereby suppress expression of their stories; when they appear, stories go unrecorded because they are viewed

> as irrelevant to the specific aims of specific questions; and stories that make it through these barriers are discarded at stages of coding and analysis. (p. 106)

Following the ideas of Mishler, in the analysis of my interview data, I have kept this point in mind to be on the look out for the stories that are told by the bank employees. Indeed, according to Mishler (1986), "Telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak. ... In general, researchers in the mainstream tradition either have not recognized the pervasiveness of stories because as I have already remarked, the standard survey interview "suppresses" them, or have treated stories as a problem because they are difficult to code and quantify" (p.69). He then goes on "to show how a response, even in answer to a direct question in a relatively structured interview, may take the form of an account that resembles what we would all intuitively recognize as "some kind of story" (p.74). The narrator "sets the scene for us, introduces characters and describe their actions, specifies events and their relations over time, explicates a significant conflict and its resolution and tells us the point of the story. These are features of more formal narratives; they serve as criteria in the definition of other oral and written accounts as stories and have been topics for systematic analysis" (p.74). Similarly, in my interviews, there were several accounts that could be considered as "some kind of story", namely those related to me by Lucy Liu and Paul Smith, both of whom worked at AB Bank. In Liu's accounts, we clearly note her description of characters, conflict between characters in the workplace, and the resolution of that conflict by the actions taken by Mr. A, the Bank's CEO. The common element in these two interviews was the fact that the interviewer was not meeting the interviewees for the first time, and the interviewees felt at greater liberty to talk more freely with minimal prompting from the interviewer.

Yet another researcher, Seidman (2006), says that he asks his interviewees to tell him "a story about what they are discussing" (p.87). He points out that "in a sense, everything said in an interview is a story. But if a participant were talking about, for example, relationships with students, I might ask for a story about one particular student who stands out in his or her experience" (p.87). Seidman points out the value of conducting an interview this way:

> Stories such as this, in which the student teacher gave a beginning, middle, and end to a segment of her experience, drew characters, presented conflict, and showed how she dealt with it, convey experience in an illuminating and memorable way. (pp.87-88)

In my interviews with the bank employees, I did not employ this method of questioning with the majority of my informants. However, in at least two of the cases, those of Lucy Liu and Paul Smith, both of whom worked at AB Bank, in the course of the interviews, and in the subsequent analysis of the interview data, one is able to observe the informants' narrating of conflict at work and how it was resolved. This researcher finds Seidman's argument persuasive and will incorporate his method of asking participants to "tell a story" in future studies using the interview method.

In the field of narratives in the workplace, Holmes' (2006) study on "Workplace narratives, professional identity and relational practice" (in De Fina *et al.*, 2006) looks at how workplace anecdotes construct professional and social identity at work. She looks at the "ongoing process of constructing good relationships between team members in an organization" (pp.176-177). Differing from Holmes' study, my interviews were not narratives of people interacting with colleagues or team members at work but rather, they were people talking to me, the researcher, about what they did at work and how they used language to carry out their different tasks. Holmes' study discusses jointly constructed anecdotes. It is interesting to note that at the senior managers' meeting at AB Bank, the absence of jointly-constructed anecdotes reveals the hierarchical nature of the meeting where Mr. A, the Bank's CEO, was very clearly in charge. At certain times during the meeting, he was the sole constructor of anecdotes that fell outside the scope of the reporting of work activities, as for example, in his recounting of an employee whose wife was about to deliver a baby at the time of the meeting. In Holmes' view:

> Though typically over-looked, marginalized and erased from the official record, workplace anecdotes may make an important contribution to constructing workplace solidarity, or "creating team" in Fletcher's terms. They may also contribute to the better understanding of ratified workplace objectives, though this contribution is rarely recognized. (p.186)

In another study on narratives, Berger (1997) states that

> ...narratives pervade our lives. When we are young children, our mothers and fathers (and others) sing us lullabies and other songs and teach us to recite nursery rhymes, and as we get older we read fairy tales and other stories, and eventually we learn to read stories ourselves. These stories play important roles in our lives. (p.9)

Berger (1997) also argues that one of the most important ways we learn about the world, and ourselves as well, is through narratives. He concludes by saying:

> We have to learn how to "read" narratives, to look at them analytically, to see analogies in them with aspects of our lives, to see what their heroes and heroines symbolize and the way these figures reflect as well as affect our ideas about power, sexuality, morality, the good life, and so on. (p.174)

Indeed, it may be time for educational researchers to incorporate narrative analysis to a greater extent in their studies as Cohen *et al.* (2000) assert that stories and storytelling are "a comparatively neglected area in educational research" (p.303).

3.5 Talk at work: institutional talk

Drew and Heritage (eds) (1992) is a collection of studies by different authors who apply conversation analysis (CA) to the study of language and interaction in institutional settings. The editors explain that "institutional interaction", which refers to the talk that goes on between people at work in order to pursue various practical goals, need not adhere rigidly within the walls of institutions.

> Thus, the institutionality of an interaction is not determined by its setting. Rather, interaction is institutional insofar as participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged. (pp. 3-4)

They believe that "CA offers an especially powerful and coherent perspective from which to investigate the activities making up the life of social institutions" (p. 53). In their long introductory chapter, Drew and Heritage provide a useful citing of the earlier research studies into discourse and social interaction, and outline the position of CA as an approach to institutional talk. This volume brings together a collection of empirical research into interactions between professionals and "clients" including doctor-patient consultations, legal hearings, news interviews, job interviews, visits by health visitors, and so on. While these studies are insightful and interesting, I did not find that the bulk of my data lent themselves to be analysed using a strictly CA framework.

Another landmark study of organisational talk is Boden's (1994) *The Business of Talk: Organizations in Action.* She uses the analytical framework of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to examine meetings in organisations in the health sector, academia and business, and to show how talk is influenced by the organisational or social context, and how the organisation is in turn, influenced by the talk that takes place within it. She states that "talk ... is the lifeblood of all organizations and, as such, it both shapes and is shaped by the structure of the organization itself" (p. 8). Boden argues that although her analysis is limited to talk in meetings and other common work settings, "these interactional encounters have been treated as organizationally occasioned events through which members generate both immediate interaction and larger organizational agendas" (p.202). I apply this understanding to my exploration of the senior managers' meeting that is discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.6, whereby the "business of talk" that we observe as outsiders, is for the purpose of carrying out the Bank's larger organisational goals or agenda. Of particular interest to my study is what Boden has to say about the interaction order of meetings with its restricted turn-taking system, and how talk constitutes the action in meetings. We see all these concepts demonstrated in the senior managers' meeting discussed in Chapter 6.

Yet another study on the role of talk in the institutional order is by Sarangi and Roberts (1999) who state that workplaces are held together by communicative practices such as talk, text, the use of social space, and other artifacts. They say:

> So our understanding of the workplace as a social institution where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are played out and professional knowledge is

> constituted must include, among other things, a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of talk, text and interaction. (p. 1)

I should like to point out here – using the terminology above – that in my description of talk, text and interaction in my recounting in Chapter 6 of what took place at a senior managers' meeting, we are able to see for ourselves one such live demonstration of resources being regulated, problems being solved, identities being played out and professional knowledge being constituted.

3.6 Discourse(s) in the workplace

The subject matter of Coleman (ed) (1989) is expressed in its sub-title, *A Multidisciplinary Consideration of Language Use in Work Contexts*. This book deals with "the broadest possible spectrum of work areas [and sets out to be] more of everything: more *selective*, more *integrated*...more *evaluative*...and theory building" (p.vii-emphasis in the original). Coleman's (1989) paper entitled, *The present and the future of work* (pp. 109-127) discusses the relationship between work and language. He provides a three-fold classification of work in terms of the language that is associated with it: (i) work which is defined by language; (ii) work in which language is important but not defining; and (iii) work in which language is incidental. This three-fold classification does not necessarily accommodate all instances of language which may be associated with work. I would think work in a bank would fall in the second category and so Coleman's insights are interesting and important for analysing and evaluating both the situation of my informants, as well as their responses to that situation, because they have to do their work and perform their tasks, in different degrees not in one, but in *two* languages, Chinese (Cantonese) and English. If language is important in or for work and at the workplace, those who do the work and are at the workplace will have to think about language and also about what to do **with** and **about** it.

In another study, Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) argue that the "new capitalism" is the late twentieth-century economic system characterised by global hyper-competition, incessant advances in technology, large-scale customisation of goods and services for niche markets, and guileful manipulations of consumer and worker identities. As this new capitalism is taking shape and dominating this new world, a 'new work order' is also evolving. The authors "share an allegiance to a *sociocultural* approach to language, learning and literacy, believing that these practices can be understood only when they are situated within their social, cultural and historical contexts. When they are so situated, it becomes clear that they are always and everywhere connected to *social identities*" (p. xii - emphasis in the original).

Characterised by an environment of cut-throat and truly global competition, the new work order is placing unprecedented demands on leaders and managers in the matter of training, motivating and empowering workers. Since the traditional approach of top-down control is no longer valid or even available, the new capitalism seeks to create what are variously called goals, core values, a vision, a culture and so forth. The authors describe them collectively as Discourse–with the capital *D*, as opposed to discourse. According to them, "Discourse is composed of ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing and using tools and objects, in particular settings and at specific times, so as to display or to recognize a particular social identity", whereas discourse simply " means 'a stretch of spoken or written language' or 'language in use' "(p. 10).

There is greater elaboration of this distinction and greater exemplification in Gee (2005) where the writer tells us that "There are innumerable Discourses in any modern, technological, urban-based society" (p. 26). He adds:

> The key to Discourses is "recognition." If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others *recognize* you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here-and-now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). Whatever you have done must be similar enough to other performances to be recognizable. However, if it is different enough from what has gone before, but still recognizable, it can simultaneously change and transform Discourses. If it is not recognizable, then you're not "in" the Discourse. (p. 27)

I apply this concept of Discourse with a capital *D* and discourse with a small *d* in Chapter 6 to analyse a senior managers' meeting and the data from my interviews with the Head of the Corporate Communications Department in one of the four banks in the study as I explore the impact of different bank corporate cultures on banking Discourse.

Gee (2005) goes on to say that "Discourses are always embedded in a medley of social institutions" (p. 27) with the use of various "props". Applying this concept of Discourse to the situation in the four banks in Hong Kong surveyed in my study, we can say that my informants, the bank employees, are rather more capable of Discourse (with the capital *D*) than discourse (with the small *d*) in English. And the role of language training in the banks would be precisely to enhance the capacity of these employees to engage in discourse (with the small *d*). This assertion is demonstrated in Chapter 5 where I provide a detailed analysis of my interviews with the 16 bank employees on their job nature, language use at work, and their difficulties with conducting English discourse while Chapter 7 takes up the issue of providing more effective language training in the banks.

A further complexity is the distinction between institutional and professional discourse. Sarangi and Roberts (1999) suggest that what professionals routinely do as a way of accomplishing their duties and responsibilities can be called *professional discourse*. This possesses identifiable linguistic features which are not only durable, but also legitimate and authoritative. On the other hand, *institutional discourse* comprises "those features which are attributed to institutional practice, either manifestly or covertly, by professionals (and clients)" (p. 15). They point out that what is significant is not so much the distinction between the two, but rather "the common elements, the interplay of the two, and above all, the dominance of the institutional order over professional discourses which emerge from workplace studies" (p. 16).

Gee *et al.* (1996) point out that there has been a whole paradigm shift in the way businesses function in this 'new work order'. Not surprisingly, communication becomes all-important in this new world, given the emphasis both on knowledge and information and on the skill and capability to process and convey information. How to impart this knowledge and these skills and capabilities into the new workers – both present and future – is a major challenge for the education system. The new work order needs people who can work collaboratively, in teams, and who can produce results and add value through distributed knowledge and understanding. Consequently, new classroom methods, such as reciprocal teaching and 'the jigsaw method' have been devised to ensure that knowledge and understanding are public, collaborative and distributed. My study, as will be seen in the following chapters, is an attempt to analyse the Discourse and discourse of banking in Hong Kong.

3.7 Business discourse

In this section, I will discuss some of the relevant literature on business discourse. Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson's (2002) introductory article in the special issue on Business Discourse of *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (IRAL)* presents an overview of business discourse as a discipline and introduces the other articles in the issue. Referring to their earlier work, they define business discourse as "talk and writing between individuals whose main work activities and interests are in the domain of business and who come together for the purpose of doing business" (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 1999a, p. 2). On the basis of their field research, they further describe business discourse as "web of negotiated textualization, constructed by social actors as they go about their daily activities in pursuit of organizational and personal goals" (p. 274). They discuss in detail the questions of terminology and the variety of analytical and methodological approaches and argue that that the multidisciplinary investigation of business discourse would be best served by a multimethod approach. They characterise business discourse as contextual and intertextual, self-reflexive and self-critical, although not necessarily political, and believe that such a business discourse is founded on the twin notions of *discourse as situated action* and *language as work.*

The authors postulate a model of business discourse that incorporates insights from genre analysis and discourse analysis, intercultural communication and organisational theory, into a context-sensitive analytical framework for the study of discourse in corporate settings. The framework, which has three layers or levels – macro, meso and micro – "aims to account for (some of) the contextual influences and their generic discourse realisations" (p. 278). The macro level includes factors such as national and regional cultures, which are partly responsible for the formation of generic discourses. The meso level includes factors such as organisational culture(s), business type, methods of control in place, and so on, which also partly shape generic discourses. The micro level or interactional level is where individual socio-psychological profiles and interactional preferences are most prominent and are identifiable in the pragma-linguistic features of typified actions. The applicability of the three-layer approach to a banking environment is evident, as is the fact that anyone working in a bank, like my informants, is simultaneously engaged in business discourse as well as professional discourse all the time.

Trosberg and Jorgensen (eds) (2005) is an important collection of papers on various aspects of business discourse. According to the editors, the current scenario in the business environment is marked by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, any type of communicative event involving negotiations or the exchange of documents is intrinsically bound up with the immediate situational context. On the other hand, because of globalisation, the business environment is becoming more and more homogeneous and individuals from different backgrounds and of different nationalities develop common generic frames of reference for producing and understanding the communication of the marketplace. Clearly, both forces are impacting each other in varied ways, but the picture is both uncertain and constantly changing.

Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken (2007) represent some of the latest thinking or views on the subject. This is a comprehensive, systematic and accessible introduction to business discourse. They begin by defining business discourse as being "all about how people communicate using talk or writing in commercial organisations in order to get their work done". They state that they would "view business discourse as social action in business contexts" (p.3). They go on to present a brief history of business discourse and an overview of the hallmarks of business discourse research. The impact of increasing globalisation and mutilinguality on intercultural business discourse research is also looked at.

The motivations (the profit motive) behind doing business may not have changed in the past few decades but the technology of doing business certainly has. Internet technology and the digitisation age have been responsible for a shift from monomodality, expressed in static generic types such as the traditional printed business letter, to increasingly complex and dynamic examples of multimodal forms of communication. According to Kress (2003), writing is de-emphasised while other representational modes (pictures, sounds, films and so on) are emphasized and this broadens our understanding of how 'text' is viewed. It was Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1990) seminal book *Reading Images* that started to talk about multimodality and their ideas are much further developed in Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). Furthermore, Iedema (2003) states that "Within this new multimodal landscape, electronic communication, economic globalization and multiculturalism are responsible for the dissolution of traditional, linear and hierarchical representational practices and genres" (p. 38). This might be less evident in banking, however, where writing is still the mainstay of written communication.

Bargiela-Chiappini *et al.* (2007) emphasise that "in business, communication is not an end in itself, [but] there is always an underlying business purpose or objective to be achieved as a result of the communication" (p. 172). Therefore, in order to be effective and "to study and understand organizational communication researchers need to take into account the specifics of the context, including business strategy, the business environment and professional practices, and how that context influences communication practices in a given discourse community" (p. 172).

One example of a multimethod study of business discourse is Swales and Rogers' (1995) study of mission statements as an organisational text type. The researchers used a text-based analysis of 100 mission statements and combined this with a contextual analysis of the organisational framing of three such texts that considered the history, authorship and institutional function of the texts within the corporation. They interviewed employees involved in creating the mission statements and also consulted other corporate policy documents to understand the corporations' histories, philosophies and the corporate processes. In general, the mission statements were seen to be extensions of the goals, values and purposes of the corporations that published them, and originated at the level of the CEO and senior management. The mission statements served the purpose of encouraging and fostering a sense of identification with the corporation and promoting a particular corporate culture and the 'right' values among employees of the corporation. This study thus incorporates many methodologies including genre analysis, case study and ethnography and is collaboration between a corporate communication specialist (Rogers) and an applied linguist (Swales) who both share an interest in studying genre.

Rogers herself (2001) argues that the time has come for "convergence and commonality" (p. 14). Citing others who state that business communication research lacks a "comprehensive theoretical grounding" (Shelby, 1988, p. 13) and continues to attach itself onto the findings of other fields in search of legitimacy (Hagge, 1987, p. 89), Rogers states that such self-criticism may no longer be valid as "there are signs that we're growing more comfortable with our plurality, even beginning to acknowledge some of its value" (p. 16). She goes on to state that:

> ...convergence challenges us to get inside the head of other disciplines, to adopt them as our own. It challenges us o use methods that are foreign to us and to study research areas investigated by colleagues whose conference sessions we would not be inclined to attend. (p. 17)

In sum, she states that "convergence is multidisciplinary, multimethod, and multifaceted" (p. 18). In response to Rogers' proposal, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2001) put forward the concept of partnership research, which is comprised of researchers representing different disciplines and therefore a combination of different insights, methods and tools, in order to put behind the "conflictual exchanges that have been so prevalent between the pro-theory and pro-application camps" (p. 248). They go on to assert that in the complex research environments presented by business organisations, "a mono-method approach is at best narrow, and at worst inadequate" (p. 249).

Given the very real challenges of conducting research in the real world as I have also encountered in conducting my research study, as opposed to conducting research within the academy, the principles of convergence and partnership research have considerable potential to move the study of business discourse and business communication forward. In my concluding chapter, I suggest that this is the way forward for educational researchers who wish to locate their research site in the workplace.

3.8 Spoken discourse: meetings

Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris's (1997b) study is what the authors claim to be the first systematic study of corporate meetings. Meetings are essential to any organisation, irrespective of its type, size, location or nature of work. In any organisation, the authors say, "human relationships are the connecting lines of the networks of process that form the organisation. Meetings...are the critical nodes in such communication networks" (pp. 4-5). They further express their "conviction that meetings are the essence of many if not most organisations; in fact, one could argue that they are *the organisations themselves*, and that face-to-face communication is not likely to be phased out by technological development. This is all the more significant when corporate communication takes place across cultures, where direct contact and a common language are often not sufficient to guarantee mutual comprehension..."(p. 7-emphasis in the original). This book is a study of how two companies, one British and the other Italian, named *Britannica* and *Italia* respectively, conduct their meetings; [and of] "what their respective managers do during meetings, how sense-making through language *makes* communication and how meaning creation in organisations depends on drawing from various levels of shared contextual knowledge" (p. 34-emphasis in the original).

Poncini's (2004) study of intercultural business communication investigates language use at multicultural business meetings held in Italy by an Italian company for its international distributors from approximately 12-14 countries from Europe, Asia and North America. This study attempts "to gain further insights into discourse and language in business settings by taking into consideration specific aspects of the extra-linguistic context and in particular the business relationship" (p. 24). She expresses the view that interactants from different cultures, including non-English speaking ones, often use English as a common language to establish and maintain business relationships successfully. For a comparison of business meetings in a multicultural Hong Kong workplace, see the discussion of the study conducted by Bilbow (1997 and 2002) in section 3.11.

The author sets out the broad parameters of the larger issues involved in intercultural business communication, such as the language and the culture of the parties involved and the perceived problems of (mis)communication and (mis)understanding in business communication, *between* as well as *within* organisations. Some of the specific areas that she chooses for a detailed analysis are: the participants' use of the personal pronouns *I*, *we* and *you*; their use of specialised lexis or lexical items which in a marketing context take on a specialised meaning – such as *product*, *price* and *promotion*; and their use of explicitly evaluative lexis at the meetings.

Poncini states that the meetings themselves have "their own culture or at least their own character and sense of 'groupness', not necessarily linked to national cultures. The meetings are characterised by [the] participants' shared 'cultural practices' and can be viewed as series of speech events and shifting frames" (p. 275). Interestingly, it is in the last chapter called 'Conclusion' that the author actually formulates what may be called the overarching research question underlying her study as follows: "How do selected participants at multicultural, multiparty business meetings use selected features of language and how does this use, together with shifts in participant roles, relate to the business activities, roles and relationships, and the goals of the group at the meetings?" (p. 277).

She posits that training needs to give attention, among others, to the following factors: the business context as well as the intercultural business settings; the level of the learners' professional expertise or competence; the possible effects of culture on business communication as well as individual differences possibly arising from the business context; the use of English as a common language in multicultural business settings. Her observations on training can be generalised and also applied to companies in the Hong Kong context.

3.9 Business discourse and language teaching

Nickerson (2002) examines "the link between empirical research in business discourse and the development of appropriate teaching materials for the teaching of business discourse" (p. 375). She points to the consistent research findings for: (1) the need to incorporate into teaching the genres associated with new media; (2) the need to take the organisational, or business, context into account; and (3) the need to understand the interface between local communication genres and global communication genres. She expresses the view that genres associated with new media, namely fax and e-mail, need to be incorporated into teaching materials for the benefit of students; however, established genres such as the business letter, memo and business report, are not to be lost sight of. Nickerson's (1999) study of the use of English in one division of a large Dutch multinational corporation investigates business emails produced by non-native writers of English. She discusses how Dutch and English interplay in email communication and provides reasons for why and when English is selected as the appropriate language over the local language. Her findings have clear implications for corporate training policy in multinational companies and she recommends that organisations that choose to introduce a corporate language other than the native language(s) of their employees would benefit from a clear corporate policy that provides local employees with opportunities to receive training in the required language skills. Her findings echo the preliminary conclusions reached in Chew's (2005) study of the English language skills required by new graduate employees in four Hong Kong banks.

Referring to Bilbow (2002) and Poncini (2004) she stresses the role – apart from the potential miscommunication between native and non-native speakers of a given language, say English – that cultural differences play. She also discusses the implications of the possibility of a local versus global genre conflict, which can occur at many different levels. Students can be encouraged to identify communicative genres unique to their own cultures, as well as to investigate and analyse the differences between the textualisation of genres used for a similar communicative purpose across different cultures.

The author concludes with the hope and belief that the various suggestions made by her would facilitate the raising of the students' awareness of the complex situations they have to learn to tackle if they aspire to become successful communicators in the international business arena. These suggestions can be useful not only for students but also for people already employed, such as my informants, who need to learn and master English in order to do their daily work efficiently.

Pauline Robinson's paper, *An overview of English for Specific Purposes* (pp. 395-427), in Coleman (1989), has some perceptive insights about designing and teaching an ESP course. She explains four criterial features of ESP: (1) ESP is goal-oriented (as distinguished from English for General Purposes or EGP, which is oriented towards equal mastery of all four language skills); (2) ESP courses are normally for adults, maybe young adults; (3) the majority of ESP students are not beginners and an ESP class is normally homogeneous; (4) an ESP teacher is often also the course designer and materials writer.

She argues for a detailed 'needs analysis' of the group to whom it is to be taught. Needs analysis has two components: target situation analysis (TSA) and present situation analysis (PSA). So a selection must be made from the data and the course designed appropriately. There are four possible approaches for this; the first two being predominantly language-based and the second two learning-based: the structural approach, the functional approach, the skill-based approach and the process approach. These issues need to be considered when drawing up a language training programme for people such as bank employees.

3.10 Language in post-colonial Hong Kong

Evans and Green (2001) is a significant empirical study of the language scene or situation in post-colonial Hong Kong. The authors covered three sectors in their research: Government, Government-related organisations and private companies. They used three types of instruments for collecting their data: questionnaires, focus group interviews and case studies. Their paper, however, is mainly based on the questionnaire. The questionnaire required the subjects to report on their use of English, Cantonese and written Chinese in written and spoken communication, using a 5-point scale ranging from "always English" (point 1) to "always Chinese/Cantonese" (point 5).

They report that English is still the principal language of written communication in the post-1997 workplace. Formal documents such as legal documents and reports as well as the new communication tool of e-mail, are almost exclusively written in English. Internal communication within organisations across all three sectors is primarily in English. In external communication, all incoming correspondence in Chinese is replied to in Chinese. Written Chinese is used more in the quasi-governmental sector than in the government departments or private companies. English is more prevalent in the large Hong Kong companies than in the small companies. Communications to overseas customers are always in English, while those to Chinese professionals in Hong Kong may be in English or Chinese, depending upon the topic, the purpose and the relationship with the recipient. How many expatriates are employed in a company, and what ties or contacts a company has with its branches, or with other companies, on the Chinese mainland, are also relevant factors.

In the matter of spoken communication at the workplace, contextual factors seem to play a greater role. Job interviews are the one situation where English is most prevalent, followed by seminars, presentations and conferences. For meetings, discussions, telephone conversations, etc, the participants often prefer English, especially if expatriates are present. In general, the authors note that the use of English is slightly more prevalent in the private sector than in the public sector. Within the private sector too, the use of English is much greater in foreign-owned companies than in the Hong Kong-owned ones.

In conclusion, the authors state that:

> The future roles of the English and Chinese languages in the private sector are more likely to be shaped by the role which Hong Kong adopts in the post-colonial era. If Hong Kong continues to function as a centre of economic and cultural interchange

> between China and the West, as it has done since the mid-nineteenth century, it is likely that English will continue to play an instrumental role in the territory's economic development. If, however, Hong Kong turns inward, and hastens its political, economic and cultural integration with mainland China, it is likely that Cantonese, Putonghua and written Chinese will become increasingly important in the business and professional spheres. [Hong Kong's] future role and direction will to a great extent be determined by which of the two competing forces eventually holds sway. If it is the former, Hong Kong may become...a "world class" metropolis on par with New York or London; if it is the latter... [Hong Kong] may become "just another" big city in China. (p. 266)

It would seem that the conclusions drawn by Evans and Green are more or less equally valid for all sectors in present-day Hong Kong, including the banking sector where I conducted my study.

Bhatia and Candlin (eds) (2001) is an important report on a large-scale project that was undertaken in Hong Kong. It investigated "the nature of the requirements in the use of English posed by the multidisciplinary academic programmes in five tertiary institutions in Hong Kong on their undergraduate Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students". It also evaluated to what extent these requirements are met by the existing courses in English.

Although I was a team member of this project, I wish to point out several important differences between this project and my own study. Firstly, this was a large-scale, institutional project that was carried out by a large team over a period of two-and-a-half years, while I conducted my research entirely by myself, since it was for my own PhD. Secondly, the investigating team under this project had university students as its informants, whereas my informants were comparatively new bank employees. Thirdly, I conducted my research using individual interviews with the informants supplemented by a questionnaire; this project, in contrast, used a variety of well-established methodological instruments and procedures, including questionnaires, focus group interviews (with both students and staff), classroom observation and textual and generic analysis. Finally, the aims of the two studies are different. Although the three specific recommendations made by the research team in this project are discussed in Chapter 7, it can very well be said here that if the recommendations were to be implemented effectively, the next generation of new entrants in banks – as well as other sectors – may not face the difficulties in the matter of the communicative tasks that they have to perform in English, which have been brought out in my study and which are discussed in detail later (Chapter 5).

3.11 Language in the Hong Kong workplace

Forey and Nunan's (2002) study into the writing practices of accountants in Hong Kong has obvious situational and geographical relevance to my study. First, it is also conducted in Hong Kong and second, it is about the accountancy workplace, which has obvious parallels with the banking workplace. As the authors state, the paper "focuses on discourse practices in the workplace. It is concerned with adults who have well-developed skills in literacy and who are already fully qualified professionals or who are studying for their professional qualifications" (p. 204).

Data for the study came from over 1,000 questionnaire responses as well as from 30 focused interviews. The questionnaire sought data on the following:

- the type of documents which accountants are required to produce during the course of their work
- the attitudes and views of accountants towards writing in English
- the amount of time invested in the process of writing
- the problems encountered in the process of writing
- the degree and nature of support and training available.

I will just highlight some of the findings that I find are interesting in terms of similarities or differences with the findings in my study:

Forey and Nunan (2002) find that senior accountants spend a significant amount of time redrafting material submitted by junior colleagues. The investigators suggest that an 'audit' or time management study should be carried out to determine whether the amount of time seniors devote to redrafting juniors' work is justified, or whether an alternative scheme can be found. In my study, I also found that the most common solution adopted by bank employees for their writing difficulties was to pass the documents written to their supervisors to be checked and corrected.

The authors report that "the feelings and attitudes of both seniors and juniors towards writing in English were surprisingly positive. ... Almost 90% saw writing as an essential part of the organization" (pp. 213-214). The investigators conclude that "It is hardly surprising, then, that both firms and individuals place a high premium on the quality of their English, and that both are prepared to invest time and money in improving their competence in English" (p. 216). This finding appears to be more positive than what is found in my study as will be evident in Chapter 7.

They raise the following interesting questions for further investigation:

- Is the support and training which is being given appropriate and effective?
- Should professional development be provided for seniors so that they can render linguistic support and training on a day-to-day basis as and when required?
- Should notions of language awareness be refined within the workplace enabling employees to recognise and register when they are receiving assistance?

The findings from this study of accountants and my study of bank employees suggest that similar remedial measures will have to be adopted at two levels: first, at the workplace, with a view to enhancing the required competencies of those who are already there; and secondly, in the educational institutions, with a view to anticipating and pre-empting the difficulties that future workers or employees would face at their workplaces, by appropriately equipping them in advance.

Bilbow (1997) is another study of spoken discourse in a large multinational airline corporation in Hong Kong analyses business meetings involving participants from different cultural groups. Bilbow first sketches the background of his study; after discussing the transformation of Hong Kong from being a transshipper of opium from the Indian sub-continent to China into an international financial centre and so on, he discusses, as I have done in Chapter 2, the linguistic situation in Hong Kong. He points out that for historical reasons, Hong Kong has always maintained a small but significant *English-speaking* population, traditionally comprising senior civil service officers, and senior employees of large companies. Recently, however, even as many senior positions have become localised, Hong Kong has been attracting a large number of lower-level English-speaking managers. This changing demography variously affects the manner in which expatriates and local Chinese interact in the workplace, particularly when, increasingly, expatriates work alongside the Chinese, rather than *over* them. This situation is a great challenge for companies in Hong Kong. His study analyses certain aspects of verbal behaviour of Western expatriate (WE) and local Chinese (LC) staff in cross-cultural business meetings in terms o the processes of self-presentation and impression-formation. He argues that Confucianist and Western cultural values underpin such processes, but at the same time, point out that the verbal performances of WE and LC participants may be as much influenced by other sociocultural factors (e.g. corporate culture) as by ethnicity owing to the fact that the particular corporation studied is a Western-style corporation in which Western styles of discourse may constitute the dominant communicative norm.

Bilbow (2002) focuses on the use of commissive speech acts in three types of business meetings. Commissive speech acts are promises and statements of commitment, in which a speaker expresses an intention to undertake a commitment associated with the action specified in the proposition. The study has the following two findings:

- Neither Western nor Chinese participants particularly eschew commissive speech acts; however, there are significant differences between them in terms of the circumstances under which commissive speech acts are uttered and how they are realised lexico-grammatically.
- Western commissive speech acts are usually in the nature of spontaneous offers. Conversely, Chinese commissive speech acts are usually in the nature of responses to initiating sequences with promises. The author goes on to

make the significant observation that "this may reflect the cultural predisposition on the part of the Western speakers to be spontaneously vocal in business meetings and the predisposition of Chinese speakers in such contexts not to initiate conversation, which may result in commitment needing to be explicitly sought more from Chinese participants than from Western participants." (p. 301)

It is interesting to see what Bilbow's two studies have to say about the different features in Western and Chinese spoken discourse in a multinational corporation in Hong Kong.

3.12 Summary

The literature review in this chapter has provided the theoretical context for my study. It has provided a clearer framework from which we may examine the discourse (in both the big *D* and small *d* ways) in the four banks. I began the literature review with a discussion of competing definitions of discourse analysis, and then went on to discuss critical discourse analysis (CDA) and some of its limitations. I then discussed genre analysis followed by narrative analysis, showing how some aspects of the latter could enable a clearer understanding of my interview data. I then provided short discussions of the following in turn: talk at work: institutional talk; discourse(s) in the workplace; business discourse; spoken discourse: meetings; how the study of business discourse may be applied to language teaching; language in post-colonial Hong Kong; and finally, two studies conducted on language in the Hong Kong workplace. It is clear from the literature surveyed that a research study such as the one I have undertaken needs to bring together all the relevant, useful and usable threads from a wide variety of past studies, approaches, theories and lessons so that each may contribute towards the methodological approaches adopted in this study, namely the face-to-face interview supplemented by a questionnaire, and the subsequent analysis of the data collected with the objective of gaining a better understanding of what goes on in the language domain of a banking workplace in Hong Kong. In the next chapter, I shall explore methodological issues and show how both theory and the real life context shaped the research questions in the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief restatement of the aims of this study and then that of its rationale. I briefly explain my motivation in undertaking this study, and how my small study is linked to a much larger study I participated in, namely the study entitled *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong*, which was carried out by scholars from five of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions. I then express the hope that despite its admitted limitations, my study may be interesting and helpful for people both inside and outside the banking industry.

I proceed to set out the research questions framed by me for this study. In discussing the general research approach adopted, I describe the difficulties encountered from choosing banks as the research site and justify employing the interview method used in combination with the questionnaire method; I also justify not employing other methods. I then explain how the interview and questionnaire methods were sequenced in the study. Next, I discuss the role of the interviewer and illustrate my interviewing methods with actual examples from the text. I then explain the difficulties encountered in transcribing the interview data, and how the data presentation gradually evolved. I also discuss extensively the issue of validating the data with examples of checks made to rule out leading questions, misunderstandings or biases in the interviews and instances of wording in the questionnaire which might have been problematic. Finally, I discuss the role of ethics in this study.

4.1 The main aims of the study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the use of English in four banks in Hong Kong by examining how new graduate employees use English to carry out their work. It investigates which communicative tasks these employees carry out in English and which tasks in Cantonese. It further analyses the types of difficulties they have in using English and the solutions they adopt to overcome them. The study also investigates the differences in proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees and the extent to which these differences in language use are a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures. Two illustrations drawn from one bank explore how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and Banking Discourse. The study further examines what types of English language training these employees received at university and their views on them. In the area of English training in the workplace, the study aims to find out whether banks provide English training to their employees, whether employees are interested in receiving such training and other related details.

4.2 The rationale for the study

I have been teaching English for more than twenty years, the last eighteen years to university students in Hong Kong. One of my major responsibilities as an English teacher at the Hong Kong Baptist University is to run the Business English course for first year students studying for the degree of Bachelor of Business Studies (BBA Honors). This is a compulsory forty-hour course taught to more than three hundred BBA students in every academic year and aims to improve their English language skills for business studies and business communication. I am therefore very familiar with the common skills and topics taught in Business English courses. With my many years of classroom experience, I wanted to do a study that would allow me to look outside the academy to see how university graduates were faring in English at the workplace.

I was also in part motivated to undertake this study because of events outside the classroom. There is the perception today by Hong Kong employers and the general public that the English language standards of university graduates are not good enough to meet the needs of the economy. Employers have in the past decade become increasingly dissatisfied with the English language standards of the university graduates that they employ (American Chamber of Commerce Survey, 2001; Chew, 1999; Hong Kong Census & Statistics Department Survey, 2000; Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, 2001; *South China Morning Post*, September, 1999; Standing

Committee on Language Education and Research, 2003; *South China Morning Post-TNS* Opinion Leaders Survey on Education in Hong Kong, November 2006). The business sector is alarmed that the poor English standards may cause the city to become less competitive not only vis-à-vis its traditional rival, Singapore, but even vis-à-vis some cities in mainland China where standards of English are improving fast (*South China Morning Post*, May 1999 and December 2002). I therefore felt that it would be very interesting to see firsthand the English standards of university graduates in the workplace. After further consideration, I decided to investigate the English standards of bank employees because the financial sector is one of the pillars of the Hong Kong economy, with Hong Kong having one of the world's most developed and modern banking systems where the use of English is very important.

My small study is also partly linked to a much larger study that I participated in and which was carried out by scholars from five of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions entitled *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong*. This project was headed by Professor Vijay K. Bhatia and Professor (Chair) Christopher N. Candlin from the City University of Hong Kong, and was funded from 1997 to 2000 by the Hong Kong Standing Committee on Language Education and Research Language Fund (SCOLAR). The five institutions which participated in this project were the City University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Baptist University (where I acted as the coordinator for the data collection at my university for this project), Lingnan University, and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This SCOLAR project looked at the teaching of English to meet the needs of business education from five perspectives – student, teacher, curriculum, writing performance, textual, and occupational. My contribution to the project was in the occupational perspective, and I presented papers on the occupational perspective at four international conferences[26] in conjunction with the

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[26] Chew, K-S. (2000) (With Vijay Bhatia, Christopher Candlin, Jane Jackson) presented a paper entitled Multifaceted needs analysis in business education in a colloquium at the TESOL 2000 Convention: Navigating the New Millennium, Vancouver, Canada.
Chew, K-S (1999) (With Vijay Bhatia, Christopher Candlin, Bertha Du-Babcock, Jane Jackson, Matthew Peacock, Lorrita Yeung) presented a paper entitled Multiple discourses in business education at a symposium of the 12th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA'99) on the Role of Language in the 21st Century: Unity and Diversity, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan.
Chew, K-S (1999) (With Vijay Bhatia, Christopher Candlin, George Braine, Stephen Bremner, Kimberly McGrath, Matthew Peacock) presented a paper entitled Investigating the communicative demands of business education in Hong Kong in a colloquium at the International Conference on

team members who presented papers on the other perspectives. Reference to this five-institution project is made in Chapter 3, and some of its findings are also reported in Chapter 7.

My study admittedly has its limitations and the findings cannot be generalised for all banks or for the entire Hong Kong workplace. However, the findings are interesting and may be helpful even to those outside the banking industry. For those inside the banking industry, I hope that it may persuade people in positions of power to undertake the necessary training of their staff to rectify the present language shortcomings. I also hope that this small-scale study would be the precursor of similar studies in the future by other researchers who would be given freer access to their chosen site of investigation so that public knowledge may be further advanced and greater benefit reaped for the Hong Kong community.

4.3 The research questions

Following the dictum in Andrews (2003) that research questions be "context-related" and "must be answerable" (p. 2), I have framed my research questions as follows:

1) What communicative tasks do the bank employees perform in English and what communicative tasks do they perform in Chinese?

2) What difficulties do the bank employees encounter in carrying out these tasks in English and what solutions do they adopt for overcoming these difficulties?

3) What differences are there in the proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees in the four banks, and to what extent are these differences in language use a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures?

Second Language Teaching: Reading, Writing and Discourse, jointly organised by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.
Chew, K-S (1999) (With Vijay Bhatia) presented a paper entitled English for business education in Hong Kong at the Conference on Research in English for Academic Purposes: Issues and Approaches, City University of Hong Kong.

4) What types of English language courses did the bank employees take at university and what are their views on improving the effectiveness of university English courses?

5) Are the bank employees getting English language training at the bank, what type of English training are they interested in and what is the duration that they think is needed for such training?

I hope it would be apparent that I am seeking to answer the "what" questions, in line with the nature of qualitative research (Silverman, 2001).

4.4 General research approach adopted, method(s) and procedures used for data collection, sampling and sample sizes, and their justification

4.4.1 Choosing banks as the research site and practical difficulties encountered

As already mentioned, I selected the banking industry for my study because the financial sector is one of the pillars of the Hong Kong economy, where English is very important. Yet, it is also true that banks do not give easy access to researchers. Laura Nader (1974), the anthropologist, says this about the work of anthropologists:

> If we look at the literature based on field work in the United States, we find a relatively abundant literature on the poor, the ethnic groups, the disadvantaged; there is comparatively little field research on the middle class and very little first-hand work on the upper classes. Anthropologists might indeed ask themselves whether the entirety of field work does not depend upon a certain power relationship in favor of the anthropologist, and whether indeed such dominant-subordinate relationships may not be affecting the kinds of theories we are weaving. What if, in reinventing anthropology, anthropologists were to study the colonizers rather than the colonized, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty? (p. 289)

Very interestingly indeed, she **even refers to banks** in the argument she makes:

> If, in reinventing anthropology, we were principally studying the most powerful strata of urban society, our view of the ghetto might be largely in terms of those relationships larger than the ghetto. ***We would study the banks*** (emphasis added) and the insurance industry that mark out areas to the city to which they will not sell insurance or extend credit. (p. 289)

While the poor or the weak make vulnerable subjects and have little recourse to saying no to researchers who want to study them, the rich and the powerful are less frequently studied. As Nader puts it:

> The most usual obstacle is phrased in terms of access. The powerful are out of reach on a number of different planes: ***they don't want to be studied;*** it is dangerous to study the powerful; ***they are busy people***; they are not all in one place, and so on. (p. 302) (emphases added)

In educational research, it is also true that most studies are done in the classroom where the researcher who also usually happens to be ***the*** teacher (or ***a*** teacher as the case may be) has easy access. Not only does the researcher have easy access to the classroom, the informants are usually acquiescent in their filling out of questionnaires or of being interviewed or videotaped. Getting a big sample size is also usually not a big problem. Denscombe and Aubrook's (1992) study has some very interesting things to say about this. The researchers looked at the issue of consent given by school pupils for a large questionnaire survey of British 14 to 16 year-olds to find out the reasons for the very high response rates for this and similar surveys that distribute questionnaires to pupils in schools. They found out that the reason why so many participated was largely due to the organisational context – the fact that the questionnaires were distributed in the classroom during tutor group periods. The researchers also found out that there was another dimension to the pupils' cooperation. Many of the pupils saw it as just another piece of schoolwork, an indication that they perceived the request as coming from authority figures (their teachers) during school time. It also suggested that there might be subtle pressures on the pupils to obey the request and fill in the questionnaires completely and correctly as they would other pieces of schoolwork.

However, my choice – banks in Hong Kong – proved to be much more difficult to gain entry into. This is because banks, more so than many other commercial institutions, are very secretive about their financial data and observe strict confidentiality of their clients' information. I first sent out letters to twenty banks in Hong Kong in June 1999 requesting their participation in my study. For a copy of the letter sent to banks, see Appendix 7. Most of the banks did not even bother to reply. A few of them did reply but declined to take part in the study, citing reasons of "limited resources". For the rejection letters sent by three banks, see Appendices 8, 9 and 10. Indeed, Buchanan *et al.* (1988) states that "negotiating access to organizations for the purposes of research is a game of chance, not of skill (p.56). Some advice the authors give on negotiating access are:

> First, allow for this (gaining access) to take time. Second, use friends and relatives wherever possible. Third, use non-threatening language when explaining the nature and purpose of your study. Fourth, deal positively with respondents' reservations with respect to time and confidentiality. Fifth, offer a report of your findings. (p.56)

In my case, it was fortunate that through my repeated attempts over the course of a few months, and through a friend's contacts, I eventually managed to get the consent of four banks to take part in the study.

Was there any incentive for these four banks to take part in this study? I wish to say a few words about their motivations here. The senior management who agreed to participate in the study did so out of a personal interest in the issue of use of English in the banking sector and/or civic-mindedness that the results of such a study could prove useful for the larger Hong Kong community. It is not possible for me to provide all the details of why these four banks agreed to participate in the study without disclosing their identity; suffice it to state that in the case of AB Bank, the Head of the Corporate Communications Department who was my entry point into the Bank was personally interested in the issue of English language standards of bank employees and also eager to express his views on English discourse in the banking sector (as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 6); in the case of HD Bank and MB Bank, the Executive Director and the Regional Head respectively felt this was a worthy project as they concurred with the contents of my letter about the usefulness of investigating how well new graduate employees are coping with the English language demands at work.

The collection of data started in the summer of 1999, but subsequently there were personnel changes in one of the banks involved, and further access was denied. I also found that I could not control the number of employees who could be interviewed and surveyed, and the number of visits I could make was also not within my control. The sudden and unexpected curtailment of access to the bank that I had hoped would be the focus of my study seriously affected the course of the study. I was unable to pilot the study and return to carry out further investigations. Eventually, I modified the research questions to reflect the data that I **was** able to gather.

I was also unable to gain access to the written documents produced by the informants in my study because of the confidential nature of the work that banks do. Therefore, I did the next best thing a researcher could do, *viz.* look at what the informants tell me about the work they do and the difficulties they face in terms of language demands. Interestingly, by studying the **very** language they use in the interviews, it is possible to get a fairly accurate picture of their English language standards. Hence, the interview data is very important in my study. I have reproduced sections of it as documentary evidence of the English standards of my informants. Through these interviews and questionnaires completed by the informants, and also some close-up observation of the workings of one department in one of the banks, it is possible to get a picture of the scenario in the four Hong Kong banks and to reach some tentative conclusions.

Other researchers of business discourse have also encountered the same difficulty in gaining access to commercial institutions and organisations. At a recent "International Roundtable on Discourse Analysis"[27] held at the City University of Hong Kong, Mirjaliisa Charles of the Helsinki School of Economics, one of the keynote speakers, shared with me her experience and that of her Finnish colleagues in trying to gain access to banks in Helsinki. When finally one bank agreed to let the

[27] The *Roundtable on Discourse Analysis: Discourse in Professional Contexts* from 10-12 May 2007 was organised by the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong.

researchers carry out their study at its premises, they "all descended upon that one bank in droves" was how she described the situation. In writing about the difficulty of data collection, Charles (2007 in press) says that she and her colleagues have over the years, accumulated a database of close to 60 hours of spoken data in the form of meetings, negotiations and presentations in addition to having access to email messages. She adds:

> We use these data to give insight into what we, as researchers, see is actually happening in the companies – as contrasted with what employees perceive to be happening. ***Modest as this database is, anyone who has been involved in trying to get recordings from companies will appreciate the enormity of the challenges presented by this kind of data collection.*** (emphasis added) Research cooperation in the form of surveys and interviews is one thing; permission to record interactions is another. (p. 11)

Another business discourse researcher, Catherine Nickerson, also expressed similar views to me at another recent international conference on professional communication that I attended.[28] I had expressed to her my difficulty in getting more data to analyse in addition to the interviews that I had with the 16 bank employees in four banks in Hong Kong, and interviews with the Head of the Corporate Communications Department in one of the banks, plus my attendance and notes taken of a meeting of senior managers at the same bank. I wanted to hear her views on what other data I needed to collect. Nickerson advised me to just use my interview data to the maximum because she understood the very real difficulty of gaining unrestricted access to study financial institutions. I am much indebted to these two researchers for sharing with me their real life research experience and for their reassurances and practical advice to me.

Silverman (2005) too advises researchers to limit their data. He states that "to make your analysis effective, it is imperative to have a limited body of data with which to work" (p. 64). He also warns novice researchers to "beware of complexity ... keep data gathering simple. Go for material that is easy to collect. Do not worry if it only gives you one 'angle' on your problem. That is a gain as well as a loss!" (p. 64). He

[28] The 7th Asia-Pacific conference organised by the Association for Business Communication was entitled *Professional Communication: Globalizing the Local and Localizing the Global* and held on March 28-30, 2007. It was jointly hosted by the Department of English and Communication, City University of Hong Kong and ABC.

further states that in analysing data, "narrowing (it) down to a single issue may (allow you) to make novel observations" (p. 65).

In the case of my study, I was restricted in my data collection not by choice but by circumstances. I could not specify either the number of people I could interview, or the number of times I could interview the same informants. I was, however, able to request about one hour to interview each bank employee that they had selected for me. In this way, I came away with about 16 hours of interviews with 16 informants plus the questionnaires that they completed. Unfortunately, I was also unable to watch them at work and could not gather the written documents the informants produced as part of the work they do. At one of the four banks in the study, AB Bank, I was given freer access to the Department of Corporate Communications. The Head of Department was a Briton who, after making me sign a Confidentiality Agreement (see section 4.7 for excerpts) not to divulge information about its banking business, trade secrets, customer information and so on, was happy to let me come in on a few visits to talk to the staff in the department, sit in on one of their departmental meetings, be interviewed on English discourse in banking, introduced me to the Bank's CEO who then permitted me to attend one of the weekly senior managers' meetings, and was generally generous in allowing me to observe and understand the workings of his Department. My earlier research plan was to focus my study on this one department in this one bank, and through the members of this department in whatever way was possible and permissible, to use their discourse as a window on professional assumptions and work practices. I would provide, in this planned study of mine, the descriptive, interpretive and explanatory accounts of discourse in action using this particular research site as the focus of my study. Unfortunately, however, real world practices intervened and ended this wishful thinking on my part. As I was preparing to implement my research study, there was a personnel change in my intended research site and the person who had given me this access was replaced. The new Head of Department "(did) not want to be studied" (using Nader's words), and so my visits to AB Bank stopped.

4.4.2 How the research questions might best be answered

Access to four banks was gained after considerable difficulty and I had to find the best methods for getting the information I was looking for. My study intended to find out the following information:

1. What work was performed in English and what in Chinese by a selected group of bank employees?
2. What difficulties were encountered by them in doing their work in English and what solutions were found for these difficulties?
3. What differences were there in the proficiency and use of English by different levels of employees in the four banks and to what extent were these discourse differences a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures?
4. What English language courses at university did these bank employees take and what were their views on improving the effectiveness of university English courses?
5. Was English language training taking place at the banks and were the employees interested in such training?

In short, the study aimed to investigate the types of work and the language of this work, attitudes of the bank employees towards difficulties they encountered in English and towards English language training. In addition, the study also aimed to investigate bank employees' university English courses and their attitudes towards these courses. Finally, the study also aimed to investigate different types of banks, different corporate cultures and different banking Discourses and discourses.

With these objectives in mind, I decided that the interview method used in combination with the questionnaire method would suit my research needs best. I reasoned that I would be meeting bank employees from different banks who were working in different departments and holding different jobs. There might not be much similarity in their different roles at the bank. I would also be meeting them for the first time. I therefore needed to find out as much as I could about their individualised work, and the individual interview would be the most suitable method.

Therefore, my study employed the interview method because it could provide the following advantages:

1. The topics could be covered in greater depth and detail as the interviewees could be probed and issues pursued during the approximately one hour that I had with each person.
2. I could gain valuable insights based on the "expert" knowledge of these bank employees.
3. The information gathering could be less intrusive because I needed only a small audio recording device and my skills in asking relevant questions and pursuing the lines of investigation. This was an important consideration as my study was carried out at the banks which were very busy workplaces and the personnel there were not used to being participants in a research study. I recorded all the interviews so that I could analyse the data as they were presented in a verbatim fashion.
4. The information gathered was based on the informants' opinions and what they considered as crucial factors in the description of their work. Although I worked with a set of questions that I wanted to ask, the informants could expand or explain any point they wished and at the same time, they could tell me which points did not apply to them.
5. The interview method allowed a certain amount of flexibility as adjustments to the line of enquiry could be made during the interview itself. This was useful because the informants were performing different types of work at the bank.
6. The interview method enhanced the validity of the data collected as direct contact at the interview allowed the data to be checked for accuracy and relevance at the point of collection.

At the same time, in order to cross check the information collected from the interviews, I also employed questionnaires. The questionnaire I used was a modified version of the one adopted by Bhatia and Candlin (1998) for their legal English study. I modified the questions to suit a banking workplace. The two methods complemented each other and also allowed the corroboration and triangulation of data obtained from the bank employees. The questionnaire was designed to find out the following information from the respondents: their personal particulars, educational qualifications, professional qualifications and/or training, previous employment, current employment, frequency of languages used with various people at work, frequency of English language used for various tasks at work, task difficulty and source of difficulty, language used for communicative tasks including participants involved and typical outcomes and language of outcomes, their personal language profile and lastly, their views on professional development in communication skills. Because the questionnaire had a total of 36 questions, it was advantageous to hand out the questionnaires to the informants before the interviews commenced and to discuss certain questions with the informants at some point in the interviews. There were four advantages with using the questionnaire and the interview methods at the same meeting:

1. The respondents could ask for clarification on any particular item in the questionnaire.
2. The interviewer could also ask the respondents for clarification about their written answers in the questionnaires.
3. Some items could be selectively elaborated upon at the time of the interviews.
4. The questionnaires were collected there and then at the interviews and this ensured that all the respondents completed the questionnaires. Thus, I obtained a response rate of 100%.

The typical disadvantages of questionnaires as a research method (i.e. having a poor response rate, incomplete or poorly completed answers and unclear answers) were thus dealt with in the way I structured my research design. However, had I been able to trial the questionnaires, I would have improved it by simplifying some of the items. A discussion of validity issues of particular questions is found in section 4.6.3.

4.4.3 The road not taken

I did not employ a focus group method for the same reasons that I employed the individual interview: the various bank employees worked in different departments in different banks and a group discussion in which the interaction among group members played an important role would not have yielded as much useful information for my study. I was also more interested in what each person had to say to me rather than what they had to say to each other as would have been the case in a focus group interview.

How far could observation be used to answer my research questions? In order for observation in the banking workplace to yield useful information, it would have to be done over a longer period of time and freer access to the workplace would need to be a precondition. Observation would also yield more useful information if it were accompanied by video recording, audio recording and note-taking. It would be a more useful method to employ in a specific department instead of various departments in various banks as the information gathered might be too diverse to analyse for a study such as mine.

I also did not employ a case study approach even though I had initially planned to do this and to focus on one department in one bank. This plan was abandoned when I failed to gain further access to AB Bank, the bank that might have been the choice of a case study. (See section 4.4.1 where I discuss this issue.)

4.4.4 Sequencing of research methods

The study was therefore carried out by a combination of the interview and questionnaire methods and sequenced in the following way: a questionnaire, then an interview which ended with a discussion of the questionnaire. Each informant was first given the questionnaire to fill out before the start of the interview. They were instructed to complete it to the best of their ability and informed that they could seek clarification or discuss their answers during the interview. The use of these two methods – the questionnaire and the interview – allowed the findings from one method to be checked against the findings of the other. I followed the sequence of questionnaire, then interview which ended with a discussion of the questionnaire in order that certain lines of enquiry could be pursued and checked. By completing the questionnaire before the interview, the informant could begin to gather his/her thoughts on the issues that the study was investigating. Then during the interview, open-ended questions were asked which allowed the informants to talk at length and to elaborate on various issues. At the same time, the researcher had the opportunity to corroborate the findings from one source against the other source and this enhanced the validity of the data. For example, factual information such as the informants' job title, current position, educational qualifications, previous employment and so on could be easily checked by comparing what was reported in both the questionnaire and what they told me in the interview. The questionnaire was also used to corroborate other types of information that dealt with the informants' opinions, attitudes and beliefs, as for example, which tasks they found difficult because the respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty of the different communicative tasks at work. Another example was the item in the questionnaire which asked the respondents to identify their training interests and how long they thought would be adequate for such training. The interviews enabled the respondents to elaborate on such matters. By cross-checking the information from these two methods, the researcher was able to check for consistency in the data collected.

4.5 The role of the interviewer

4.5.1 Differing views and general principles

Oppenheim (1992) states that the interview, unlike most other techniques, requires interpersonal skills of a high order in that the interviewer has to put the respondent at ease, ask questions in an interested and friendly manner, note down the responses without disrupting the conversational flow, and show support in order to encourage the respondent to continue talking without introducing bias. An interview is not an ordinary conversation, although the exploratory interview appears similar in some respects. The purpose of all research interviews is to obtain information of certain kinds. This information may be in the form of factual replies to factual questions, or responses to attitude scale items, or ideas and feelings, or percepts and expectations, and the like. The respondents may or may not have this information, or they may be unable or unwilling to communicate it. Although there is talk by both the respondent and the interviewer, an interview is essentially a one-way process. Indeed, if it should become a two-way process of communication and turn into a dialogue, it will lose much of its value because of the biases introduced by the interviewer. Respondents get very little out of participating in an interview – perhaps a slight degree of interest, a little ego boosting and a general feeling that they have been of help. They do, however, lose some of their valuable work time, particularly in the busy offices of Hong Kong's banking employees. In order to do their job well, the interviewer has to "switch off" his/her own personality and attitudes and try to be unaffected by circumstances, by his/her attitude to the topic or the respondent, or by personal involvement.

Other researchers take a slightly different view on the role of the interviewer. Harwood (2007) for example, used an interview-based approach for his study on pronouns in academic writing. He interviewed five political scientists and says that he followed a semi-structured interview format which was "sufficiently flexible to allow the interviewer and interviewee to *develop conversation* (italics added), so that both parties were active." (p. 31) Harwood states that at times, the interview data reproduced stretches of interviewer dialogue as well as that of the interviewees. Yet other researchers speak of how qualitative interviews are "joint accomplishments" (Dingwell, 1997, p. 56) between interviewer and interviewee, and are therefore co-constructed. Smart (1998) in describing his ethnographic study of economists at the Bank of Canada, the country's central bank, argues for the need to achieve a balance between engagement with and detachment from the conceptual world of the community being observed. My own position is a middle one, and as an interviewer in this study, I was neither completely silent nor engaging in a two-way conversation with my informants. In the next section, I describe the methods I employed during the interviews.

Whom should we interview? We should try to interview a sample that is typical of the respondents whom we aim to question or investigate. We need a fairly good spread of respondents so that we have in this study, for example, bank employees who are relatively new entrants with a university degree and employed in the various departments of the banks. Sometimes we may also include interviews with "key informants" such as the department manager. How many interviews should we conduct? There can be no definitive answer to this question, but a study of workplace practices and in particular of the banking industry in Hong Kong will encounter limits that are set by the banks and not by the researcher. Gaining precious access to several banks dictates that quality, rather than quantity, is more important.

How should the interviewees be identified? I spoke to the Human Resources Heads in three of the banks to explain to them what the objective of this study was, and what kind of bank employees I was interested in interviewing and surveying. It was left to these senior management personnel in the respective banks to provide me with a list of the names of bank employees and an interview schedule. In the fourth bank, AB Bank, I spoke directly to the Head of the Corporate Communications Department, who was willing to let me conduct my study in his Department itself. Thus I got the permission to interview 16 employees in all plus one Head of Department, across the four banks.

Where should the interviews take place? In this study, the natural and logical place was a meeting room at the respective banks. This was actually the case in all the banks except AB Bank where the interviews took place in the offices of the respective employees. In all the instances across the four banks, the setting was private, quiet and not intimidating. The primary goal is to maintain spontaneity, to allow the respondent to talk more or less continuously, punctuated now and again by an 'uhuh, uhuh' and an occasional nod from the interviewer. The interviewer must not only note what is being said but also what is being omitted. The interviewer should be able to maintain control of the interview, to probe gently but incisively and to present a measure of authority and an assurance of confidentiality. An even tone of voice, a pleasant and polite manner, an acceptant and non-judgmental attitude and a willingness to listen should be among the interviewer's interpersonal skills as these qualities will encourage informants to talk freely. As Oppenheim (1992) states, "The respondents should come away with a vague feeling of pleasure at having been of help and having had an interesting conversation with an attentive professional, though preferably without a clear idea as to the exact purpose of the interview; they should never go away angry or upset, or feel that they have been the subject of a painful inquisition" (p. 69). Sections 4.4.4 and 4.6.3 discuss how I sequenced the questionnaire and interview and how I took measures to corroborate information from both of them – including the notes which I had taken during the interviews – in order to ensure the consistency of data from these two sources.

4.5.2 My interview questions

The purpose of the interview is to find out how the interviewees think and feel about the topics of concern to the research. Interviewers work with a handful of headings or topics around which they will seek to direct the interview as unobtrusively as possible. The interview should move from topic to topic, maintaining the fiction of an interesting conversation. The interviewer may start with any of the topics on the agenda and proceed in any order. According to Oppenheim (1992) it is better that the respondents be given only a vague idea of the central topics of the interview as it is their spontaneous reactions that are wanted and not carefully thought out answers.

In the interviews I conducted, my questions were asked with the following objectives: finding out about the work the informants did, what they used English for, what they used Cantonese for, what was the proportion of English-Chinese use at work, what difficulty if any they faced in doing work in English, what methods they adopted to solve these difficulties, what English courses they studied at university, how useful these courses were, what could be done to make university English courses more useful for students, what kind of English training they were getting at the bank, what kind of training they would be interested in, and details of such training at the workplace. For a list of my interview questions, see Appendix 11.

I generally started the interview by briefly informing them about my background and the aim of the study which was to investigate the use of English by graduate employees in some banks in Hong Kong. I tried to put them at ease by asking them if we could start by talking about how long they had been working at the bank, and which university they graduated from. Then I usually continued by asking them to tell me their job title and the work they did. This was the main part of the interview as they described the work they did, and provided details about the use of English to do their work. In the rest of the interview, I asked them to talk about the other aspects of work, university English and training issues as outlined above. About two-thirds through the interview, I normally asked them to elaborate on their responses in the questionnaire, a copy of which is in Appendix 12, and I clarified any doubts they might have about certain items in the questionnaire. At the end of the hour assigned for the interview, I thanked them for their time and cooperation. For a sample copy of a full interview transcript, see Appendix 13. I should add here that in order to fully utilise data from the interviews, I made notes as the interviewees were speaking to corroborate the information that was being tape-recorded. My notes recorded my impressions of the situation and the interviewee and also took down the salient points of the discussion. When I was analysing my data at a later time, these notes were useful in clarifying and verifying some of the information on the transcripts and questionnaires.

4.5.3 My interviewing methods

In this section, I describe the methods I employed in my interviews to obtain information from the informants and provide actual examples from the text for clarification:

(1) Repeated or rephrased what the informant told me:

E.g.

Herbert: ...All these occasions require some casual environment, some casual interaction. So I mean, that can present a challenge.

I: Present a challenge. Okay.

Herbert: Yeah, especially for a new recruit.

(2) Asked for examples or explanations where necessary:

E.g.

Catherine: ... Try your best to sell more.

I: What products are you trying to sell?

(3) Re-affirmed what informants told me by stating it in the positive:

E.g.

Rex: Their colleague tell them to work like his and they just follow. They don't know why.

I: Yeah.

(4) Re-affirmed what informants told me by stating it in the negative:

E.g.	Ida:	Actually, not lots of people doing this job.
	I:	No, huh?
	Ida:	Yes.

(5) Showed support in non-verbal ways:

E.g.	Ida:	Mostly I will use the excel because it is a good software. [laughs]
	I:	[laughs too]
	Ida:	It can do a lot of chart and also a lot of tables.

4.6 The procedures and processes used to get from the data collected to the findings presented

4.6.1 Transcription difficulties

The interviews with the 16 bank employees were about 16 hours in total as each interview lasted approximately one hour. Additionally, I had more than two hours of interviews with the Head of the Corporate Communications Department in AB Bank. It was essential for the interviews to be recorded on CD so that they could be analysed in detail at a later time. In order for analysis to be carried out, the interviews had first to be transcribed. This was a hugely time-consuming task because (the following comments only apply to the 16 informants interviewed) the interviewees were generally not articulate, the pronunciation was in many instances unclear, the speech contained many grammatical and syntactical errors, and there was a great deal of repetition of words without meaning such as "the", instances of stuttering, swallowing of certain words and other such problems. Each one hour interview required about 10 hours to be transcribed. This was just the first stage. In the second stage, I listened to each interview again, and went over the transcribed data to correct the mistakes I had made in the transcription work. The correcting and typing up took many more hours. However, it was only through listening to the interviews again and again that I became familiar with the job nature of each informant. I found that I needed to listen to their talk and answers many times to understand the real meaning behind what they were saying because their responses were often indirect, in addition to being grammatically wrong, and hence, more difficult to comprehend. I provide here an example of how the poor grammar and lack of knowledge about English syntax by one of the interviewees made it extremely difficult to transcribe the interview with him, and after the transcription was done, to accurately understand the meaning behind his words. In the following excerpt, Kenneth Kwok (BE6-SD6) is telling me about his difficulty with English and how the cause of his problem is his weak foundation going back to the days of his secondary school education:

> Kenneth: Yeah. **I find the gaps.** [his emphasis] How in writing, when I writing the message, I find it so difficult because [of my lack of] vocabulary.
>
> I: You mean how to put the words down? What you have, the ideas you have, in words?
>
> [But he does not answer my question, and instead he continues]
>
> Kenneth: I write using the dictionary and also try to find similar word [...]
>
> I: [I misunderstand what he is trying to say] That's a good strategy to try and find similar work in English. Try and copy the structure. Use that as your model. That's a good strategy.
>
> Kenneth: But also the grammar is not well [good] [laughs]

The above excerpt from the interview may be interpreted as an example of a misunderstanding between interviewer and interviewee, and a check needs to be done for data validity. Did such misunderstandings occur frequently? My answer is that although I asked Kenneth to clarify what he said by expanding on the meaning of the word "vocabulary", what he actually did was to continue to say that he used the dictionary to find the right word. The next misunderstanding on my part derived from his use of the word "also" as in "[I] also try to find similar word" which led me to hear "work" instead of "word". Hence, I attempted to rephrase my understanding of what he said, and I said to him "try to find similar work in English. Try and copy the structure. Use that as your model". A close analysis of the exchange shows that Kenneth was consistently talking about vocabulary in the first instance and about weak grammar in the second instance. As pointed out above, he was the only interviewee whose weak English posed the biggest challenge in the transcription process, and the example cited above was the most glaring in terms of my not hearing correctly and hence, not understanding the message. A close examination of the transcribed text, however, shows that the exchange was faithfully recorded and that is why this particular excerpt was selected as an example of transcription difficulties. A full discussion of the checks made to ensure data validity is found in section 4.6.3.

4.6.2 Evolution in the presentation of interview data

Initially I paraphrased much of the talk of the informants. But this was a frustrating exercise because the text was boring and it seemed pointless to be restating what the informants had reported to me. Then I tried to use their direct speech but found that there were numerous errors, which had to be denoted with the use of "sic" and they were recurring far too often for comfort. After considerable trial and error, and while researching my roots for the part in Chapter 1 about how I learnt to speak English, I came across the book written by Rudolph (1998) on *Reconstructing Identities: a social history of the Babas in Singapore* whereby the author uses the original language of his informants. I decided to adopt the same strategy. Doing this opened up many advantages at once. First, I could dispense with the use of "sic" as well as excessively correcting the language of the informants and re-constructing their sentences in my use of direct quotations. Second, the text became richer and more interesting with the informants talking in their natural voice. Third, through capturing their original and authentic voice, it was also possible **to see very clearly their standard of English.** This is one of the main aims of the study and in the absence of written texts produced by them, this fulfils the goal admirably. In fact, it could even be said that it is a better way of seeing their English standards as written documents produced by them are likely to have been edited by someone else, unless the researcher is given the informants' first drafts of writing. Indeed, in Hong Kong where the local people rarely speak in English among themselves, these interviews are a valuable source of the use of English in a spontaneous and unscripted manner by Hong Kong locals. In order to reflect the tone, manner or spirit in which the informants talked to me, I have shown where certain words are emphasised by the use of boldface, and instances of laughter, speaking to himself/herself, shouting or other physical action where and when they appear in the interviews with the use of rectangular brackets [ ] containing the explanatory remarks. In addition, throughout the thesis, the words ***bank employees, informants, interviewees, respondents*** and ***subjects*** are used interchangeably.

As I was working with and presenting interview data, I started reading up on how other researchers presented their interview data. I was working with a substantial amount of transcribed talk and I grappled with the problem of putting all this data on paper in a way which would be clear, logical and easy to read. I read up on how Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) presented their interview data from their study of the communication problems between native and non-native speakers of English among the employees in a Finland-based multinational company. The findings are clearly presented but they are much shorter than the very considerable bulk of interview data I am working with. I also looked at Harwood's (2007) and Smart's (1998) interview-based studies. Both are much shorter presentations of interview data. Harwood (2007) interviewed only five informants for his study. Reading the article "Metaphor and positioning in academic book reviews" by Low (in press), I found his systematic presentation of the many extracts he was working with a model that I could follow for my interview data. So through an exploration of the different ways of presenting interview and other extracts of data, I have come up with what I hope is a clear and systematic method of presentation of the interview data from my 16 informants. In addition, there is also interview data from the Head of the Corporate Communications Department at AB Bank which is presented and discussed in Chapter 6 and set apart from the rest of the interview data. I believe that the method adopted by me has some very considerable advantages as outlined above.

4.6.3 Validation issues

After transcribing the audio-recordings of the interviews, the data was carefully checked to ensure a high level of validity. Checks were made to see whether some of the extracts could be interpreted as instances of leading questions, misunderstandings and other forms of bias that would weaken the integrity of the data collected. The first check was to see whether any of the interview excerpts showed that leading questions were asked. First, we take a look at an extract of the interview with SD6, Kenneth Kwok.

I asked him about the written requests that he makes:

(BE6)

I:	You write requests to whom?
Kenneth:	To IT department.
I:	Write the request to IT department for?
Kenneth:	Change the programme or system.
I:	Is this quite often that you do this?
Kenneth:	Yes, it's quite often.
I:	The language used is English?
Kenneth:	Yes.

The interviewer's language with this particular interviewee, SD6, may be seen to differ a little from the way questions were generally put to the other interviewees, and may on the surface look like leading questions with answers being suggested to the interviewee. I wish to repeat that this was because SD6's English was considerably weaker than the other interviewees. It was necessary to phrase my questions the way I did in order to get the information from him that he had either put down in the questionnaire or mentioned earlier in the interview. Indeed, this part of the interview was a checking of the interviewee's responses in the written questionnaire. The interviewer was carrying out a check for accuracy of the data. This was the big advantage gained through collecting the questionnaire at the time of the interview. The informant replied in the affirmative to the question on frequency. The next question on whether the language used was English was a check of what he had written down in the questionnaire, and he confirmed it with a "yes". Evidence to show that the interviewee was answering the questions of his own volition and not at the prompting of the interviewer may be clearly seen in the next excerpt:

Kenneth explained that regular meetings with colleagues were in Chinese, but twice a year he attended meetings with Australian or American technical vendors when they visited the Bank:

(BE6) Kenneth: Also in the meeting all in the Chinese and little time the vendor to visit our site [infrequently when the vendor visits our site] using the English. But most of the time we using the Chinese in terms of the meeting.

	I:	Is that a large part of your job to attend meetings with vendors? Is that a large part?
	Kenneth:	Not a large part. [He replies in the negative.]
	I:	Okay. Two times a year. [As he is unable to express the frequency of meetings, I have to rephrase it for him.]
	Kenneth:	Two times a year.

In response to my question "Is that a large part?" the interviewee replied in the negative. This indicated that he was answering truthfully and candidly and not according to ideas suggested by the interviewer.

Similarly, in the case of MB1, Maureen Chow, what may again on the surface look like leading questions were actually attempts on the part of the interviewer to break down what the interviewee was saying into smaller chunks and to reformulate the question and ask her for confirmation. I wanted to check that I had understood her correctly.

(BE11)	Maureen:	I think spoken [was difficult]. The reactions, you know. You have to come out with suggestions or proposals. I think this is where the challenge come from.
	I:	You mean it's more impromptu and on-the-spot?
	Maureen:	Yeah.
	I:	Is it because it's on-the-spot thinking? Is that right?
	Maureen:	Right, right.
	I:	Whereas for writing you have time to think about it.
	Maureen:	Yeah, yeah. You don't want to **say** something that is wrong. [laughs]

The interviewer rephrased and reformulated the implied meaning behind what the interviewee was saying because the interviewee uttered four sentences at once. When she gave her first reply as "yeah", I wanted to double-check what she meant. So I repeated the question and she again replied, "Right, right". Then I again reformulated my question about writing as opposed to speaking and she again replied, "yeah, yeah". Her brief responses of "yeah", "right, right" and "yeah, yeah" were likely due to the fact that she tended to mumble and not enunciate clearly. The above exchange did not imply that the interviewee was acquiescing and agreeing for the sake of agreement with the interviewer, but rather that she wished to convey the same meaning as the rephrasing and the reformulating; in fact, she ended the excerpt by saying categorically that the challenge of spoken English came from the desire not to say something wrong as this could lead to a negative outcome with the business client.

The second checking of the data was for misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer or interviewee. The example of SD6, Kenneth Kwok, has previously been discussed in section 4.6.1. We now examine a second case of misunderstanding by MB2, Herbert Chan:

(BE12)	Herbert:	[...] I always find that what I've learned from school ...
	I:	Hm.
	Herbert:	... including both secondary school or university education ... the only discrepancy between my education and day-to-day work or day-to-day life is not about some formal reports or formal memos. I can handle that quite easily, or without too much difficulty. But it's all about day-to-day work when you hang around with some expatriate colleagues, then you will find little bit difficulty, a little bit difficult because you find all you learned from school is quite formal. [School] teach[es] you formal English whereas it's those like, oral English or more casual way of saying, jargons ...
	I:	[laughs]
	Herbert:	... those which is very difficult to pick up.
	I:	Colloquial English.
	Herbert:	Yeah, local English.
	I:	Colloquial.
	Herbert:	Yeah. That you can only pick up, say in my case during the four years of studying in UK, hang a lot around with your friends, then you can pick up these.

The interviewer used the term "colloquial English" and the interviewee responded, "Yeah, local English". The interviewer corrected him by repeating "colloquial", and the interviewee responded, "Yeah. That you can pick up, say in my case during the four years of studying in UK, hang a lot around with your friends, then you can pick up these". The substantive meaning that MB2 wished to convey was clear. One suspected that he heard the word correctly the second time around. If he was not entirely familiar with the word initially, that fact did not affect the meaning that he wished to convey.

The third check was for any interaction that moved out of the scope of the research questions. One interview excerpt with SD6, Kenneth Kwok, showed that the interviewer was asked to act as consultant, and did so. How often did this happen? Did it affect the interview?

(BE6) Kenneth: I think I want to ask a question. I want to know how to [...] the best way to improve the English.

I: What's the best way?

Kenneth: Yeah. Because I found [have been asking] that question so many years [but] I cannot find the answer.

I: There isn't er...there isn't a quick solution. Language learning takes a long time, but I think what is very important is that you must expose yourself to the language. If you are not exposed to the language, you only look in the textbooks, then it's difficult because you don't hear the sounds. You don't know how it's used, so when you are using it, you may sound like you are speaking Chinese instead of English. So the exposure is important. That's one thing. The second thing, I think, is using it. **You must give yourself the chance to use it.** A lot of Hong Kong students are taught in the classroom but they hardly use it because the teacher explains things mostly in Chinese and they don't have a chance to use it. When they are outside, they are also very shy and reluctant [to use English] and not motivated. So I think one, is exposure to the language; and two, is using the language.

Kenneth: Thank you. [laughs]

[...] I think working in Hong Kong, you must be, to advance myself, to protect myself, to learn more skills on something even though [whether it is] the IT or the English.

As can be seen above, the interviewee asked the interviewer a question about the best way to improve his English. It would appear to be a logical question for him to ask as the observation has been made that Kenneth was a very conscientious learner and was trying to make up for his relatively weak foundation in English in his secondary school education. His question came at the **very end** of the interview session after I had thanked him for participating in the interview. It did not affect the earlier part of the interview and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. SD6 was also the only interviewee who asked me a question about how to improve his English standard.

The final check was for bias in the data that could arise from the characteristics of the interviewer and/or the interviewee. Did the researcher's educational qualifications, for instance, affect the interviewer-interviewee relationship in any way that might make the data less valid? For example, although Smith was the Head of Department in AB Bank, he had no university degree and he produced extended story-telling about having no degree and succeeding in his job. He compared himself very favourably to other people in the financial world and might appear somewhat boastful. Was the interviewer aware of what he was doing? The answer is yes. Did the interviewer check the interview transcript to see if the data was plausible? The answer is yes again. Smith was interviewed because he was a key informant in this study. He was the supervisor of employees who were the subjects of my study and he had direct and daily contact with their written and oral skills in English. He also had many years of experience working in the financial and banking world. His professional success was the direct result of his English skills and of being in the right place at the right time, and the fact that he had no university qualification was a significant and interesting point to note in the study. It was reasonable to assume that his comments were based on his knowledge of and his authority on the issues being investigated in this study. His personal style, at times bordering on boastfulness, could be faithfully recorded at the same time that the interview data coming from him would remain valid and relevant.

Checks were also carried out on the questionnaire for validity. In particular, were there problematic areas in the wording of items in the questionnaire? We now examine three possible wording difficulties in the questionnaire:

Questions 22 to 25 investigated the frequency of languages used to carry out various tasks and with various people at work. For example, in item 24, the question is worded as follows: "To what extent are you required to **read** the following texts in **English**?" And the possible answers are "always", "most of the time", "some of the time", "hardly ever", and "never". The word "always" is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as "at all times" and "on all occasions". As used in the question, the word means "every single time". The respondents did not have any ambiguity with the use of the word "always" and understood it in the above three ways. Not a single respondent asked me to clarify the meaning of this word. In retrospect, however, it would have been lexically more accurate to have written "all the time" instead of "always" and this correction will be made in future studies using a similar type of questionnaire.

Secondly, in the scale of challenge in questions 26 to 30, the respondent was asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "least challenging" and 5 being "most challenging". Because of the numerical values provided in each of these questions, the respondents did not have any difficulty with these terms and interpreted "least" as "of **little** challenge" and "most" as "**very** challenging". In the Hong Kong context, these terms are often used interchangeably. Again in retrospect, it would have been lexically more accurate to have written "**not** challenging" for the scale of 1 and "**very** challenging" for the scale of 5.

Thirdly, question 33 required the respondent to fill in the blank cells in an open-ended question. The researcher could have written down all the various tasks that were envisaged to be performed by the various bank employees but chose not to do that as this would have made the question very long, and some tasks might not apply to some of the interviewees. So instead, the researcher left the cells blank and used the question as an opportunity to ask the respondents to think about certain tasks they did and to elaborate on the language(s) used. At the time the questionnaires were handed out before the start of the interview, the instruction was given to each respondent to complete the questionnaire to his/her best ability, and to leave unclear or difficult questions blank. This was because during the interview, the interviewer would be able to look at the responses and go over certain questions with each individual to clarify their doubts or their responses. About two-thirds through the interview, the interviewer went over the responses put down in the questionnaire. For this particular question, the interviewer would discuss what the question was looking for. I asked the respondent to specify some of the communicative tasks that he/she talked about in the interview. The question corroborated the information provided in the interview. In some cases, it could refer to answers given by the respondent for question 30. In completing this question, they had to list one or more communicative task(s) and specify the language(s) used in carrying out the task(s). For example, in the case of HD1, Kara Chan, whose interview transcript is found in Appendix 13, the communicative tasks would be a combination of English- and Chinese- speaking and writing tasks that can be found in Diagram 5.7 on page 178. The inclusion of this question allowed for the triangulation of information from the interview and questionnaire. In those cases where the informant could not provide further explanation or elaboration, I did not press them. I allowed them to say as much or as little as they wished for this question.

4.7 Ethical considerations

I wish here to discuss how ethical considerations impacted on my study. I will discuss the issues of access, consent, confidentiality and anonymity, all of which are interlinked.

Nader's (1974) point about studying the powerful instead of the weak is similarly made by Silverman (2001) who states that the relatively easy access afforded by 'underdog' subcultures is in contrast to barriers encountered in studying 'topdogs'. He further states that "the ethnographer who studies sub-cultures may unthinkingly be preying upon groups who are unable to protect themselves" (p. 56). I have mentioned earlier how it is easy to conduct research in classrooms where a ready and larger pool of subjects is easily available or amassable – a point corroborated by Denscombe and Aubrook (1992) – unlike the experience I encountered knocking on the doors of the four banks.

There are two kinds of research settings – closed or private settings where access is controlled by gatekeepers and open or public settings where access is freely available but not necessarily without difficulty. There are also two kinds of research access – covert access without the subjects' knowledge and overt access based on informing the subjects and getting their consent, often through gatekeepers. My study of the banks takes place in closed and private settings. As I have mentioned earlier, access was extremely difficult for me and my eventual success in gaining access was through the assent of gatekeepers at the highest levels – the Bank's Executive Director in one bank, the Regional Head in another bank, the Head of Department and subsequently, the Bank's CEO in the third bank, and a very senior executive in the fourth bank.

The issue of access is, at the same time, closely tied with that of consent. Informed consent is defined by Diener and Crandall (1978) as "the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions" (p. 51). In this regard, the letter that I sent to all the banks, including the ones which declined to take part in the study, provided information about who I was and the institution I was working for; what kind of study I was intending to carry out and the procedures involved; the role that the banks' senior management would be invited to play in the study; and how this study would be useful in changing the way that English is taught at university. For the text of the letter I sent out to banks, please see Appendix 7.

Informed consent, a benchmark for social research ethics, takes place at the earliest stage of the research project before the researcher can gain access to the organisation where the research is to take place, and permission is granted for the study to begin. Festinger and Katz (1966) point out that there is real economy in going to the very top of the organisation in question to obtain consent and cooperation. This is particularly so where the structure is clearly hierarchical and where lower levels are always dependent on their superiors. This was duly done in my study both because of the organisational culture in Hong Kong in general as well as the institutional culture of banks in particular. The importance of this is clearly seen when some months into my study of AB Bank, the Head of the Corporate Department was changed and the new Head refused to give her consent and the study could not therefore be continued. For my study, after the very top level of management had given their consent, it was left to the Human Resources Department Heads in three of the banks and the Head of the Corporate Communications Department in the fourth bank to select which employees would be interviewed by me. I have to assume that the selected informants agreed to take part in the interview and that no one was coerced. As the list of informants was selected by the banks themselves, they would have taken care of issues that they considered to be sensitive and would have briefed the informants about what was possible and what was not possible to be divulged in the interviews. Therefore, my informants should not be viewed as vulnerable subjects.

In turn, consent and cooperation are more likely to be given if there is a promise or guarantee of confidentiality. Confidentiality is the main means of protecting a participant's right to privacy. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), "the essence of the matter is the extent to which investigators keep faith with those who have helped them" (p. 62). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) assert that the researcher should protect the anonymity of research participants and maintain confidentiality at all times unless arrangements to the contrary are made with the participants in advance. It is usually at the point where researchers collect their data that they make their position clear to the hosts and/or subjects. They will explain to the subjects the meaning and limits of confidentiality in relation to the project. In general, the more sensitive, intimate or discrediting the information, the greater is the obligation on the researcher's part to make sure that guarantees of confidentiality are carried out in spirit and letter.

It is interesting that only one bank in the study, AB Bank, required me to sign a Confidentiality Agreement. This is not to be seen as a bigger fear on its part as compared to the other three banks, because it later emerged that this Bank was the most cooperative and the most willing to allow me to conduct my study on its premises. I quote below excerpts from the Non-Disclosure and Confidentiality Agreement that I signed. My reason for not including the entire document in the Appendix is to reduce the likelihood of disclosing the identity of this Bank:

> Whereas:-
>
> 1. The Recipient is in the process of undertaking a study on the use of English in the banking and commercial environment in Hong Kong and elsewhere.
>
> 2. The Recipient has requested that the Owner assists with the said study by providing certain information relating to its banking business, with particular reference to the use of English.
>
> 3. The Owner has agreed to disclose to the Recipient certain information which may include Confidential Information (as hereinafter defined).
>
> Now the parties agree that:-
>
> 1. "Confidential Information" shall mean all information relating to the Owner and its banking business including but not limited to financial and accounting information, trade secrets, know how, techniques, business,

operations, technology and marketing plans, projections, arrangements, legal documents, customer information and customer information proprietary to customers, including all such other information of a similar nature, either in verbal, written or computer held format.

2. [...]

3. The Recipient agrees that the Confidential Information shall be used only for the purpose of his/her said study and that same shall be handled with all due care and attention and in compliance with Hong Kong law (including but not limited to the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance).

In the process of interviewing the informants, one level of maintaining confidentiality meant that I would not repeat what they told me to another informant from either the same bank or a different bank. This, I have strictly observed.

Another way of maintaining confidentiality of data is through granting anonymity to the banks and the informants. The essence of this is that information provided by the informants should in no way reveal their identity, thereby guaranteeing their privacy. Thus a respondent completing a questionnaire that bears absolutely no identifying marks is ensured complete and total anonymity. A person agreeing to a face-to-face interview, on the other hand, cannot expect anonymity. At most, the interviewer can promise confidentiality and try to ensure that the information cannot be traced back to the individual who provided it. The principal method of ensuring anonymity is not using the names of the participants or any other personal means of identification.

In this study, I have used pseudonyms and letter and number codes for people and banks. However, it has to be recognised that there are two conflicting interests here – protecting the informants' identity versus the integrity and validity of the research findings. For example, falsifying or scrambling up the informant's gender, age, or job title in order to maintain the confidentiality of the data and to prevent traceability would also destroy the integrity and significance of what was said and found. There are limits, therefore, to how far researchers can go to protect the identities of informants without jeopardising the integrity of the data and the quality of the analysis. A further point to note is that the better the identities of those involved are disguised, the more difficult it becomes to check the validity of the data and other researchers are less able to compare the findings with similar instances. It is also less likely that the study, if replicated by other researchers in the future, could be checked for similar results.

Finally, something also needs to be said about the perceptions that the informants will have of researchers and their intentions and that these need to be positive. Researchers should present themselves as competent, trustworthy and accommodating people. It is important for the researcher to reveal fully his or her identity and background. Such information was disclosed in my initial letter sent out to the banks. Furthermore, at all my initial meetings at the four banks with the relevant Heads of Department, I gave a brief background of myself including the work I do at my institution and my interest in this research project. I also went over the aims, nature and procedures with each informant at the beginning of each interview. However, as Denscombe (2002) points out, the provision of too much information by the researcher can unintentionally contaminate the data by "leading" the informant's responses. If informants know exactly what is being investigated, it might influence the replies they give. Too much information may also deter participation. It could prove boring to the informants who have neither the time nor the interest to know about the finer points of the investigation. Thus, in my role as interviewer, I had to decide how much I would say about the project to the informants and I kept this to the level that was sufficient to jump-start my investigation.

To sum up, I would say in hindsight that I had approached the topic of my study with a certain amount of foolhardiness and without full consideration of what it would mean if I could get no access or only limited access to the banks. But I was motivated by the desire to find out more about the English language situation in banks, and so I embarked on this project. Then again, having learnt from this first time experience of conducting a study in banks, I now know better what to do in the future should I ever conduct another similar study. I have no illusions, however, that full access to banks will be easily obtainable.

With what I was able to find out, however, I knew that I had an interesting story to tell because it was something no one else had done before in the Hong Kong context. But

I would have to slightly recast my story. According to Andrews (2003), "most research questions do not simply form themselves from the air; they derive from contexts, or in response to a situation" (p. 5). Hence, in response to my particular situation, I had to look at my data very carefully to understand what it was telling me and what lessons could be gleaned from it. Andrews (2003) further notes that "research questions can take time to develop" (p. 9) and so it was that I needed considerable time to give a final shape to my research questions; indeed, they have been progressively modified to reflect the data that I was able to gather. I firmly believe, however, that this study would still be able to make a contribution to public knowledge because no one else has told this story before.

4.8 Summary

This chapter began with a brief restatement of the aims of this study and its rationale. I briefly explained my motivation in undertaking this study, and how my small study is linked to a much larger study I participated in, namely the study entitled *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong*. I then briefly discussed how, despite its admitted limitations, my study may be interesting and helpful for people both inside and outside the banking industry.

I then set out the research questions framed by me for this study. I then explained the general research approach adopted and difficulties encountered and provided justification for the methods I employed – the interview method used in combination with the questionnaire method. I also explained how they were sequenced in the study. I next discussed the role of the interviewer and illustrated my interviewing methods with actual examples from the text. Then I explained the difficulties I encountered in transcribing the data, and how the data presentation gradually evolved and included an extensive discussion of data validation. Finally, I discussed the role of ethics in this study. With an understanding of the reasons for employing these particular research methods in this study, the following chapter will go on to discuss and analyse the data collected in this way in the four banks.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion: money talks

Figure 5.1: Map of Hong Kong in its regional setting

5.0 Introduction

As stated at the end of the previous chapter, this chapter begins the discussion and analysis of my findings. The primary source of the data is my individual interviews with the 16 informants, although I also used a questionnaire. The interview data is very important, because the very language that the informants use in the course of my interviews with them clearly indicates their English standards, even as their responses provide interesting information about the work that they do in their respective positions in the banks. I first provide, in tabular format, overall information about the informants. I then provide explanatory notes on the transcription conventions adopted by me.

I then give detailed accounts of the interviews with the informants on the nature of the work they do, and their language use at work. These detailed accounts are presented for employees BE1 to BE16 from the four banks and are presented in their own voice with my comments where appropriate. At the end of this section, the information presented is briefly summarised. The chapter then continues with extensive accounts of the difficulty the informants experience in doing their work in English and what solutions they have for these difficulties. Again, at the end of this section, the information presented is briefly summarised, followed by a table.

5.1 Making the most of the data collected

This chapter examines the first two of my research questions as follows:

- What communicative tasks do the bank employees perform in English and what communicative tasks do they perform in Chinese?
- What difficulties do the bank employees encounter in carrying out these tasks in English and what solutions do they adopt for overcoming these difficulties?

The data which is analysed and discussed comes from my interviews with 16 employees in four banks in Hong Kong, plus the written questionnaires that all of them completed. As noted in Chapter 4, because of the confidential nature of the work that banks do, I was not able to gain access to the written documents produced by the informants. Under these circumscribed conditions, I decided to scrutinise the interview and questionnaire data to find out about the informants' work, their use of English at work and the difficulties they face in terms of the language demands. By studying the language they use in the interviews, it is possible to get a fairly accurate picture of their English language standards. Hence, the interview data is very important in my study and I have reproduced sections of the interviews as documentary evidence of the English standards of my informants. Through these interviews and through my observation at close quarters of the workings of one department in one of the banks, it is possible to get a picture of what is taking place in four of Hong Kong's banks and to reach some tentative conclusions. While the circumstances and the restrictions in data collection mean that I have had to maximise my use of the data from the interviews, I believe that I have actually gained some added benefits by using the transcribed interview texts, in which I have allowed the informants to speak for themselves. First, their authentic voice is recorded. Second, we are able to clearly see their English language proficiency as they speak. Third, we are able to catch a rare glimpse of their life and world while they are working at their various jobs and departments in the banks. All these things would not be possible had I only relied on a large number of questionnaires for data collection, or only looked at the documents the informants produced at work to see their English language standards. Instead, the interview data has opened different windows into the world inhabited by the 16 informants.

5.2 Overall information on the informants

Table 5.1 summarises the overall information on the informants. It lists their identification code and number, age and sex, number of years of current and past work experience, their self-rating of their English ability, the communicative tasks they carry out in English and in Chinese, the source of difficulty for them in carrying out these tasks in English, the type of English training they are interested in receiving, and the duration of the training that they think they need.

Table 5.1 Overall information on employees in four Hong Kong banks

Bank Employee	Age & Sex	No. of Years Work Experience Current & Past	Job Nature/Position	Self-rating of English ability*	Communicative tasks in English	Communicative tasks in Chinese	Source of Difficulty	Employee's Training interest	Duration of English language training requested
BE1-SD1	21-29 F	½ + 2	Internet banking; selling banking products	3	Reading English newspapers, company reports, memos, books on banking; writing proposals and memos	All other oral communicative tasks; reading Chinese newspapers	Financial content	Not stated	Not stated
BE2-SD2	21-29 F	3 + 1	Secretarial support	2(W) 3 (R)	Reading memos, reports, journals and all incoming materials for Branch Manager; writing minutes and business reports	All other oral communicative tasks	Not stated	Practical writing; Presentation skills	Three mths
BE3-SD3	21-29 F	2 + 3 mths	Customer services; retail banking products	3	Reading memos and circulars; writing emails, memos and letters	Dealings with customers	Financial content & lang demand	Writing business letters & reports	Two to three hours weekly for two to three mths
BE4-SD4	21-29 F	2 + 3	Marketing information officer	3	Statistical analysis and reading reference books, memos and emails; writing memos and emails	All other oral communicative tasks	Not stated	Presentation skills	Two hours weekly for two to four weeks
BE5-SD5	30-39 M	6 + 1	Information systems projects and workflow study	3	Reading computer manuals; writing post-implementation review reports, user requirement documents and planning and scheduling documents	Meetings to discuss user requirements	Not stated	Writing reports and minutes	Two to three hours per session for twenty sessions
BE6-SD6	30-39 M	6 + 2	IT support and database designer	3	Reading technical manuals; writing procedural guides and requests to IT Dept.; speaking with foreign vendors twice yearly	Meetings with Chinese colleagues	Lang demand	Writing & speaking	Two to three hours weekly for six mths for writing and three mths for speaking

Table 5.1 Overall information on employees in four Hong Kong banks

Bank Employee	Age & Sex	No. of Years Work Experience Current & Past	Job Nature/Position	Self-rating of English ability*	Communicative tasks in English	Communicative tasks in Chinese	Source of Difficulty	Employee's Training interest	Duration of English language training requested
BE7-HD1	21-29 F	4½ + 0	Investment analyst	4	Reading term sheets and emails; writing term sheets, product features and emails; speaking with foreign counter parties, attending seminars and luncheon meetings	Dealing with Chinese counter parties	Lang demand – social English	Oral English for daily usage	One to two hours weekly for one to two years
BE8-HD2	21-29 F	2 + 0	Retail deposits product officer	3(W) 4(R)	Writing proposals, emails and rules and regulations for customers (bilingual)	Discussions with Chinese colleagues and outside designers; writing promotional materials and rules and regulations for customers (bilingual)	Lang demand and legal issues	Writing bank documents/business writing; Presentation skills	Two hours per session for three to four sessions
BE9-HD3	21-29 F	1½ mths + 0	Personal assistant to Head of Human Resources Division	4	Reading all incoming mail for Head of HR and English newspapers; writing minutes, memos, reports, emails, translating customer complaints into English	Handling customer complaints over the phone and discussions with colleagues; reading Chinese newspapers	Human Resources content	Effective writing; Oral communication	One to two days; Not stated
BE10-HD4	21-29 F	3mths + 6	Corporate communications officer	4	Reading English newspapers; translating Chinese news items into English summaries; editing internal newsletter and brochures	All other oral communicative tasks; reading Chinese newspapers; reading and correcting Chinese translations of bank brochures; writing Chinese advertisements	Financial content	Presentation skills; Mandarin	One hour weekly for three mths; continuously for Mandarin through different levels

Table 5.1 Overall information on employees in four Hong Kong banks

Bank Employee	Age & Sex	No. of Years Work Experience Current & Past	Job Nature/Position	Self-rating of English ability*	Communicative tasks in English	Communicative tasks in Chinese	Source of Difficulty	Employee's Training interest	Duration of English language training requested
BE11-MB1	21-29 F	1 + 2	Management trainee (credit research)	4(W) 5(R)	Oral communication with non-Chinese colleagues; reading research reports, publications, memos and emails; writing credit reviews, research reports, emails; translating Chinese data into English	Discussions with Chinese colleagues and Chinese companies; reading Chinese newspapers and company reports	Financial content & lang demand (time factor)	Public speaking; Presentation skills	One day
BE12-MB2	21-29 M	1 + 0	Management trainee (analyst)	4(W) 5(R)	Discussions with non-Chinese colleagues and other bankers; making presentations; reading reports, legal documents and emails; writing reports and emails	Discussions with Chinese colleagues; writing handwritten notes to Chinese colleagues	Financial content; lang demand (time factor) & social English	Presentation skills; Negotiation skills	Two days; one mth later, another two days; six mths later , evaluation and further training
BE13-MB3	21-29 M	5mths + 5mths	Programmer analyst (systems integration)	3	Discussions with foreign vendors, consultants and Asian counterparts; searching the web and reading emails and memos; writing operation guides, manuals, instructions and reports	Attending meetings and training development teams	Lang demand – casual conversation	Not needed at present	Not stated
BE14-MB4	21-29 F	2 + 3	Deposits and investments, retail banking	3(W) 4(R)	Briefing sessions and presentations; reading promotional brochures and reference books; writing proposals, marketing briefs, emails and memos	All oral communicative tasks with internal and external parties; reading promotional brochures	Lang demand	Presentation skills; Speaking skills; Writing reports	Half day; One hour weekly for 10 weeks for speaking and writing

Table 5.1 Overall information on employees in four Hong Kong banks

Bank Employee	Age & Sex	No. of Years Work Experience Current & Past	Job Nature/Position	Self-rating of English ability*	Communicative tasks in English	Communicative tasks in Chinese	Source of Difficulty	Employee's Training interest	Duration of English language training requested
BE15-AB1	30-39 F	3 + 3	Corporate communications officer	3	Reporting to Head of Corporate Communication, attending departmental meetings; reading English newspapers and memos; writing reports and minutes; translating from Chinese into English for news summaries	Telephone conversations with external vendors, discussions with the Chinese press, meetings with Chinese colleagues; reading Chinese newspapers; translating English into Chinese for newsletter	Lang demand	Business letters and report writing; Business conversations; Negotiations; Conducting meetings	Twenty hours
BE16-AB2	21-29 F	2 + 3	Employee relations/ Corporate communications officer	3	Reporting to CEO and Head of Corporate Communication; reading English newspapers and memos; taking notes at dinner meetings; writing memos and reports; translating Chinese into English for bosses in both oral and written forms	Answering the hotline; reading Chinese newspapers; jotting down notes; translating from English into Chinese	Lang demand; employee relations problems	Speaking; Report and memo writing	Two hours weekly; one month for speaking and two months for writing

*** Poor Average Excellent**

1 2 3 4 5

R: reading

W: writing

5.3 Notes on transcription conventions

All the reporting in this and the following sections on individual informants is written so as to situate the action and work in the present. As stated earlier, I have chosen to use the exact words of the informants in an attempt to portray their views as faithfully as possible rather than paraphrasing or summarising what they have said. **Thus, in order to preserve the way the informants spoke to me, I have not corrected their English according to the norms of Standard English.** I have also decided to dispense with the use of ***sic***. In some instances where I think the sentence may be otherwise difficult to comprehend, I have inserted missing words in square brackets [ ]. Similarly, I have also used square brackets [ ] with my explanations inserted in those instances where I have tried to clarify something. In order to facilitate the reading of the transcripts, I have taken out many of the *mhuhs* and *uhuhs* which were originally uttered by the interviewees or by me, and which were originally transcribed. Hesitations, nonsense words such as *er...er* and excessive repetitions and instances of stuttering have also been removed from the transcriptions. The signs used in the transcription of texts are as follows:

[ ] indicates that additional information has been added by me
[...] indicates that part of the transcript has been omitted
... indicates a short pause
... ... indicates a long pause
( ) indicates an unclear passage which could not be adequately transcribed
Boldface denotes emphasis by the interviewee or me
I stands for myself (the interviewer), while the names of the interviewees are pseudonyms to protect their identity.

I have used two levels of identification for the 16 informants. At the first level, I have used BE1 (Bank Employee 1) to BE16 (Bank Employee 16). At the second level, I have used letters and numbers to identify which bank they come from, for example, SD1 to SD6 are employees from the same bank; HD1 to HD4 are those from the second bank; MB1 to MB4 are those from the third bank; and AB1 to AB2 are those from the fourth bank. Only in tables and diagrams throughout the thesis have I used the complete set of identification, e.g. BE1-SD1; in analysing the transcribed data in chapters 5, 6 and 7, I have only used BE1 to BE16 to tag the informants at the start of each one of the transcribed interview accounts; elsewhere, such as in writing the summaries of my findings, I have used only the second set of identification code to refer to an informant – e.g. SD1.

5.4 Interviews with the 16 informants on job nature and language use at work

Table 5.2 SD Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE1-SD1	Vicky Wong (Female)
BE2-SD2	Fiona Fan (Female)
BE3-SD3	Catherine Leung (Female)
BE4-SD4	Ida Law (Female)
BE5-SD5	Rex Ho (Male)
BE6-SD6	Kenneth Kwok (Male)

5.4.1 BE1-SD1: Vicky Wong

Internet banking, loans and overdraft facilities

Assistant Account Officer, Commercial Banking Division

5.4.1.1 Background

The first person I interviewed at SD Bank was Vicky Wong who graduated with a BBA in Marketing from the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong in 1996 and is in her twenties. She has been working at SD Bank for six months. Prior to joining the bank, she worked for two years as a merchandiser in an oil company. She is in the commercial banking department which is a relatively small department with about forty people. She is at this time working on a special project to launch Internet banking before the end of the year and the anticipated problems of Y2K. Her specific role is to market Internet banking to customers and this involves planning a marketing strategy and thinking about the full range of services to be provided. Apart from this project, Vicky's regular job is to sell banking products meaning to make loans and overdraft facilities to business clients. For this task, she has to make on-site visits to prospective clients' offices or factories to see how their companies operate and to make a risk assessment.

5.4.1.2 The nature of Vicky's job

One of Vicky's tasks is to assess the risks involved before giving loans to corporate clients:

(BE1)

Vicky: We will also read the newspaper to know what's happen currently, overseas or in the Hong Kong economy. So we have a basic concept of how the business is going, is good or not.

[...] Then we have to see their financial report for three or four years to calculate some ratio and then write a proposal whether we suggest our bank to lend money to the client or not and why. If yes, then how we forecast [the] bank can make profit from this client.

I: I see. So ... normally do you take a very cautious position?

Vicky: Cautious position.

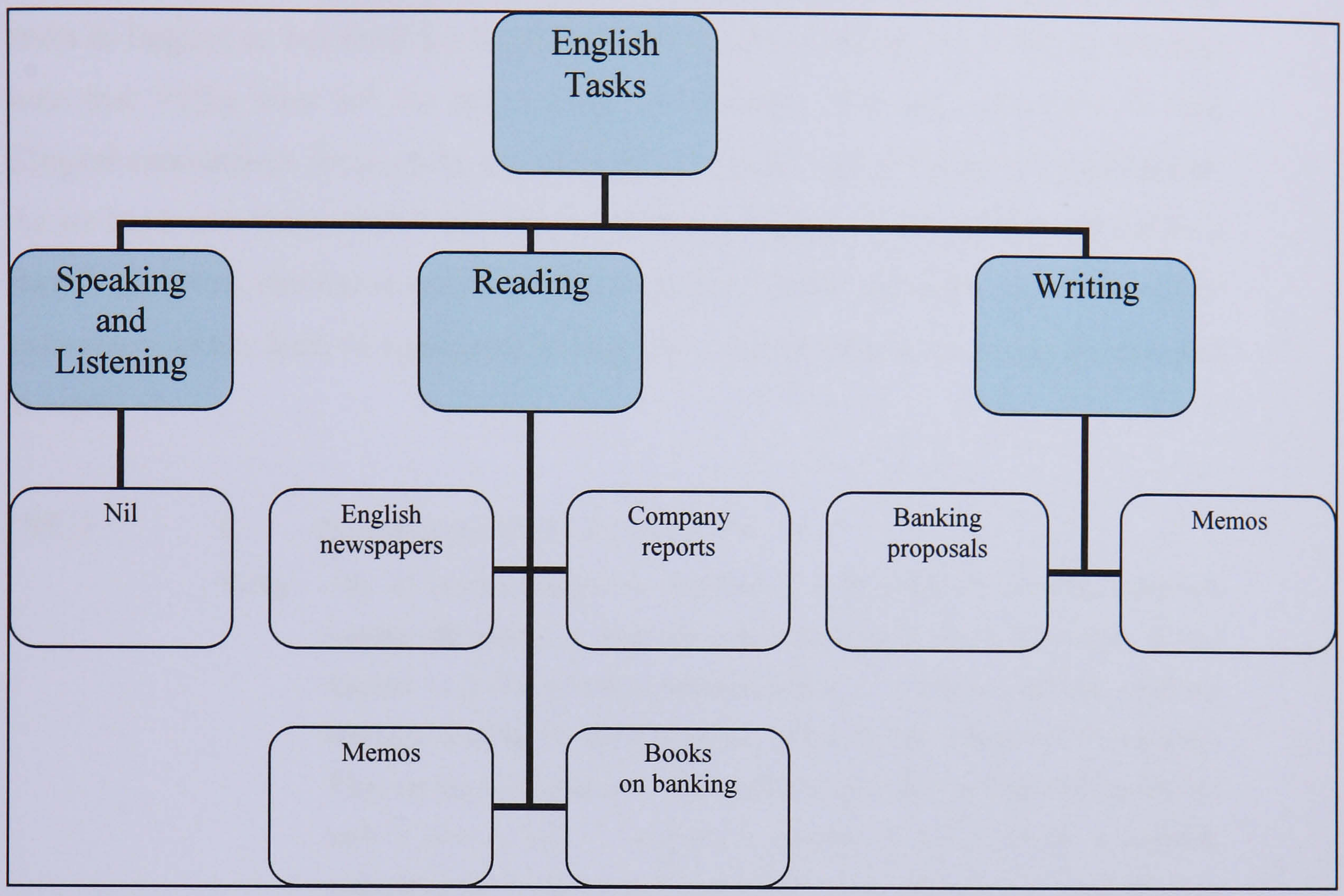
[...] And maybe our banking knowledge is not enough...er.. we are not professional enough to assess the risk we are taking now so er... if the client cannot pay back the money, the bank will lost. Then we have a bad record.

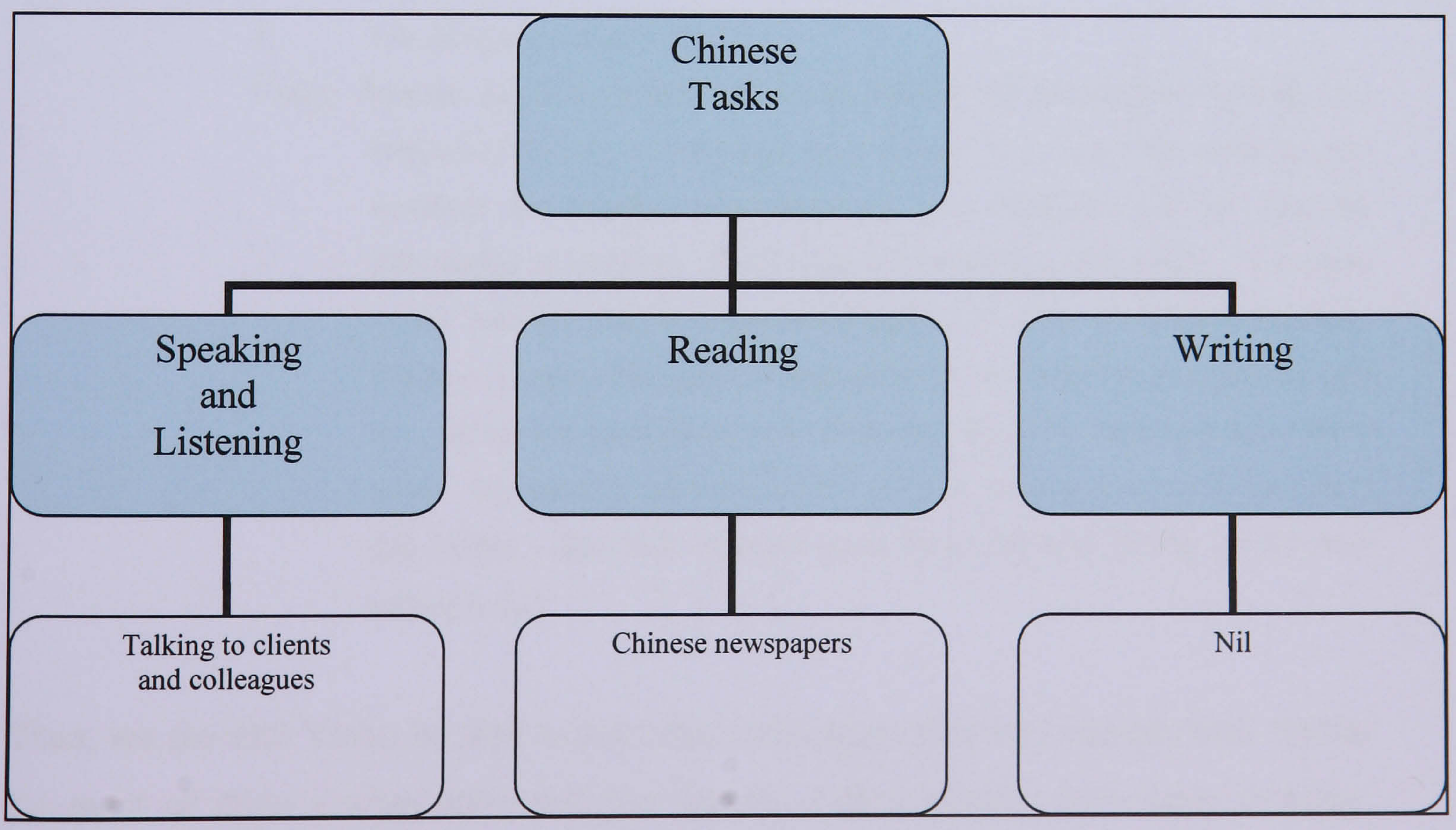
I: I see.

Vicky: [...] Of course the upper management may suspect, is there any under table? You may have some under table agreement with the client, so you lend the money to the client. So we need ... to very considerate. [*to consider the risk very carefully*] [...] [My] major task is selling the banking product, but currently I'm doing the marketing job [for] internet banking.

She explains to me that she is currently handling a special assignment to launch the Internet banking service. She begins with planning a marketing strategy to provide a full range of services online. Diagram 5.1 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Vicky performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.1 BE1-SD1: Vicky Wong's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Internet Banking, loans and overdraft facilities
Commercial Banking Division





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.1.3 Language Vicky uses at work

Diagram 5.1 shows that Vicky does not need to perform any speaking and listening tasks in English as her need for English is restricted to reading and writing. We also note that Vicky does not do any writing in Chinese. But she does have to read Chinese newspapers for her job, and she talks to clients and colleagues in Cantonese. As we have seen from what Vicky tells us about carrying out risk assessment before a loan is approved, she has to read both English and Chinese materials, and write up her assessment in the form of a proposal in English. I ask her about the language she uses at work:

(BE1) I: What language do you use on the job?

Vicky: Oh, of course Cantonese. [laughs] [...] Reading the banking proposal, reading the memos or send out some correspondence to our clients we use English [...] But normal communications ... I mean speaking, speaking language usually we use Cantonese. Most of my clients is not foreigner. They are the local people. [...] [For the writing tasks in English] actually we have a how to say ... adopted a system of how to write a financial proposal, how to write a call report from client. **We have a standard.** [my emphasis]

I: You have a standard format?

Vicky: **You can say it is a standard format, and we use the similar wording,** [my emphasis] the set of wordings we will use. [...] I use the same format, wordings **for nearly every customer.** [my emphasis] Just the financial information is different. [But] when I transfer to a new team ... the client ... the company size is larger and bigger [...], some are listed companies. We have to use some types of arguments to persuade the management that er... we have to grant those type of banking facilities, banking loan to those client. We need to use some of the skills in writing so there is need [for] this format. But each different team have different format [to do their writing tasks].

Thus, we see that Vicky as well as her other colleagues follow a standardised format for most of their writing tasks and this format differs slightly from team to team. Whether this poses a problem for Vicky will be discussed in the latter section under difficulties encountered.

5.4.2 BE2-SD2: Fiona Fan

Secretary to General Manager, Branch Management Department

5.4.2.1 Background

The second person I interviewed at SD Bank was Fiona Fan. She is in her twenties and has been working at the bank for three years. She graduated from the City University of Hong Kong in 1994 with a Bachelor's degree in Public and Social Administration. Her previous work experience was in the insurance field where she worked for one year. In her current job, she provides secretarial support to the General Manager of the Branch Management Department as well as to the two zone managers – one in the Hong Kong zone and another in the Kowloon and the New Territories zone.

5.4.2.2 The nature of Fiona's job

A lot of Fiona's time is spent on reading. She estimates that it takes up about 40 percent of her day's work. This is what she says about the reading tasks:

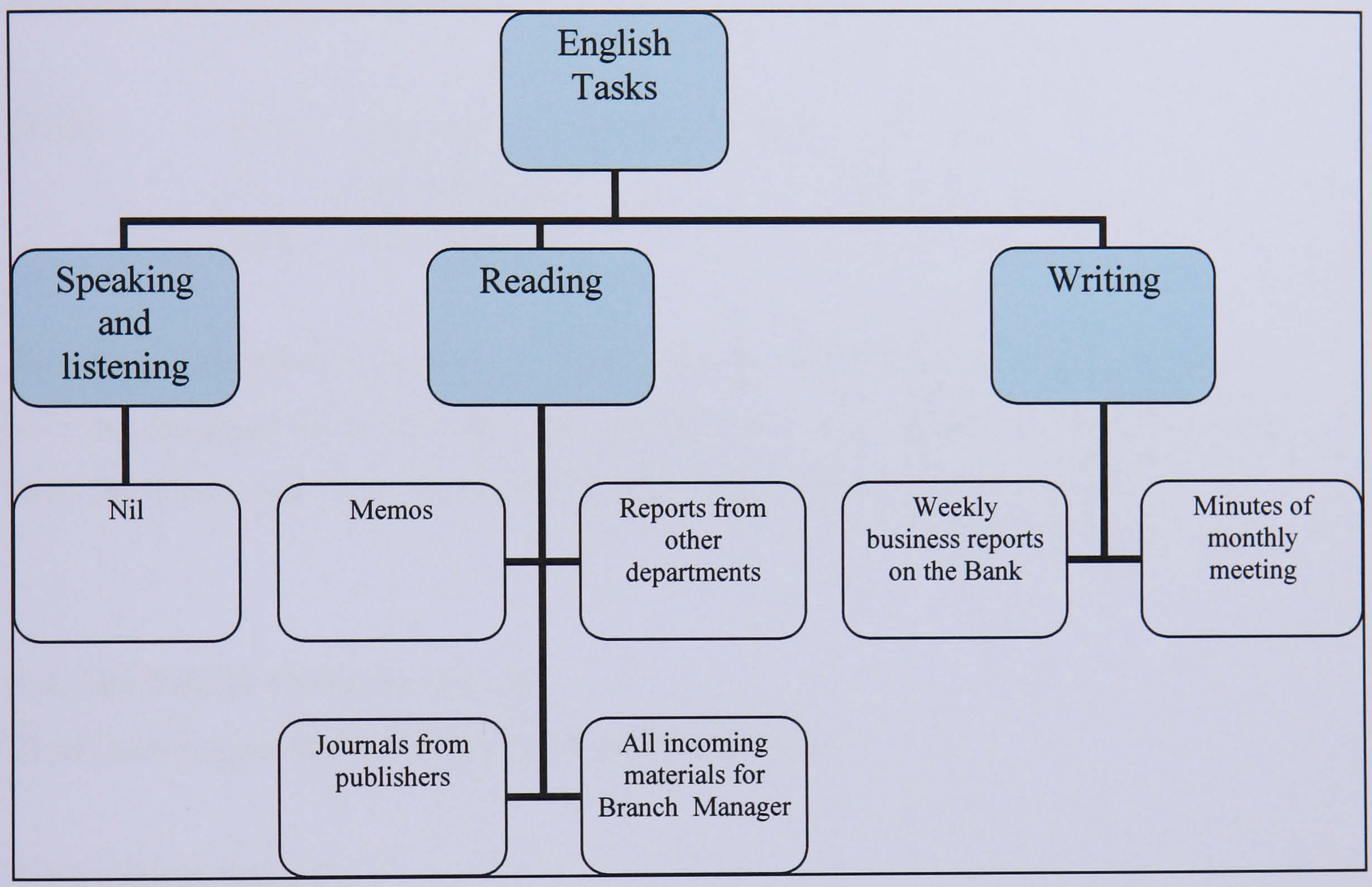
(BE2) Fiona: I read all incoming documents for my boss. I have to read memos, reports from other departments, and journals from publishers.

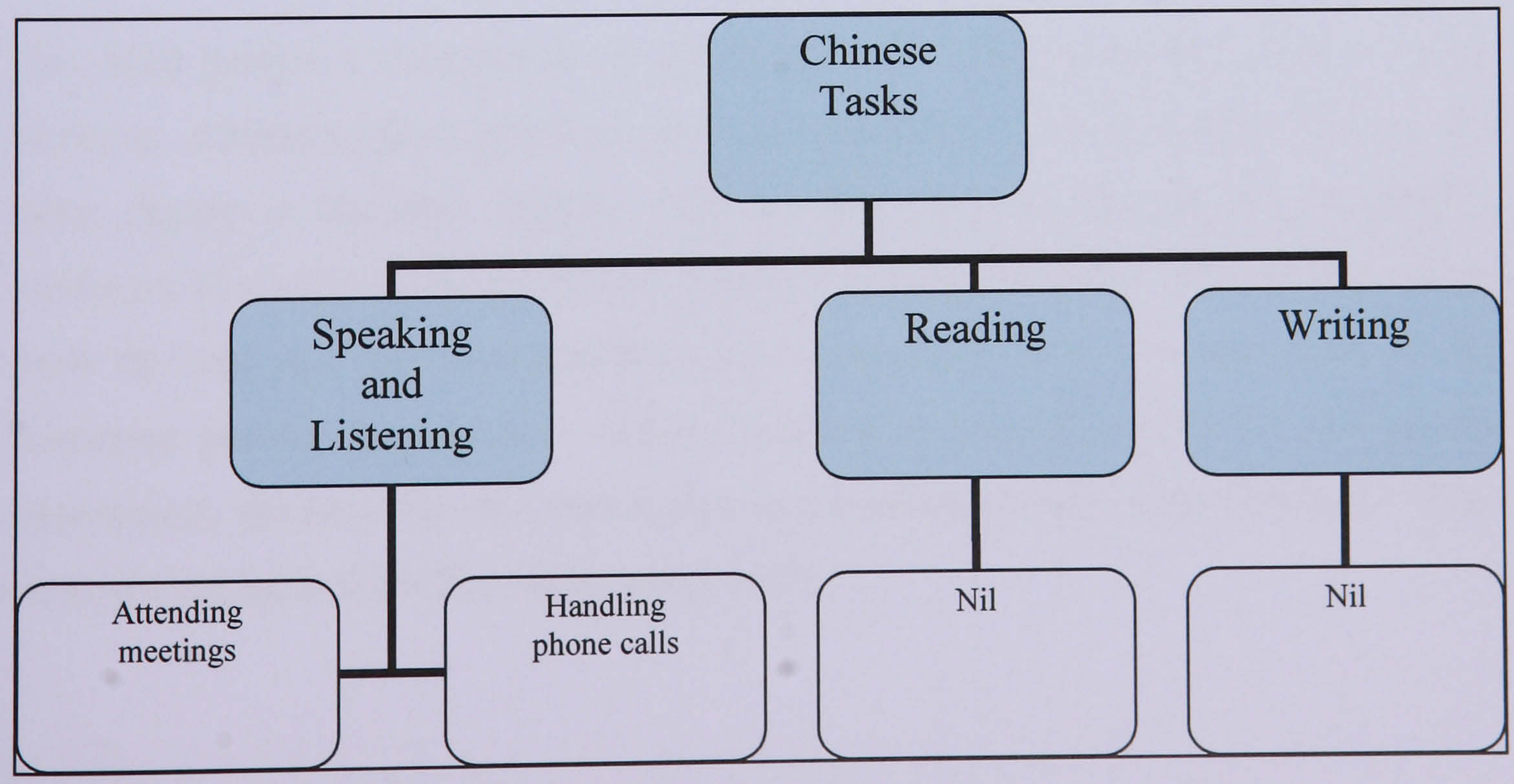
Fiona also has to write reports which review the business of the different branches. These reports are mostly figures of deposits, credit cards, personal loans, and life insurance products. Most of these reports are written on a weekly basis, but some are done on a daily basis. In addition, there is a monthly meeting for all the 39 branch managers and all the operations officers, numbering about a hundred people in all. I ask Fiona what is discussed at these monthly meetings and she tells me:

(BE2) Fiona: [We] review branch issues about operations and other business [...] It last for more than one hour from 6:30 to 8:00pm.

Her other duties include taking all the incoming calls for the General Manager as well as overseeing operational matters such as cash management, maintenance and renovation works at the branches. Diagram 5.2 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Fiona performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.2 BE2-SD2: Fiona Fan's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Secretary to General Manager, Branch Management





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.2.3 Language Fiona uses at work

All the reading materials that she looks at are in English. These are the documents in the in-tray of the General Manager. She also writes business reports in English. The reports are mostly figures reviewing the business at the branches. Fiona also takes the minutes at the monthly meeting of branch managers and operations officers. She tells me more about this writing task:

(BE2) Fiona: I write the minutes of monthly meeting. It's in English.
I: How long are they?
Fiona: About four pages.

As is to be expected, the incoming phone calls that she handles are mostly in Chinese, as is the language used for oral communication in all the meetings. As can be seen from the above, she reads and writes in English but speaks mostly in Cantonese.

5.4.3 BE3-SD3: Catherine Leung

Retail banking products, Customer Service Department

5.4.3.1 Background

The third person I interviewed at SD Bank was Catherine Leung, who is in her twenties. Catherine graduated from the City University of Hong Kong in 1997 with a BBA degree in Business Studies. She worked for three months as a marketing executive in a manufacturing company before joining SD Bank. She has been at the bank for one year and nine months at the time of the interview and works in the Customer Service Department. When I ask her to give the reason for joining this department, she says that she wants more opportunities to deal with customers rather than just sitting in the office doing paper work.

5.4.3.2 The nature of Catherine's job

Catherine talks about the importance of providing good service to the bank's customers as well as selling retail products:

(BE3) Catherine: From my point of view, [...] customer service in the bank [...] you can say is sales. First of all you have to provide the good quality service for the customer and then I think in this economic environment, you have to, another very important thing is to sell the retail product. [...] Try your best to sell more.

I: What products are you trying to sell?

Catherine: For example, credit card, life insurance and some personal loans, etc [...] But I also need to do other things er ... maybe help the customer to open their accounts er ... if they have any complaint the first people that the customer will find I think is the customer service [personnel] because they sit at the branch hall, at the bank hall [in the lobby area].

She also handles customer complaints:

(BE3) I: Do customers complain a lot?

Catherine: Sometimes.

I: What do they complain about?

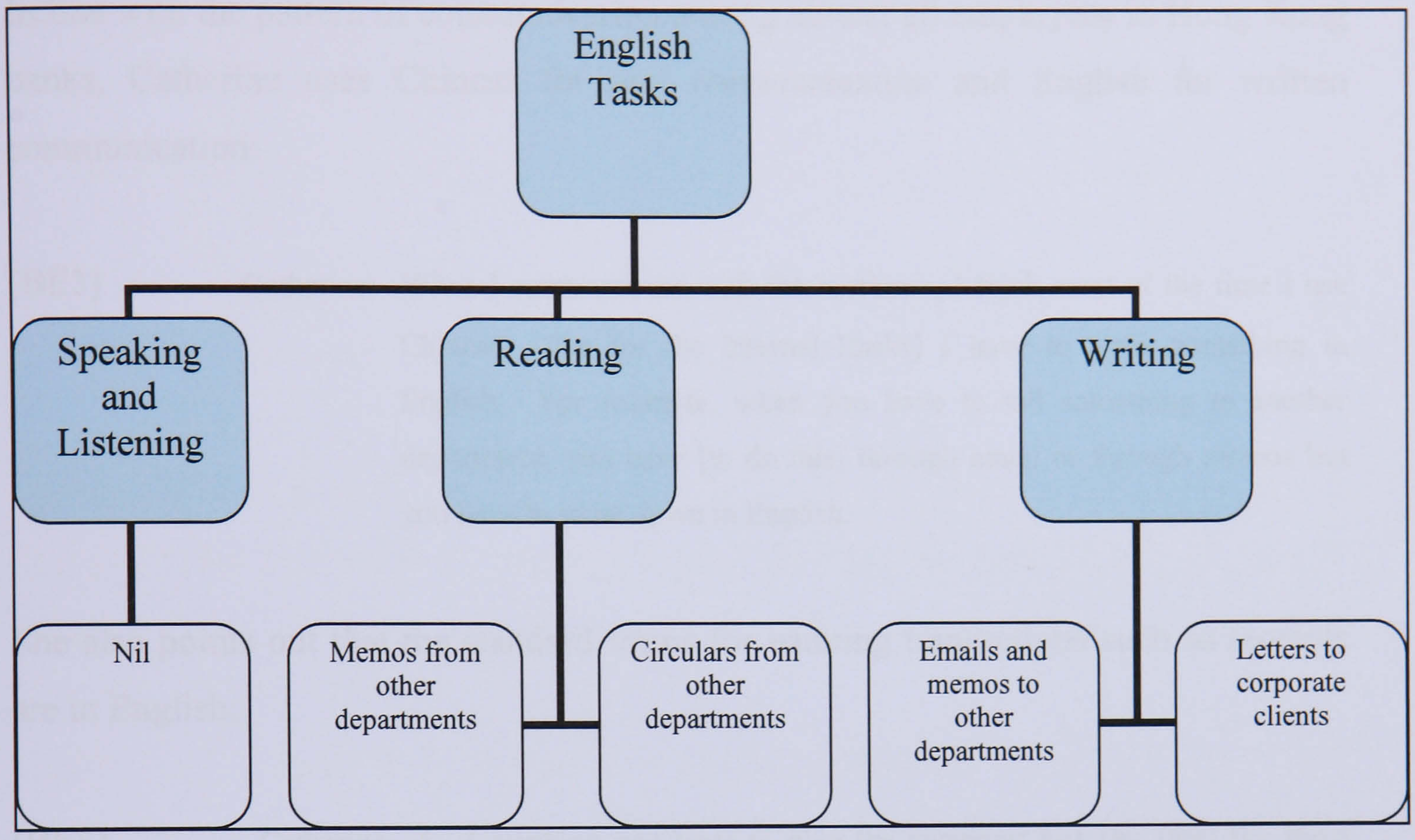
Catherine: They may complain [about] the credit department or maybe complain about the charges. They are more emphasise on the charges.

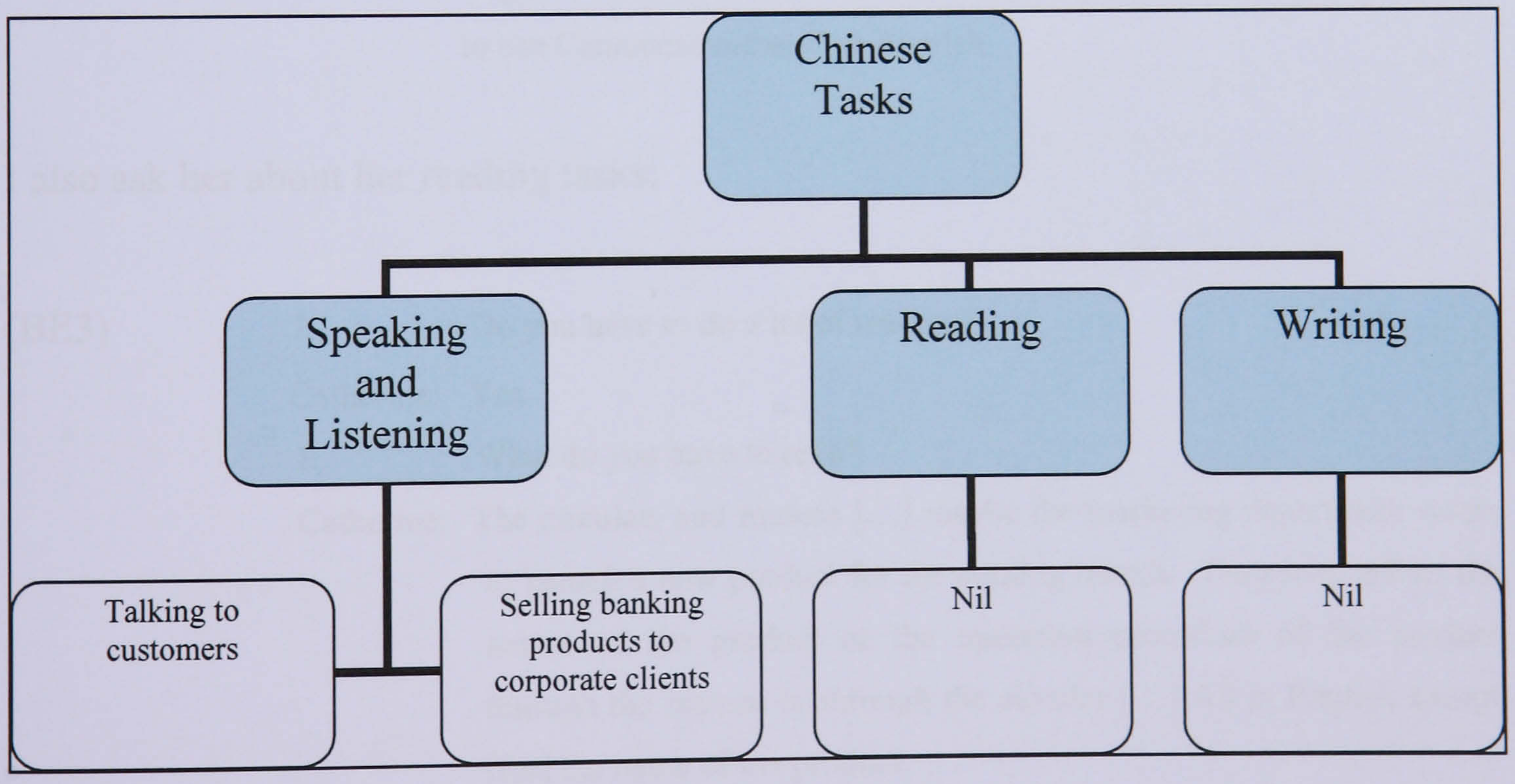
I: I see.

Catherine: Why the bank charge me?

Diagram 5.3 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Catherine performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.3 BE3-SD3: Catherine Leung's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Retail Banking Products, Customer Service Department





*****Nil*** denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.3.3 Language Catherine uses at work

In line with the pattern of communication among almost all employees in Hong Kong banks, Catherine uses Chinese for oral communication and English for written communication:

(BE3) Catherine: When I communicate with the customer, I think most of the time I use Chinese. But for the internal [tasks] I have to write something in English. For example, when you have to tell something to another department, you have [to do this] through email or through memos but you have to write down in English.

She also points out that the standard forms for banking transactions such as receipts are in English:

(BE3) Catherine: [...] anything you have to give the customer just like [for] the fixed deposit you have to give a receipt to the customer. The receipt are all in English instead of Chinese. But when I speak to the customer, I have to use Cantonese rather than English.

I also ask her about her reading tasks:

(BE3) I: Do you have to do a lot of reading?

Catherine: Yes.

I: What do you have to read?

Catherine: The circulars and memos [...] maybe the marketing department wants to launch a new product for the coming month. They may tell us the nature of the product or the operation procedure of the product through the memos or through the circular [...] All in English except [for] the name of the product.

So we see that her reading tasks are done in English. Catherine also tells me how she deals with customer complaints:

(BE3) Catherine: I have to follow up [on] the complaint to see it is which department I have to refer to. But [...] there is no need to write down [in a] memo

> [...] because actually we have a complaint form. When the customer want to write down something to the people who are in the senior management level, I have to give him or her a form [...] The customer can write [it] down in Chinese or in English.

For her writing tasks, she tells me that she translates from Chinese to English:

(BE3) Catherine: [...] most of the time because I'm Chinese, I think in Chinese first and then translate into English.

For the purpose of selling banking products to clients, she uses both English and Chinese. First she writes a letter in English, and then she makes a presentation in Chinese:

(BE3)

Catherine: I have to write a letter to a client to see whether we can go to their company to promote our product.
I: I see. Is the writing in English?
Catherine: Yes. Most of the time. But I don't [have to] do this frequently.
I: Do you have to give presentations?
Catherine: Maybe just go to the company of our client to tell something about the nature of our product [...] That's always in Chinese.

5.4.4 BE4-SD4: Ida Law

Marketing Information Officer

5.4.4.1 Background

The fourth person I interviewed at SD Bank was Ida Law who is also in her twenties. She has been in her present job for two years and before joining the bank, she worked for three years in a different field. She graduated from the City University of Hong Kong in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in Quantitative Analysis for Business, a degree in Statistics. It is interesting to note that of the six employees I interviewed at this bank, four (Fiona, Catherine, Ida and Rex) are from the City University of Hong Kong. It is also interesting to note that **none** of the other informants in the other three banks is from this university. Could this point to the possibility that SD Bank has a recruitment drive at this university? However, there is inadequate data from this study to confirm this.

5.4.4.2 The nature of Ida's job

Ida's work as a Marketing Information Officer involves a good deal of numerical analysis. She says that she likes working with numbers and that is why she decided to enter banking. Her job in the bank gives her plenty of opportunity to analyse numbers. I subsequently found out that Ida's work is called data mining. Ida explains the nature of her job in detail:

(BE4)

I: What are you marketing?

Ida: Do you know what is marketing?

I: You're selling something.

Ida: Yes, right. [laughs] Exactly. [we both laugh]. We need to package our product ... we need to design our product to suit our customer needs just like ... for loan product, we need to [know] what price should be suitable for our customer. So I need to do a lot of information gathering from our competitor and also need to do a lot of statistics to [find out] our customers' tastes and to find out what type of product should be need for them [...] loans, deposits, a lot of things. Yes, all relate to the retail banking.

She explains how she carries out the necessary research:

(BE4)

Ida: We don't need to meet the customers but we do the research just like you now [laughs] do the research. We need to contact the research house or we direct[ly] contact to our Customer Service colleagues.

I: So you want to have an idea of what your average customer [is like]?

Ida: Yes. [...] For example, [for] credit card, I need to know [the] portfolio of our credit card customer ... they are older person? Or they are the young person? And where they spend? And I need to do this report to my boss and they will do a lot of plan [ning] according to this portfolio to make them to use our credit card more, and to do a lot of promotion, campaign [aimed at our target customers].

I ask Ida what she finds out about the customer profile from her statistical analysis:

(BE4)	I:	So what kind of customers do you have at SD?
	Ida:	[laughs]
	I:	For example, what age group? What income? What do they spend on?
	Ida:	Er ... is that confidential? [We both laugh]
	I:	Maybe just a little bit so that I can understand?
	Ida:	Okay. Just a little bit. Mainly, they are in the young age group, not the aged one.
	I:	So twenty to thirty [years old]?
	Ida:	Yes, something like that. [...] they will spend because our interest rate is very low. [laughs] I sell my product to you. [We both laugh] [...] The interest rate is around 18% per year only.
	I:	Compared to what in other banks?
	Ida:	Compare to ... it's very low because [in the] other bank is 24%. Maybe some is 30%. So it is very low [among the banks] in Hong Kong.

She explains to me how many customers use their credit cards:

(BE4)	Ida:	We will catch a lot of persons to make the cash advance, to [take] a loan on credit card.
	I:	That means they don't pay up their bills?
	Ida:	Yes, they don't pay up the bill.

Ida then explains that there are two parts to the credit card business – cash advance and retail purchase:

(BE4)	Ida:	[...] because the credit card business have two part – the cash advance and the retail purchase. Retail purchase that means that you have fifty-six days [that are] free of interest. And the other part [of the credit card] is you can go to the ATM (automated teller machine) and make the cash on hand, cash advance.
	I:	So this cash is a loan?
	Ida:	Yes, it is a loan.
	I:	What is the interest rate?
	Ida:	Eighteen percent.
	I:	Eighteen percent per year?

Ida: Yes, per year. So we will catch a lot of person [who] just like to make the cash advance. So most of our customers will do a lot of cash advance rather than retail spending.

I: Oh, I see. Not so much retail spending?

Ida: [It's] fifty-fifty.

She tells me about the significance of her data mining work but at the same time she points out that some of this information is confidential:

(BE4)

I: [The customers] have credit card bills of what? Like, one or two thousand dollars?

Ida: [laughs] I can't tell [you] this. [both of us laugh]

I: It would be interesting. It is quite interesting to find out. [laughs]

Ida: Yes, my finding is very interesting. **My boss will wow!** [her emphasis] Because they will not know a lot about our customer portfolio if I don't do the statistic analysis.

I: Are you the only one doing this or more people are doing this?

Ida: In this bank and in my department only two persons [are doing this]. Two to three person. Two-and-a-half person. [laughs] Actually, not lots of people doing this job.

I: No huh?

Ida: Yes. Because not too much company know this job is very important for them.

She tells me that banking is a very competitive industry:

(BE4)

Ida: Because in Hong Kong the bank is a major industry.

I: Yeah.

Ida: They need to know a lot of thing [about] their competitor.

I: Right.

Ida: And also they need to know the market very well to plan their product. But for the other industry just like the small retail industry, they don't need to … they don't need to [do] this.

Ida then explains to me that while quantitative analysts are important in the bank, they are not needed in large numbers. The time-consuming part of the job is the gathering of data and not the data analysis:

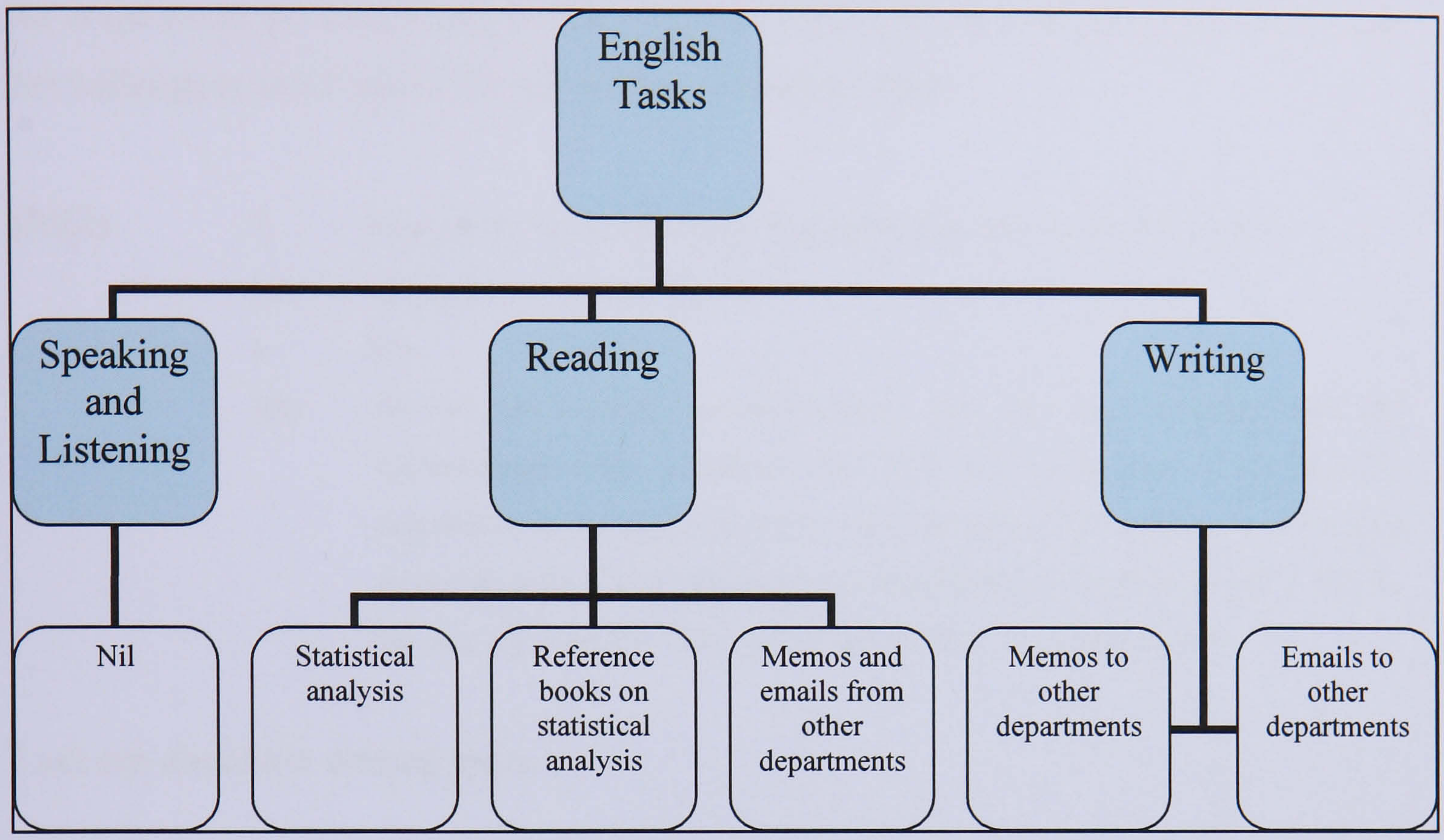
(BE4)	Ida:	[...] The most task to spend the time [the task that needs the most time spent on it] and to need a lot of person is just to gather information. After the gather information, you just [need] two or three person to analysis, that's good enough.

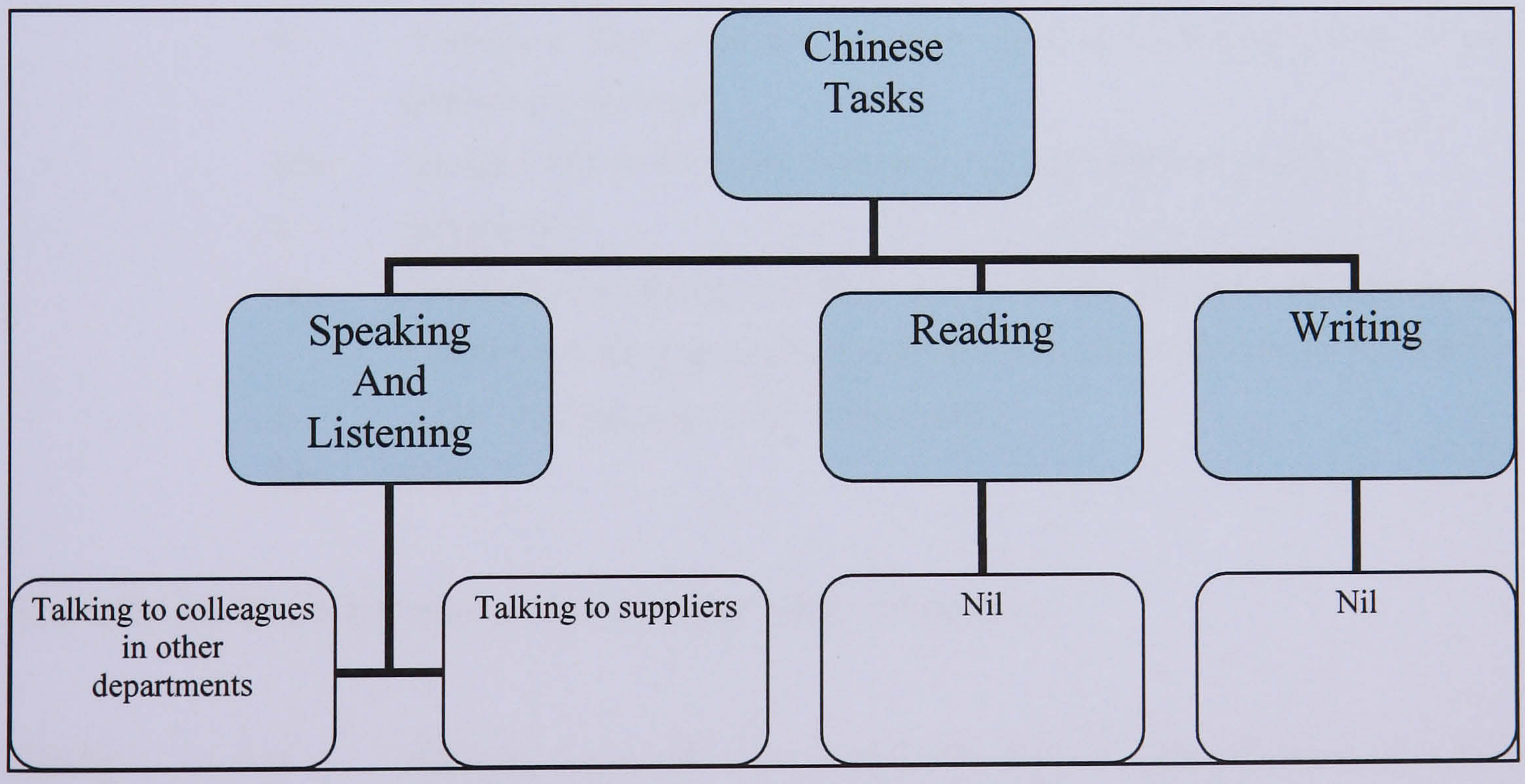
At the end of this interesting and informative interview, Ida once again reminds me to keep the information confidential:

(BE4)	Ida:	[...] Okay. Keep it confidential. [laughs]
	I:	Oh yeah. Okay. No, I'm not going to write about your credit card. Just the nature of the work in general terms. I understand that in the banks there's sensitive information.
	Ida:	Yes, right.
	I:	So it has to be protected.
	Ida:	Yes, right.

Hence, from the above, we see that Ida's work in statistical analysis provides the bank with detailed information about its customers' spending patterns so that retail products may be developed to better suit their needs and be a better sell for the bank. Diagram 5.4 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Ida performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.4 BE4-SD4: Ida Law's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Marketing Information Officer





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.4.3 Language Ida uses at work

As is the norm in Hong Kong banks, Ida uses Cantonese for oral communication with her colleagues and English for her written communication:

(BE4)

I: Now, at the bank, how much English do you need to do your work?

Ida: As you know, it is local bank.

I: Yes.

Ida: So for the normal communication, just like the speaking and the communicate with colleagues, my boss, my subordinate, I just need to communicate in Cantonese only. And also even [if] I need to communicate to my supplier, I also just need to communicate in Cantonese only. But on the writing, I need to write the memo and the report in English.

I ask her about her writing tasks:

(BE4)

I: Any writing that you have to do?

Ida: Not too much.

I: I mean, is there some kind of spreadsheet or something? How do you produce all the work?

Ida: Mostly I will use the excel because it is a good software. [laughs]

I: [laughs too]

Ida: It can do a lot of chart and also a lot of tables so mostly … most of the time I would do a lot of spreadsheet and the chart rather than to write the report.

I: I see. So there is no written report really.

Ida: Yes.

She tells me about her oral communication with colleagues:

(BE4)

I: All right. So you do all these spreadsheets and all that. So the work is more with numbers, figures. Discussions? Do you need to discuss a lot?

Ida: Em …

I: With team members?

Ida: … Not too much.

I: Not that much discussion?

Ida: Yes.

I: So the work doesn't require that much communication both in Chinese or in English?

Ida:	**Actually, I need to get a lot of information from other department. So ... we will communicate in Cantonese.** [My emphasis]
I:	Oh. There's a lot of information from other departments?
Ida:	Yes, right.
I:	Mostly spoken?
Ida:	Yes, right.

I ask her when she needs to use English:

(BE4)

I:	Is there any occasion when you do use English?
Ida:	Er ... just written.
I:	Just written what?
Ida:	Just written the memo or email.
I:	For what purpose?
Ida:	For asking some information from other department. I need to send an email to them because [if] I cannot find them through the phone [...] I will send an email to them. And list out what information I need. And also [when I want] to confirm the job because we also need to ask the information technology department to write some programme for us to retrieve some data. So I also need to ask them to do a lot of programme. So I need to send an email to confirm the job.

When her requests for information are answered, they are sometimes in the form of memos and emails and she has to read these in English. In addition, she sometimes consults reference books to look up information for her statistical work.

5.4.5 BE5-SD5: Rex Ho

Assistant Manager

Organisation and Methods (O&M) Department

5.4.5.1 Background

The fifth person I interviewed at SD Bank was Rex Ho. He is in his thirties. Rex graduated in Quantitative Analysis for Business from the City University of Hong Kong, the same local university as three of his other colleagues interviewed. The degree is a combination of statistics, operations research and computing studies. As someone who has been with the bank for six years, he is one of the two employees interviewed who have been working for a relatively longer period. This is his second job after graduation. His first job which lasted one year was with a financial institute in a job of a similar nature. At SD bank, he is Assistant Manager in the Organisation and Methods (O&M) Department. His department serves as a bridge between the IT department and other departments.

5.4.5.2 The nature of Rex's job

Rex tells me that in the O&M Department, he works on IS (Information Systems)-related projects, and there are two parts to the job he does in the department:

(BE5)	Rex:	In IS project, there is several party involved like user IT person and we, [at] O&M, serve as a bridge between user and IT person. [We take] a coordinator role or take the project management role.
	I:	I see.
	Rex:	Beside I also responsible for some workflow study.
	I:	What is that?
	Rex:	[...] that means we will review the workflow of department.
	I:	Okay.
	Rex:	And advise some improvement, etc.
	I:	Uhum. Advise improvement.
	Rex:	To increase the efficiency.

He then explains how workflow study increases the working efficiency of the other departments at the bank:

(BE5)	Rex:	It is not necessary to improve our efficiency based on the technology [meaning to use more technology] [...] we study existing workflow and propose some re-arrangement. They may not need to have extra IT support.
	I:	Okay.
	Rex:	Maybe the existing workflow, can modify the existing workflow, can serve the purpose [meaning is adequate to serve the purpose].
	I:	Can you give an example? What you go in to see, what do you advise?
	Rex:	Maybe I give you some general situations.
	I:	Okay.
	Rex:	[...] Some work procedure they are adopt[ed] from many years ago.

I: Right.

Rex: Their colleague tell them to work like this and they just follow. They don't know why.

I: Yeah.

Rex: **They don't know why.** [his emphasis]

I: Yeah.

Rex: And because the environment is always changing, maybe this step may not be useful or valid again but they don't know the reason why they are doing this. So we study their whole workflow and then to see whether some step can be skipped or not. [...] Some step may become redundance.

I: If some steps become redundant, does that mean the member of staff may become redundant?

Rex: **No**. [his emphasis]

The O&M Department has a staff of 16 people, and they serve as a bridge between the IT Department and the other departments. The IT Department is the largest department in the bank with more than a hundred members of staff. I asked Rex to tell me more about the bridging role that the O&M Department plays:

(BE5)

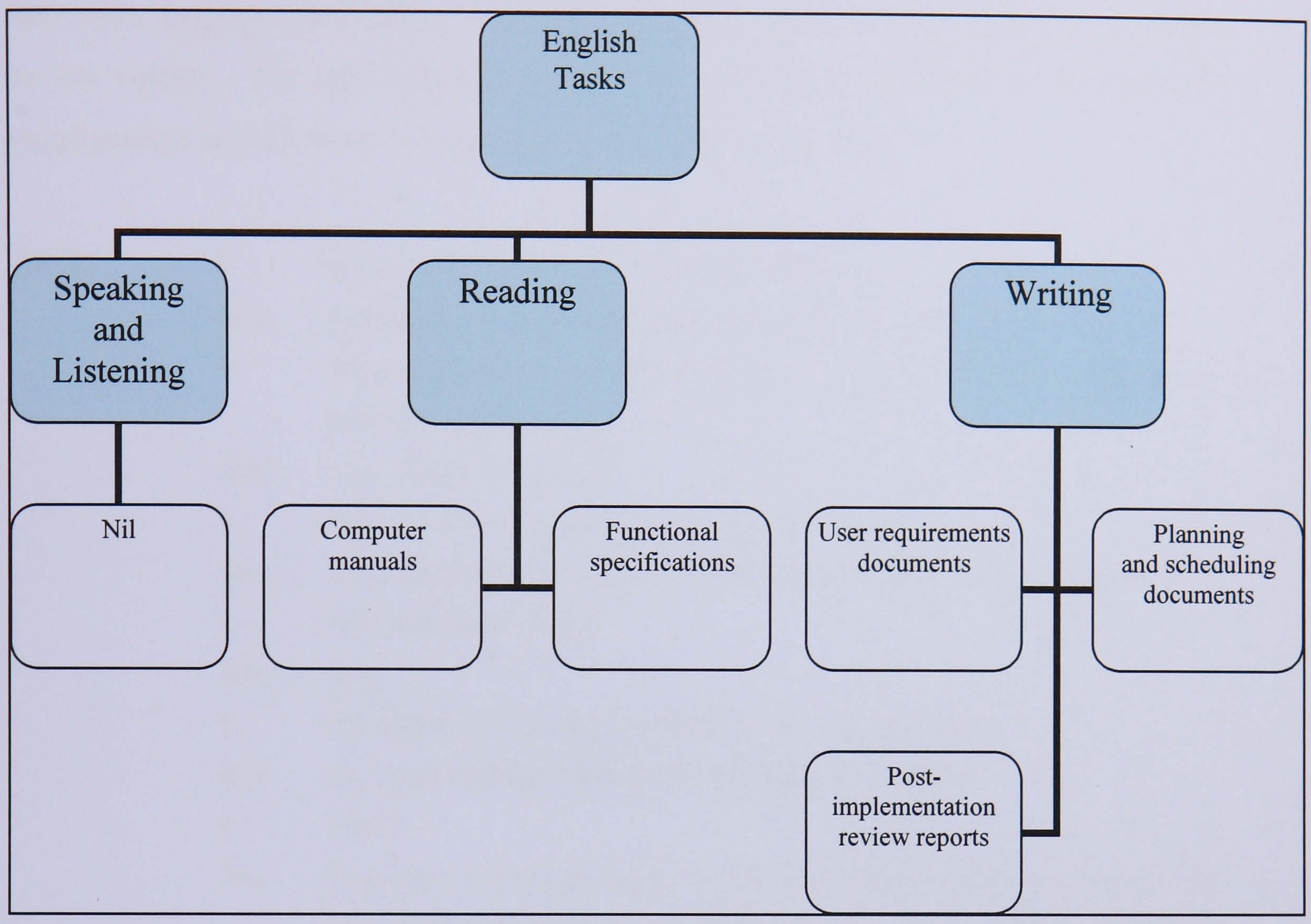
Rex: Before we kick off a project, we need some project leader or [someone] to monitoring the overall project. We [at] O&M will sometimes take the project manager work.

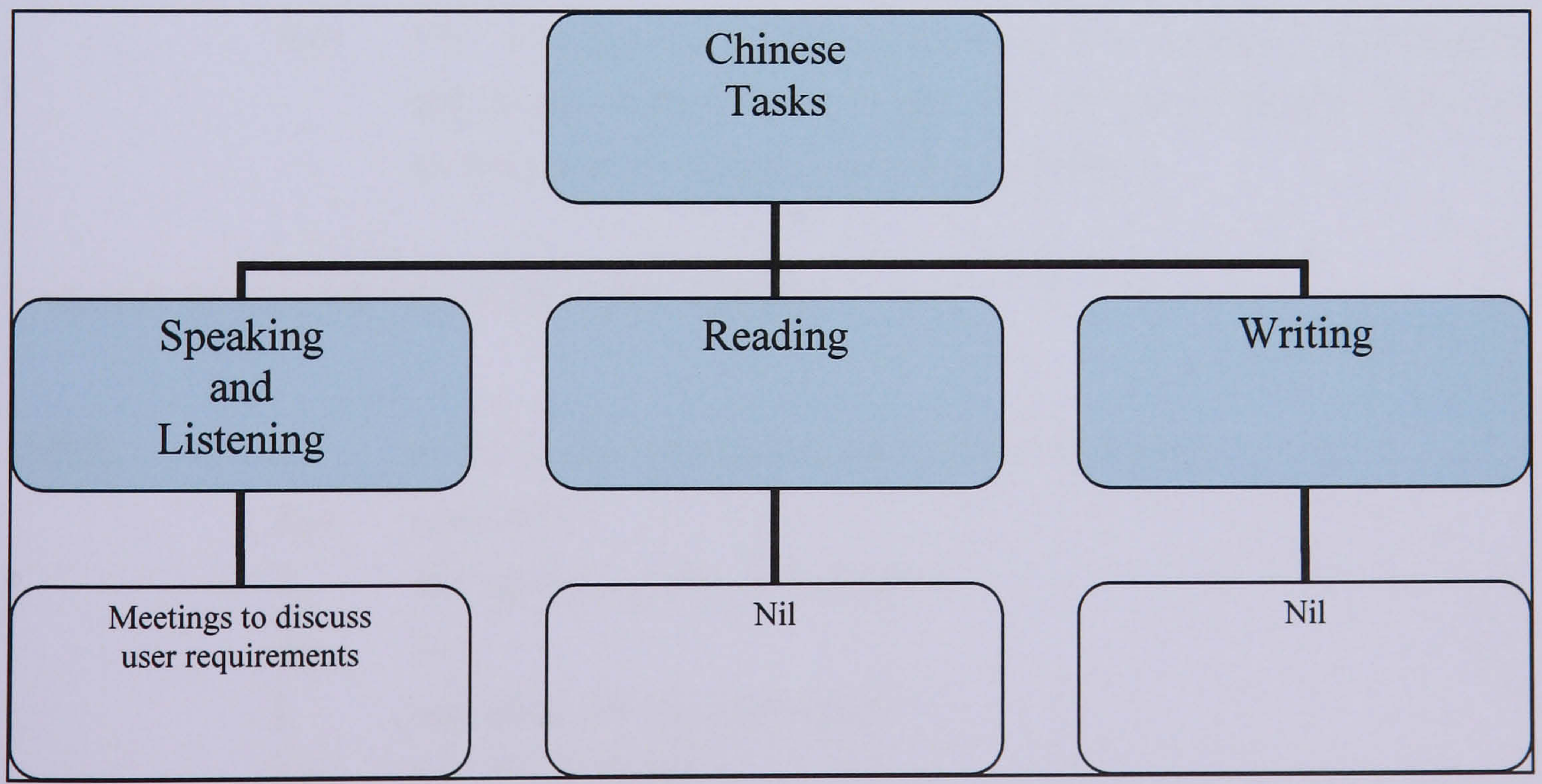
I: Again, can you give an example?

Rex: For example, I have participate in a operating system in a credit card centre. [...] So in this project I responsible for monitor the progress. [...] And also we are responsible to gather the requirement from the user and prepare a documentation about the user expectation on the system. And then IT person will base on these requirement to develop their documentation and to write their programme.

Diagram 5.5 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Rex has to perform at the bank.

Diagram 5.5 BE5-SD5: Rex Ho's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Assistant Manager, Organisation and Methods (O&M) Department





****Nil*** denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.5.3 Language Rex uses at work

Rex uses English for reading computer manuals and writing post-implementation review reports. He uses Chinese when he is conducting meetings to discuss user requirements and all other oral communicative tasks. He says:

(BE5)	I:	In the work you do, do you use any English?
	Rex:	I seldomly use English because most of the colleagues are Chinese.
	I:	What about written communication or the things you have to read? Do you have to do those things?
	Rex:	Yes. Mainly in English.
	I:	How much reading or writing do you have to do?
	Rex:	More than 99% is writing in English. [99% of the writing is in English]
	I:	99% writing in English?
	Rex:	Yes.
	I:	But most of your time is not taken up with writing, right?
	Rex:	Er… **quite heavily involved in writing.** [his emphasis]
	I:	Yeah?
	Rex:	Because […] we need to deliver some document like planning and […] the user requirement. We need to deliver both [of them]. Also is prepared by us.
	I:	Planning?
	Rex:	Yes. Like [for] the overall project, we need to issue the overall schedule and the post-implementation review. Or even some contingency plan. So we [are] quite heavily involved in documentation.

I ask him how much time is spent on writing:

(BE5)	I:	So this writing takes up how much of your work time?
	Rex:	About 60%.
	I:	Writing takes up 60% of work time?
	Rex:	Yes.
	I:	And all the writing is in English?
	Rex:	**Yes.** [his emphasis]

I next ask him about his reading tasks in English:

(BE5)	I:	Then do you have to do reading in English?

Rex: Yes. Also maybe they written some comment to me, also in English.

I: Written comments in English. Okay. From colleagues.

Rex: Yes. And other documentation like the functional specification deliver by our IT Department is also in English.

5.4.6 BE6-SD6: Kenneth Kwok

Systems Analyst/IT Support and Database Designer

Department of Management Information Systems (MIS)

5.4.6.1 Background

The sixth person I interviewed at SD Bank was Kenneth Kwok. He is in his thirties. Kenneth has been with the bank for six years. He started his working life as an office boy at another local bank but subsequently left his job to get an education in computer science through part-time distance learning with an Australian university from 1986 to 1990. After a series of different jobs, he joined SD Bank. Kenneth is someone who believes in continuously educating himself and he was, at the time of the interview, taking another distance learning course outside office hours for the degree of Masters in Accounting from another Australian university.

5.4.6.2 The nature of Kenneth's job

His work in the Department of MIS (Management Information System) involves providing IT support to other departments and database designing. His department has a staff of eight members and they produce a report to the management on the balance sheet, and a profit and loss report to describe the bank's performance. I ask Kenneth about his job in the bank:

(BE6) I: Tell me what you do here.

Kenneth: [...] I'm a technical person [...] The Management Information Service Department produce report to management such as the accounting report for balance sheet, [and] P and L (profit and loss) for forecast modelling [...] Also I provide the interface between the data from IT to [another] department.

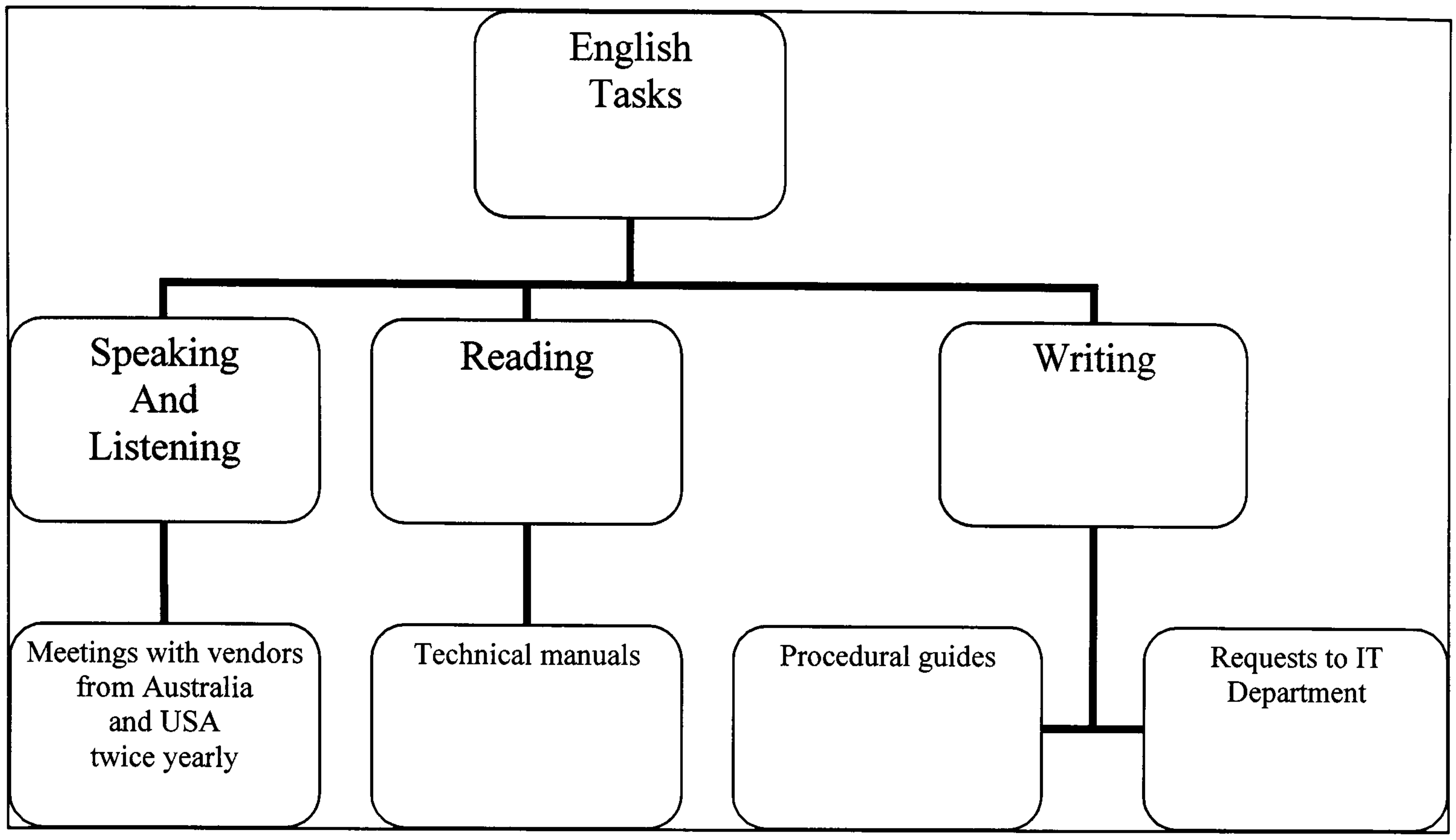
He tells me that he is the only one to perform this technical role in his Department:

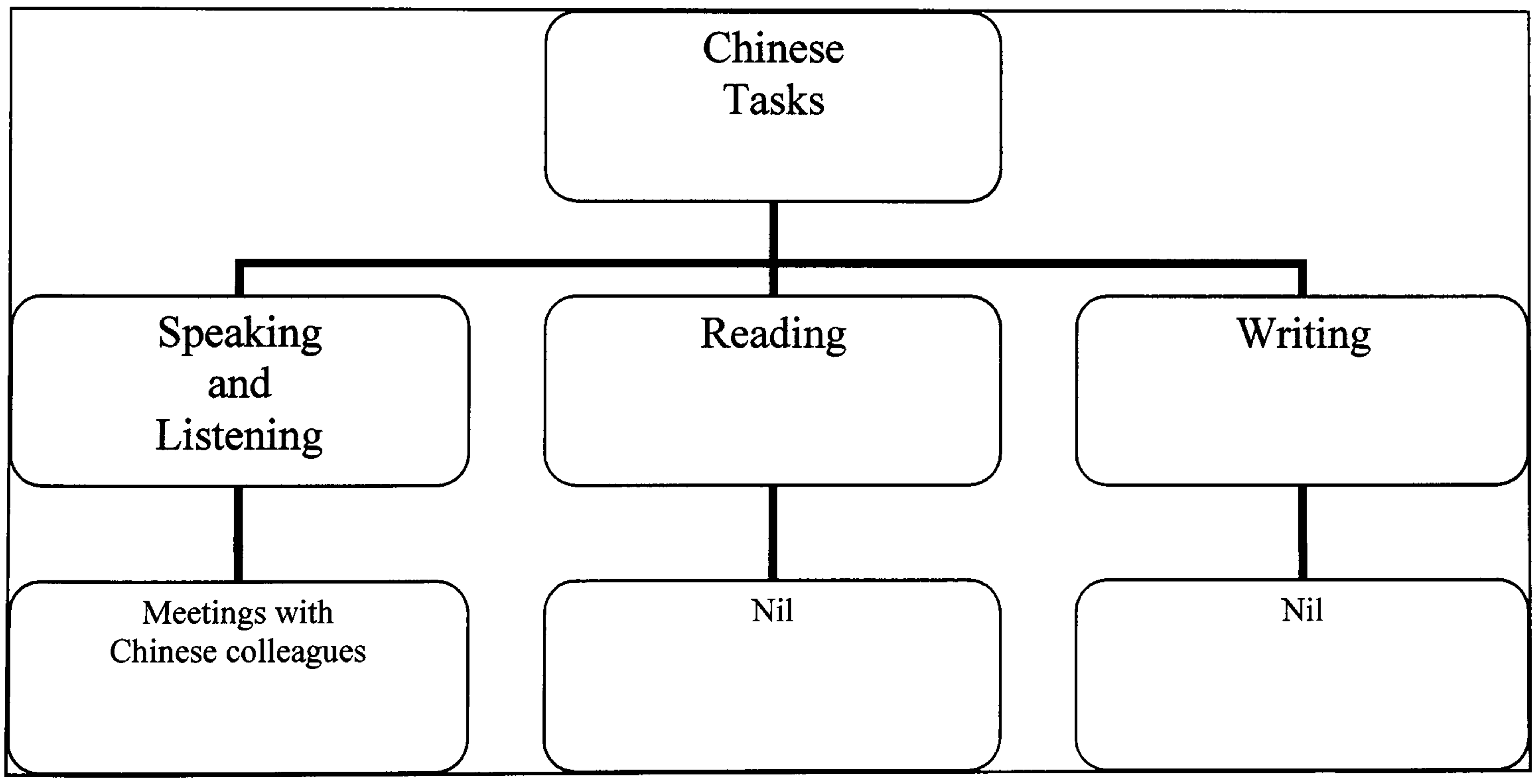
(BE6) Kenneth: Only one person to perform this role [...] I design the data integration from IT persons to MIS Department and I also design the job flow. [...] Our Bank is [using] so many system such as the retail system, the GL (General Ledger) system, and loan system. I will be capture the data directly from the system to [do the] transfer.

I found Kenneth's sentences hard to understand because he has very little knowledge of the structure of the English language and his words are simply strung together without following the basic patterns of English syntax.

What I understand from his description of his job is that the MIS Department has to produce reports to the management of the Bank providing information about the balance sheet and the profit and loss account, as well as forecasting future earnings. The Department collects the data from the various other systems and Kenneth is the person in the Department who provides the technical support to allow his colleagues in the Department to write their reports. Diagram 5.6 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Kenneth has to perform in his role at the bank.

Diagram 5.6 BE6-SD6: Kenneth Kwok's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: IT Support and Database Designer
Department of Management Information Systems (MIS)





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.6.3 Language Kenneth uses at work

Kenneth uses English for reading technical manuals and for writing procedural guides for departments, as well as for making requests to the IT department to change programmes or systems. Almost all oral communicative tasks are carried out in Chinese. He answers my question as follows:

(BE6) I: How much English do you need to use in your job?

Kenneth: I think in the speaking is a little bit. All the time is communication by Chinese. My writing is a little because I only writing the procedure [procedural] and internal memo. And also I think the most of time is using the English on reading because of the manual[s] and the procedure or reference book using the English.

I ask him about the written requests that he makes:

(BE6) I: You write requests to whom?

Kenneth: To IT department.

I: Write the request to IT department for?

Kenneth: Change the programme or system.

I: Is this quite often that you do this?

Kenneth: Yes, it's quite often.

I: The language used is English?

Kenneth: Yes.

Kenneth explains that regular meetings with colleagues are in Chinese, but twice a year he attends meetings with Australian or American technical vendors when they visit the Bank:

(BE6) Kenneth: Also in the meeting all in the Chinese and little time the vendor to visit our site [infrequently when the vendor visits our site] using the English. But most of the time we using the Chinese in terms of the meeting.

I: Is that a large part of your job to attend meetings with vendors? Is that a large part?

Kenneth: Not a large part. [He replies in the negative.]

I: Okay. Two times a year. [He is unable to express the frequency of meetings so I rephrase it for him.]

Kenneth: Two times a year.

Table 5.3 HD Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE7-HD1	Kara Chan (Female)
BE8-HD2	Cherry Wong (Female)
BE9-HD3	Ophelia Yip (Female)
BE10-HD4	Fairy Tsang (Female)

5.4.7 BE7-HD1: Kara Chan

Investment analyst

5.4.7.1 Background

The first person at HD Bank whom I interviewed was Kara Chan who has been working at the bank for four-and-a-half years. She is in her twenties and joined the bank right after her graduation in 1995 in Economics from the University of Hong Kong, reputedly the top local university. She first joined HD Bank as a trainee and worked in the Human Resources Department for one-and-a-half years before transferring to the private banking division. Kara has stayed on in private banking, where she now holds the post of investment analyst in Global Private Banking.

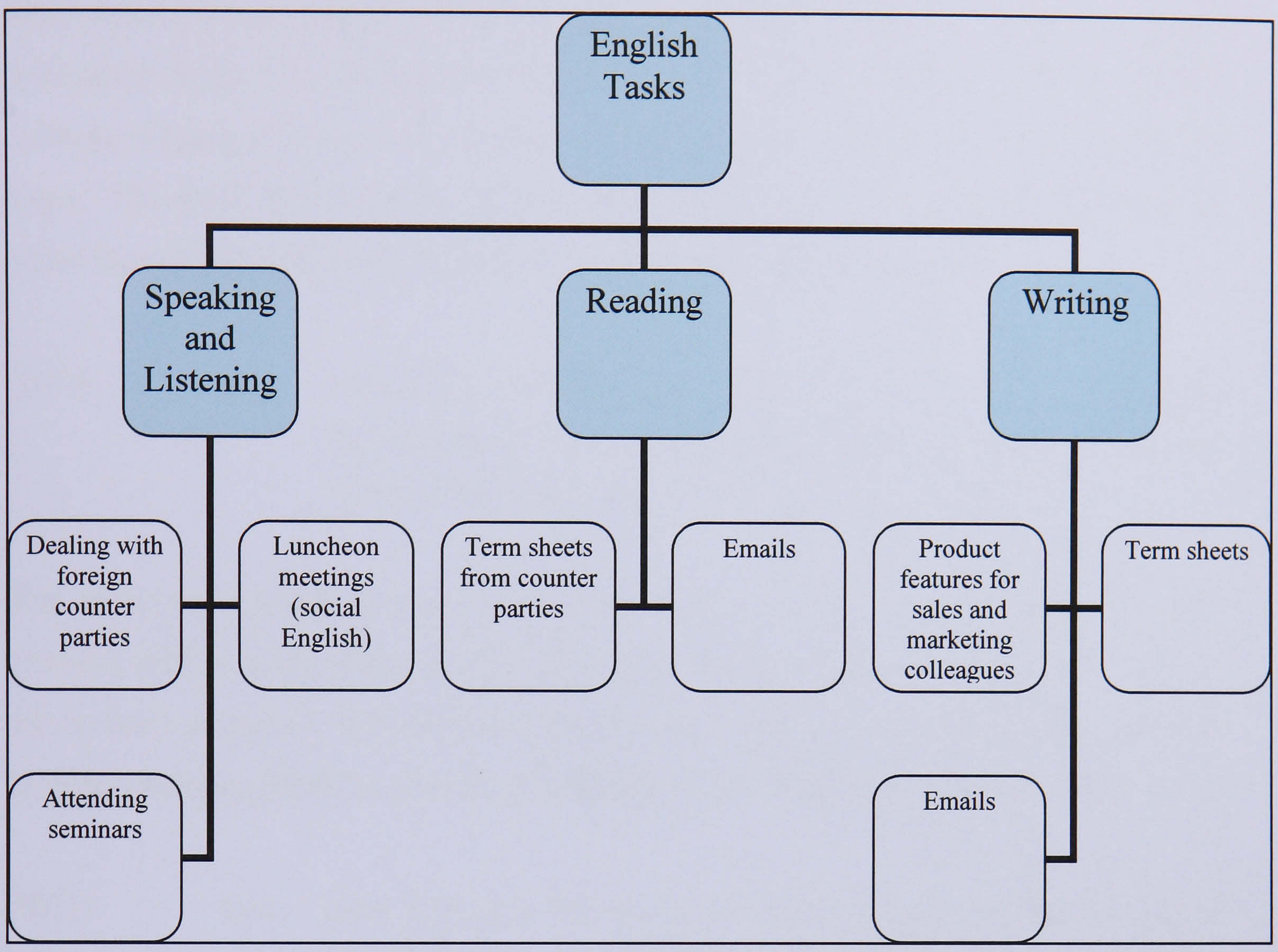
5.4.7.2 The nature of Kara's job

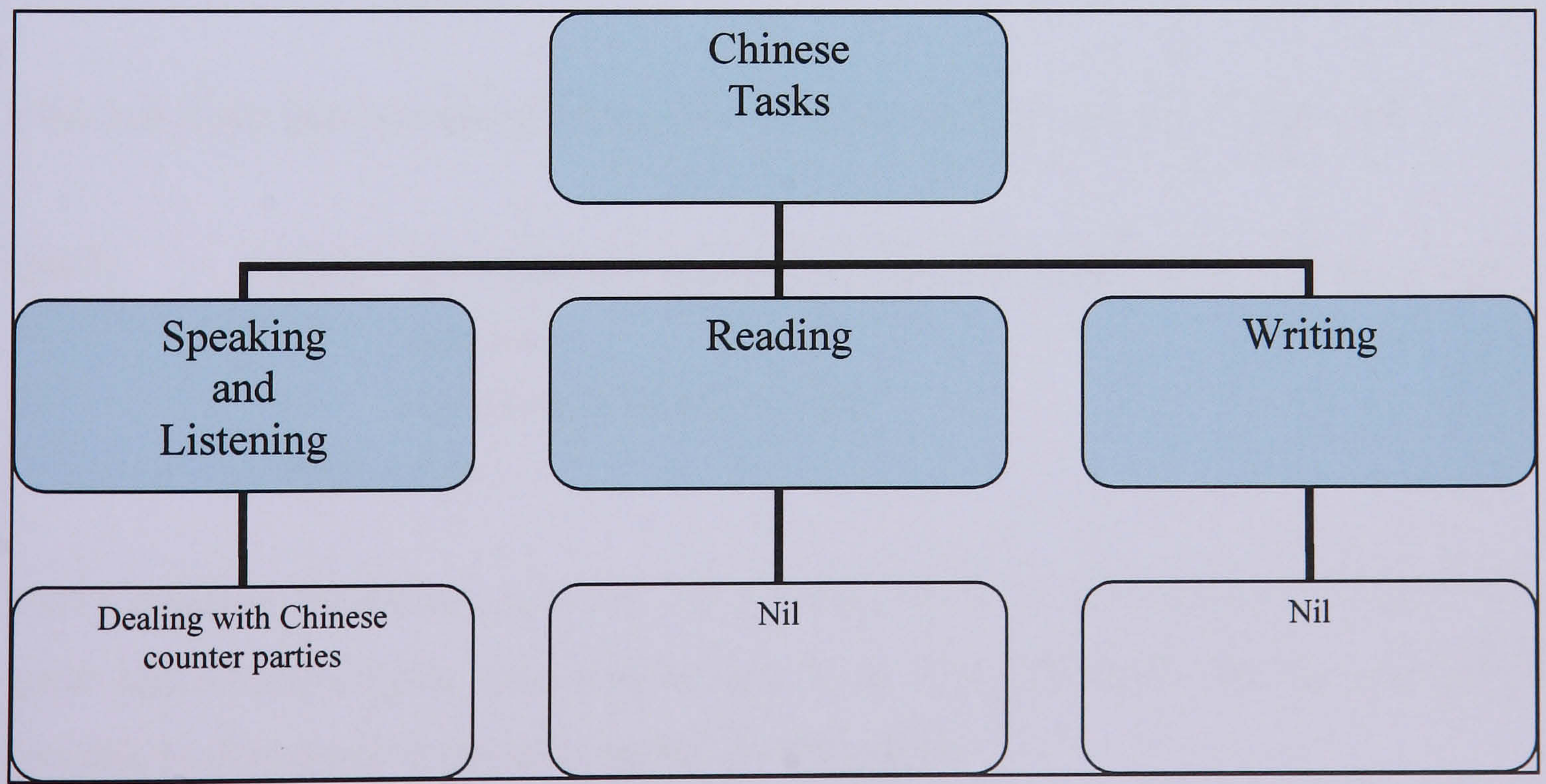
Kara points out that the demands of private banking are very different from Human Resources work that she started out doing. In Human Resources, there was more correspondence work and documents circulated between different departments. So there was a greater need to communicate with other colleagues in both English and Chinese. Now that she is in private banking specialising in investment products, however, she deals more with external counter parties from investment houses like Morgan Stanley and Jardine Fleming. She explains that the term "counter parties" refers to people from foreign banks and investment banks who quote prices to them and they, in turn, buy these investment products from them. She says she does the following on a daily basis:

(BE7) Kara: [...] I have to get [quotations of] prices from the outside counter parties on certain investment products everyday and prepare the term sheets and some product features for my colleagues [who are] sales and marketing persons and they will sell to their clients. Our clients are not the retail one, more on the high net worth people.

These clients are people of high net worth, that is, with bank balances of half-a-million US dollars or more. Kara deals with investment products such as bonds, fixed income securities, equity-linked products and derivatives. She reads the information given to her by the counter parties, and modifies or re-organises some of the features. She then passes this information to her sales and marketing colleagues through fax or email and they, in turn, send this information to their clients, the people of high net worth. Kara says that she does not have to do much writing in her present job, unlike her previous post in Human Resources. Diagram 5.7 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Kara performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.7 BE7-HD1: Kara Chan's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Investment Analyst





****Nil*** denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.7.3 Language Kara uses at work

Kara describes how part of her daily work is to deal with counter parties from global investment firms like Morgan Stanley and Jardine Fleming. Most of the banking staff in these investment firms are foreigners, so she needs to communicate in English with them. However, there are also Chinese staff members at these investment banks, so when Kara deals with them, Cantonese is used for these transactions:

(BE7) Kara: Actually, I deal with the counter parties, so most of the time I use Cantonese but sometimes I have to use English to those foreigners in banks, say Morgan Stanley and Jardine Fleming.

The use of oral Cantonese is therefore in the areas of getting market information from Chinese staff in other banks, and for quoting prices to colleagues within the bank. All the written materials, however, are in English. Other work that she performs in English includes attending seminar presentations and luncheon meetings. She says:

(BE7) Kara: Some of the time we have to attend the presentation [during which] they introducing the products. In that time, we speak in English. I think [for] the listening skill I've no problem but the talking or the oral English is not that good.

I ask her if she has to make presentations at these seminars and she replies thus:

(BE7) Kara: No, I just go to attend but we have round table luncheon [and] we have to socialise.

I: Is it business talk or social talk?

Kara: Both.

These seminar presentations occur, on average, once in two weeks, and there is a great deal of oral English used at these functions. The difficulties that this presents to her will be discussed in the next section in this chapter.

5.4.8 BE8-HD2: Cherry Wong

Product Development Officer (Deposits)

Personal Banking Division

5.4.8.1 Background

The second person I interviewed at HD Bank is Cherry Wong, who is in her mid-twenties. Cherry works as a Sales and Service Support Officer in the Personal Banking Division. She has been with the bank for two years and this is her first and only job. She graduated with a degree in Economics from the University of Hong Kong. She first worked in the Human Resources Department for two months before she was transferred to Corporate Banking, where she worked as a Customer Service Officer. In that capacity, she dealt with the daily transactions of corporate clients, receiving their instructions by fax or letter and confirming the orders over the phone. Her main task was to arrange the corporate clients' deposits or loans on a daily basis. After about fifteen months she was again transferred to her present post as a product development officer in the Personal Banking Division.

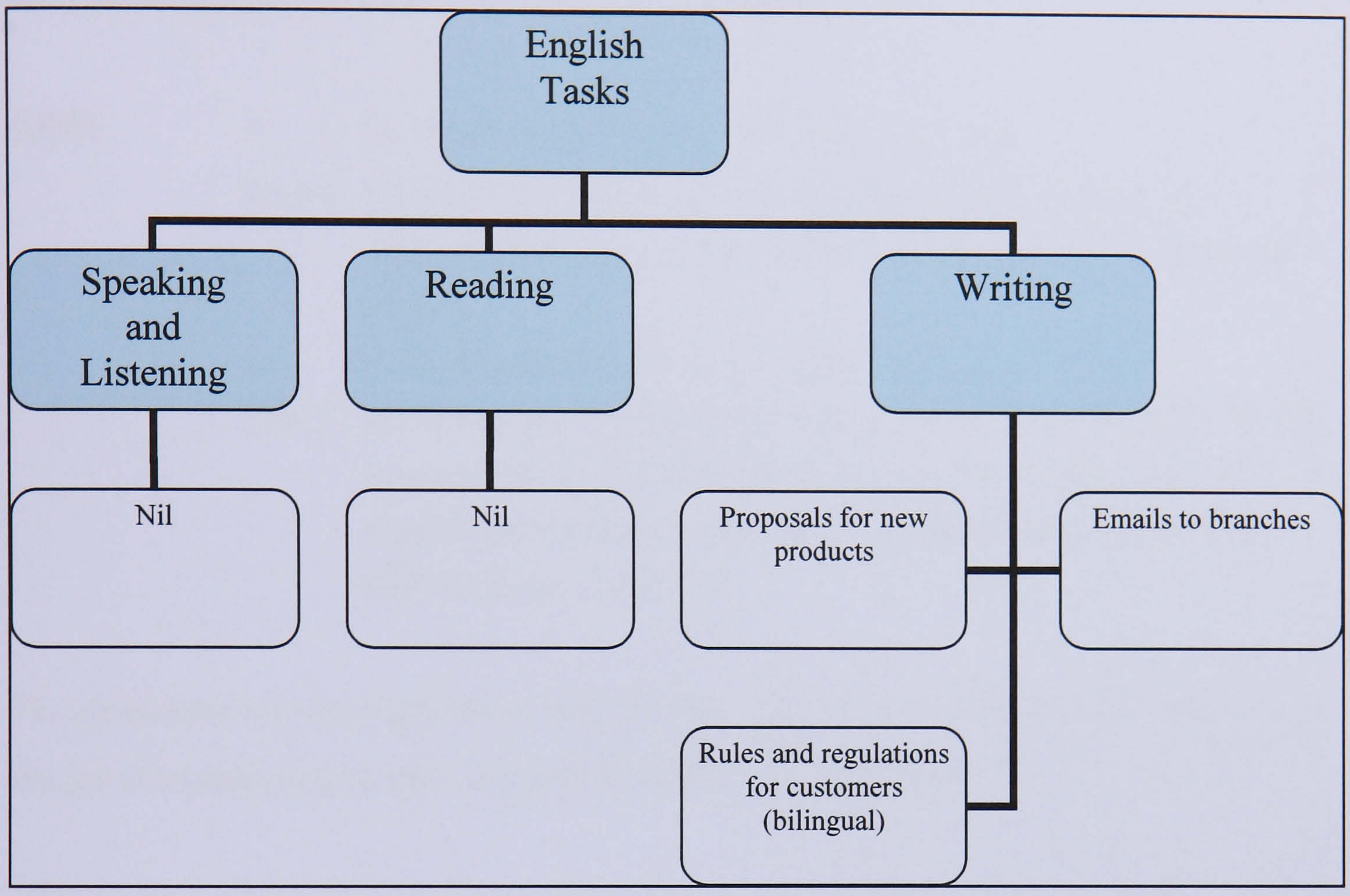
5.4.8.2 The nature of Cherry's job

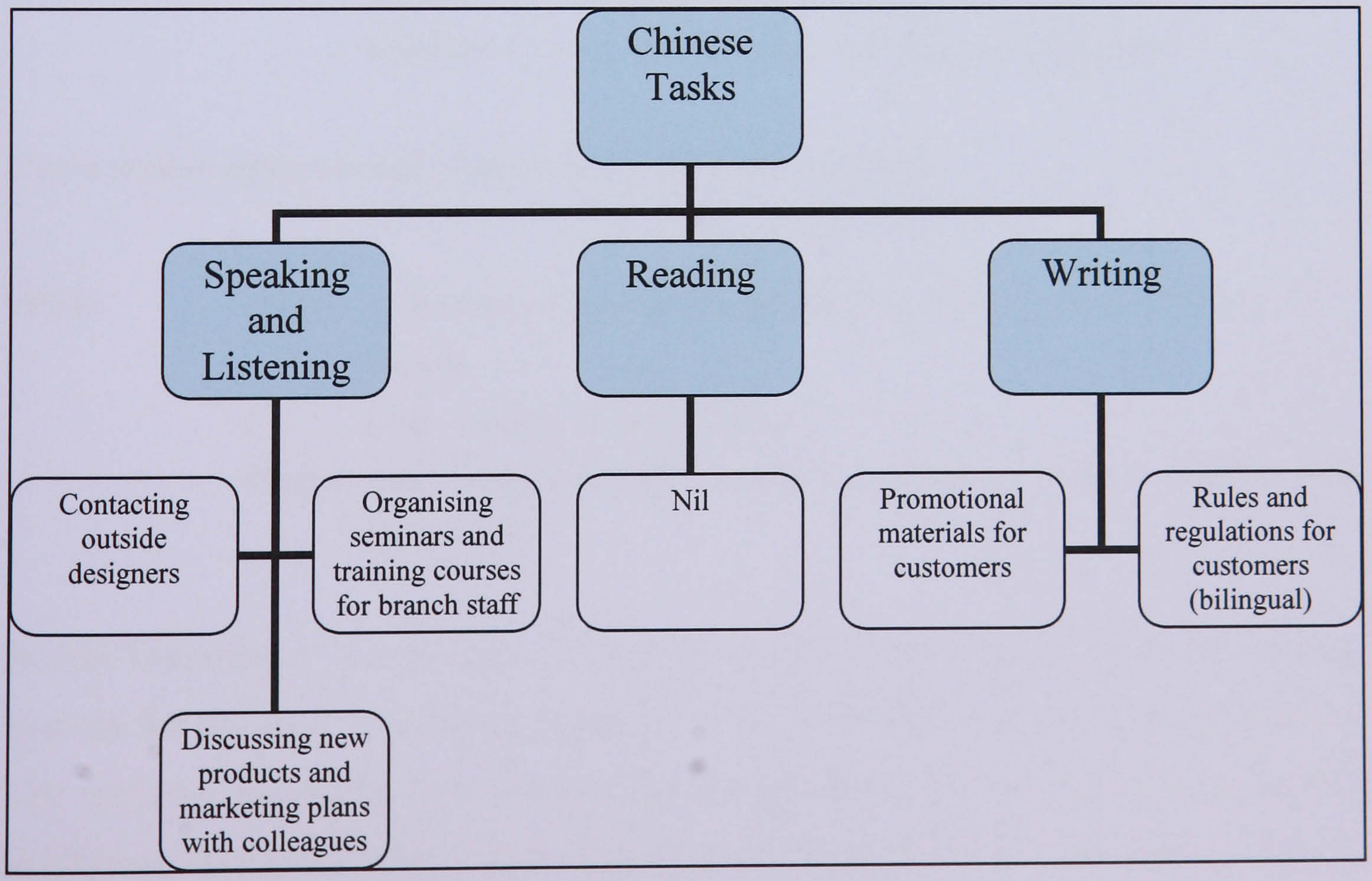
Cherry's main job in the Personal Banking Division is to focus on deposit products. She tells me about the different products in the bank:

(BE8) Cherry: As you know, banks have many different kinds of products – loans, mortgage, deposits or other services. I focus on the deposit products. Actually, we have introduced a new product in April this year, and it is a savings account.

Additionally, she is working on two or three other projects. The senior management at the bank tells them what kind of product they wish to put on the market, and based on their guidelines, Cherry's team of colleagues has to modify it and make it more attractive and more marketable. Diagram 5.8 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Cherry performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.8 BE8-HD2: Cherry Wong's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Product Development Officer (Deposits)
Personal Banking Division





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.8.3 Language Cherry uses at work

As is the norm in the Hong Kong workplace, Cherry uses Cantonese to communicate with her colleagues but she writes mainly in English:

(BE8)

I: How much English do you need to use on the job?

Cherry: We usually use Cantonese to communicate with other teams, other departments, and even to our superiors. But the paperwork is mainly on English.

I: What kind of paperwork do you have to do?

Cherry: We have to do some proposals. We have to evaluate the possible risks that involve in the new products and we have to communicate with other departments and we have to submit some product features and what we think our product needs to be.

The proposals and descriptions of product features are written in English. However, the job of contacting outside companies is done in Cantonese:

(BE8)

Cherry: We have to contact outside companies, mainly the design firms to give us some new designs and some concepts that can help us to market our new product. We have to make some leaflets, posters, and banners to [for the] branches. [...] For outside contact, we mainly use Cantonese.

There is also some written work in Chinese as she explains:

(BE8)

Cherry: [...] marketing materials for those leaflets, posters, they are written in Chinese.

I: Okay. Leaflets written in Chinese.

Cherry: Yeah. Mainly. Because our target customers are mainly ordinary Hong Kong people.

Before launching a new product, Cherry's team has to organise seminars and training courses for the staff in different branches to let them know more about the product. The seminars are mainly in Cantonese, and the guidelines for the staff are also written in Chinese "because I think branch staff may find it more easy to understand when we give them guidelines written in Chinese." Cherry points out that the expansion of information technology in the bank has resulted in a greater use of English for written communication among the branch staff:

(BE8) Cherry: We use Lotus Notes [computer software] as the main tools to communicate within our bank group, so we must use English to send the email to branches because some of the branch's computers cannot read Chinese characters.

She informs me that when she used to work in Corporate Banking, she spoke English more often in her communication with clients or counter parties involving securities trading and settlement. Now in Personal Banking, however, she says that "the opportunity to speak English is quite less." There is also bilingual work to be done because the rules and regulations governing deposit products must be written in both Chinese and English.

5.4.9 BE9-HD3: Ophelia Yip

Personal Assistant to

Head of Group Human Resources Division

5.4.9.1 Background

The third person I interviewed at HD Bank was Ophelia Yip, a young woman in her mid-twenties. She is a new recruit, having joined the bank just one-and-a-half months earlier as a Human Resource Division trainee. Ophelia graduated from the Chinese University with a BBA in Human Resource Management. While she was still a university undergraduate, she worked during one summer as a trainee in another bank in the Human Resources Department and Credit Card Centre. This previous experience in banking gave her an advantage over other candidates when she applied for the job of Personal Assistant to the Head of Group Human Resource Division in HD Bank. In addition, Ophelia believes that she has the necessary characteristics required for the job. She says, "I have good exposure of extra-curricular activities and I'm outgoing and outspoken, and it really helped in the job as a Personal Assistant."

5.4.9.2 The nature of Ophelia's job

Ophelia is a trainee in the Group Human Resource Division and she is the personal assistant to Mrs. Tong, the Head of this Division. Her boss is relatively new herself having been with the Bank for only nine months. She explains her role as Personal Assistant:

(BE9) Ophelia: I just act like a bridge between Mrs. Tong and the subordinates and also the outside customers, for example, the other Division Heads. If I'm so timid it will cause problem to her [laughs]. And also, maybe she regard me as a representative of her, contacting the clients or other subordinates. So I have to be outgoing.

Ophelia tells me that she spends seventy percent of her time on project work and thirty percent on secretarial work. Her present project is establishing a data base on the personal files of the senior executives of the Bank. She has to input the data on the hundred senior executives of the bank into a spreadsheet providing information such as the employee's name, qualifications, and previous working experience. The Bank is setting up this data base in preparation for an information system for human resources which will be implemented in the future.

Her second project is to identify some senior executives of other banks. HD Bank would like to do this work in-house instead of engaging the services of an external head hunting firm because that would be too expensive. Ophelia explains this project to me:

(BE9) Ophelia: Our Division Head hope that we can do it in-house. Then we can save a lot.

I: How are you going to identity senior executives from other banks?

Ophelia: Through many means. First of all for the first step, we just look at the information in the newspaper or some journals business and later maybe during some meetings the manager will collect the name cards and some information of these senior executives from other banks.

Ophelia explains that this is part of the regular Bank policy to build up its information on human resources for the future. She says:

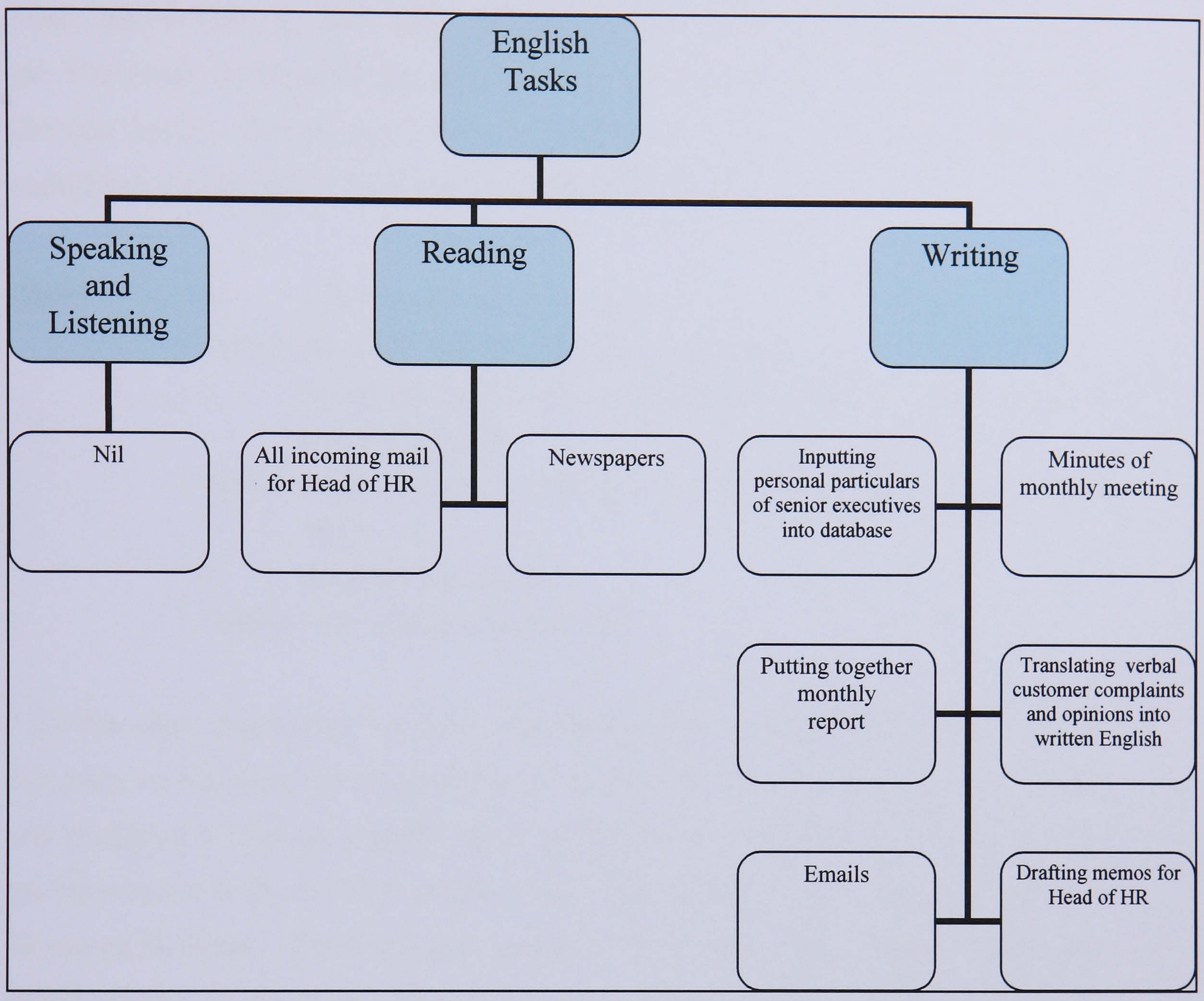
(BE9) Ophelia: We need a lot of resources for us to use. We don't know when will we use it but just having the resources for this and for the future, I think.

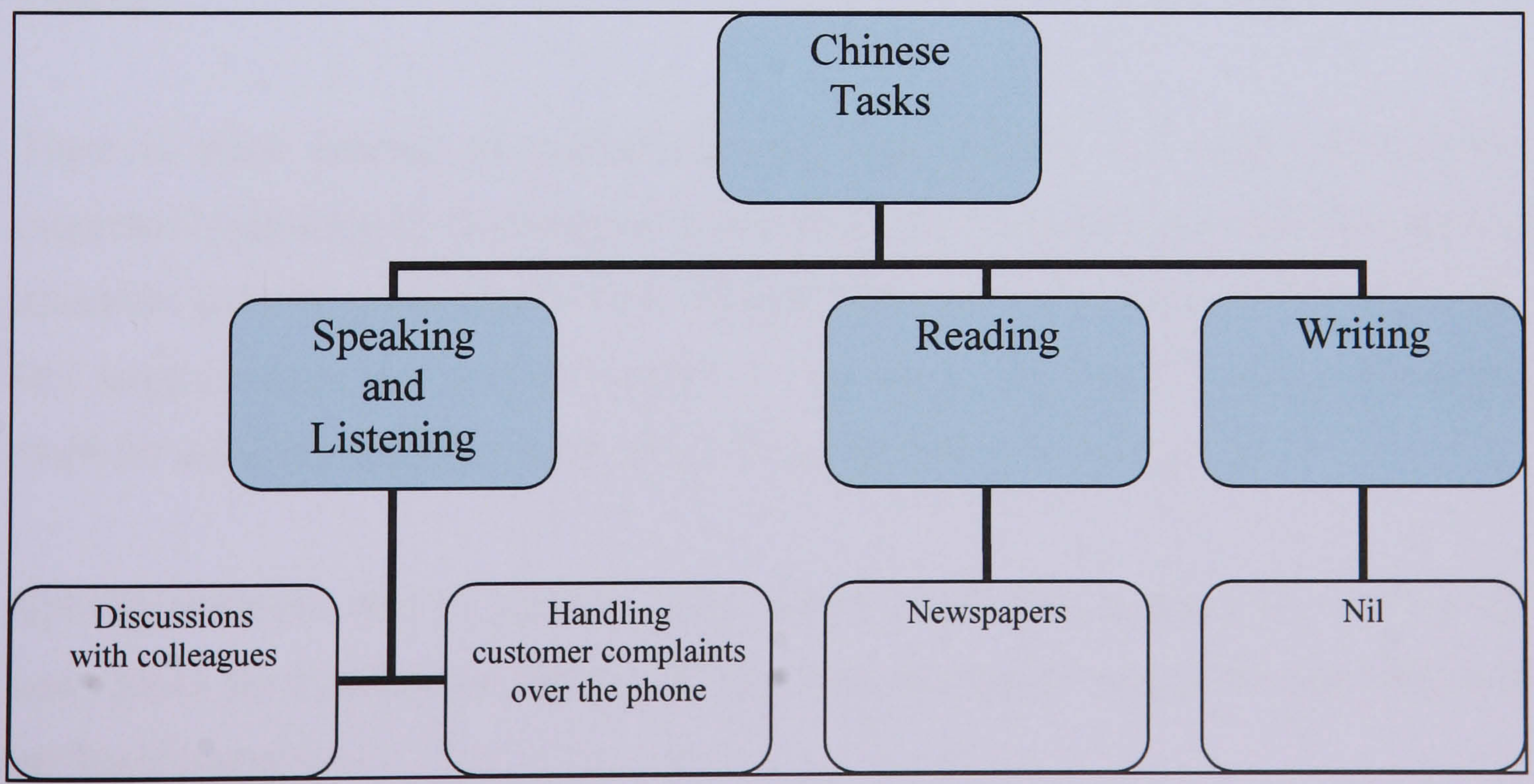
As for the thirty percent of her work which is secretarial in nature, she has to write reports and minutes. Every month she prepares a 15-page report consolidating the information from all the department heads. I ask Ophelia what items are included in the monthly report, and this is her reply:

(BE9) Ophelia: [The report is] very detailed, for example, how many training course has been held, and how about the participation rate, and for the recruitment how many people have been recruited, and how many days has [been] spent on that and so on. Very detailed report.

Her boss, Mrs. Tong, will review the report first and then she will take it to the monthly meeting of the Bank's senior management. Ophelia also informs me that staff recruitment takes place on an *ad hoc* basis when there is a need for people in a certain department. For example, there was a need in the Personal Banking Department for many temporary staff to input data, and the HR Division was asked to conduct a recruitment Open Day for this purpose. Diagram 5.9 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Ophelia has to perform in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.9 BE9-HD3: Ophelia Yip's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Personal Assistant to Head of Human Resources Division





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.9.3 Language Ophelia uses at work

I ask Ophelia about the languages she uses at work. She says, "For spoken, I usually use Cantonese to communicate with my head, my subordinates, my peers and other division heads. Sometimes I have to contact the overseas staff by phone so I sometimes use English." I ask her about the overseas calls:

(BE9)

I: Which countries are you referring to?

Ophelia: Philippine, Malaysia, sometimes even Beijing.

I: So you use English with the Philippines and Malaysia. [For] Beijing, do you use Putonghua?

Ophelia: [laughs] Actually my Mandarin is so poor that I speak English. [We both laugh]

I: They can speak English?

Ophelia: Yeah. And also London office.

Like the other employees, her written communication is always in English. One of her main writing jobs is consolidating the information from all the department heads and preparing a 15-page monthly report for the senior management. Another duty is taking minutes at the monthly meeting of the five managers within the Group Human Resource Division. These minutes are about two pages long. Sometimes she also drafts memos for her boss. And finally, she informs me that all her emails are in English.

There is some amount of translation work that Ophelia does when she handles customer complaints in Cantonese over the telephone. These complaints are generally about the attitude of the branch staff. Ophelia has to listen to these verbal complaints and translate them into written English for her boss. She does the same translation work for customer opinions from spoken Cantonese to written English.

Ophelia estimates that 95 percent of her reading tasks are in English. As personal assistant to the Head of the Group HR Division, she has to read all the documents in her boss' in-tray:

(BE9) I: What do you read?

Ophelia: I read so many things. Because anything will enter the tray of Mrs. Tong. I have to read it first, so [I have to read] almost all the documents of Group HR Division.

I: Oh, all the internal documents?

Ophelia: Including external documents.

I: Are they mostly in English?

Ophelia: Uhum.

5.4.10 BE10-HD4: Fairy Tsang

Corporate Communications Officer

5.4.10.1 Background

The fourth and last person I interviewed at HD Bank was Fairy Tsang, who works as a Corporate Communications Officer and has been with the bank for three months. She is in her mid-twenties and interestingly, is the only bank employee in the entire study who majored in English Language and Literature at the university. She graduated from the Hong Kong Baptist University in 1993. Her previous employment experience was as an English teacher at a secondary school for two years, followed by two different jobs in advertising – servicing accounts – for a further four years.

5.4.10.2 The nature of Fairy's job

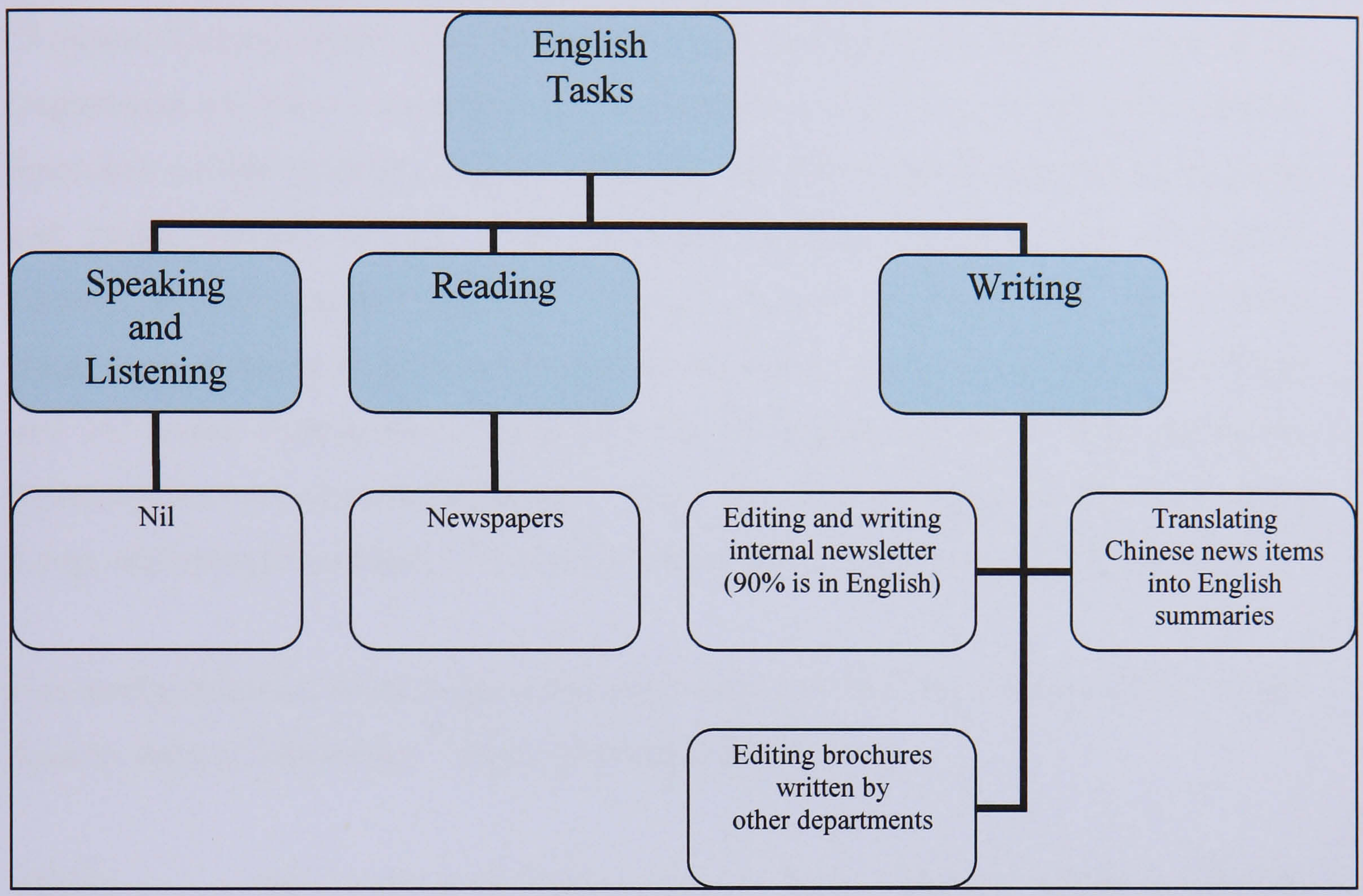
The Corporate Communications Department in its present form is a relatively new department. In the past there was no Corporate Communications Department and the bank used outside Public Relations consultants. At the time of the interview, however, there are altogether three people in the Corporate Communications Department – the woman who heads it and who has been with the Bank for three years, her female assistant of six months who is studying for a bachelor's degree on a part-time basis, and Fairy herself who has been there for three months. The work of the Corporate Communications Department is 70 percent internal communication and 30 percent external communication. The Department takes care of three areas of work – media relations, producing the internal newsletter, and organising events.

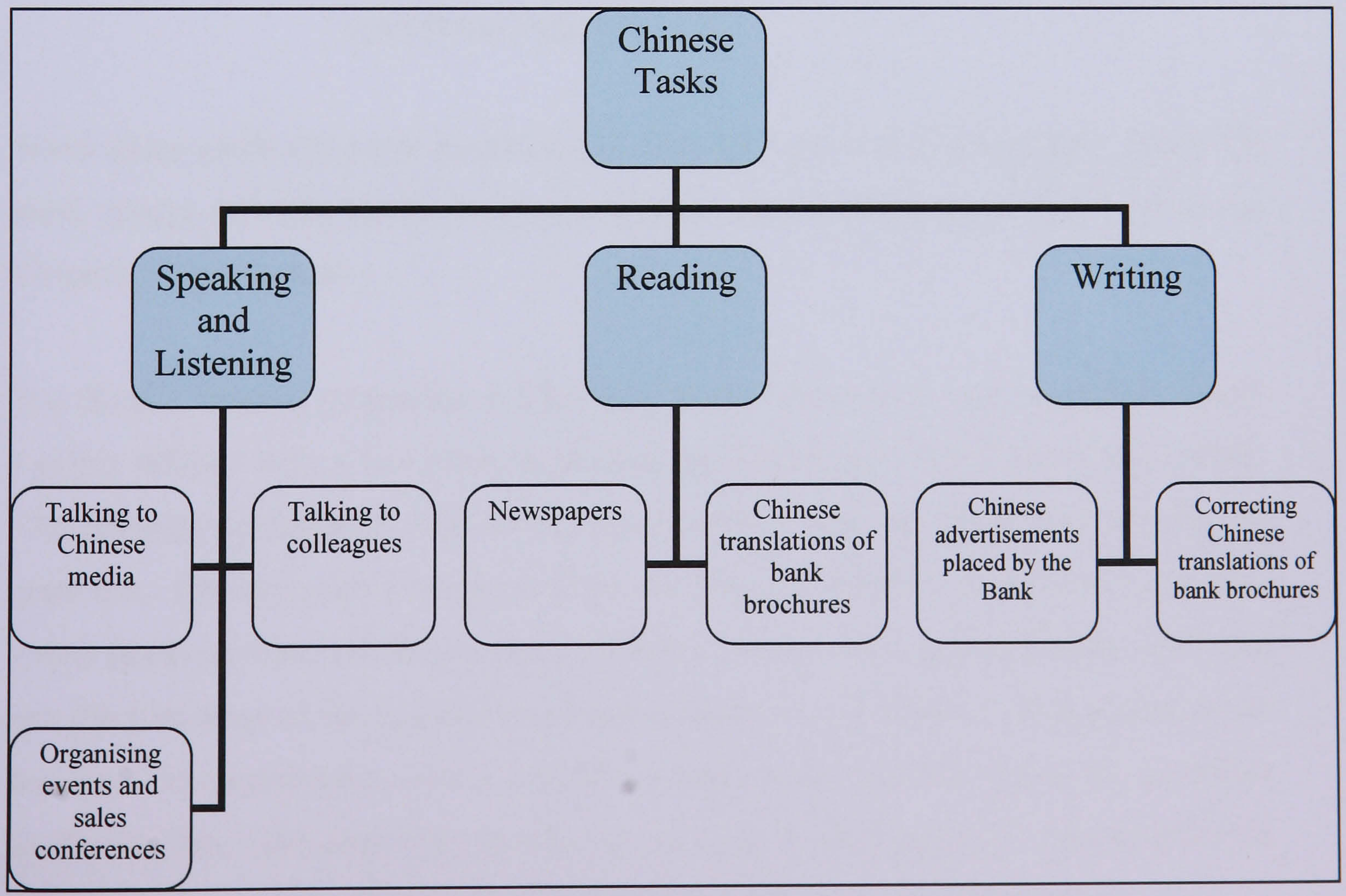
Media relations involve holding press conferences and communicating with reporters who are mostly from the Chinese press. Fairy tells me about her contact with the press:

(BE10) Fairy: I send invitations to the press. I send faxes and invitation cards. They are in bilingual. I also return calls to the [Chinese] press when they want to find out some bank information.

She also places advertisements in the Chinese newspapers. She is the person who handles the Chinese advertisements. The second aspect of her work in the Corporate Communications Department is producing the internal newsletter which is 20-24 pages long. (More details about the production of the internal newsletter are provided in the next section.) The third aspect of the work of the Corporate Communications Department is organising events for the Bank. Event organisation covers the Bank's annual spring dinner at the lunar New Year and sales conferences. All these functions require much work contacting outside vendors and suppliers. Diagram 5.10 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Fairy performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.10 BE10-HD4: Fairy Tsang's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Corporate Communications Officer





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.10.3 Language Fairy uses at work

Fairy uses both English and Chinese for the different tasks she has to do in the Corporate Communications Department. In the internal communication work of the Department, she has to read Chinese news clippings every morning and then translate them into written English synopses. She also scans the English newspapers and cuts and pastes relevant articles. The translated synopses together with the English cuttings are then collated together. This task in both languages takes two to three hours every morning and the information produced then goes to the CEO of the Bank and its senior management, including the Managing Director, three Executive Directors, and six General Managers. The CEO, who is Asian, but not from Hong Kong, and several members of the senior management, are unable to read Chinese.

Her media relations work is generally with reporters from the Chinese press, so she talks to them in Cantonese. This is what she tells me:

(BE10) Fairy: I talk to the Chinese reporters. First I check the information with other departments. Then I return calls to the [Chinese] press. I haven't received calls from the English press.

When Fairy sends out press invitations by fax, they are in both languages. When the Bank places advertisements in the newspaper, she is the person who handles the Chinese advertisements.

The Bank's internal newsletter is produced three times a year and comprises mostly English articles with a few Chinese articles on community events and charity work. The different departments send their articles to Fairy who edits them and corrects the grammar. She says that sometimes there are many corrections to be done. She also writes drafts of other articles for the newsletter. All this editing and drafting work are just the first stage in the production of the newsletter. All these are then passed on to her Head of Department, who in turn sends them to an external copywriter to polish up the English. The improved version comes back to the Corporate Communications Department, which then sends it to the typesetter and the job is completed.

There are also other types of writing that Fairy edits. For example, the Information Technology Department is producing a brochure on the Y2K problem. It writes a draft in English and passes it on to the Corporate Communications Department. Fairy edits and polishes the draft. She then sends the English draft to external translators for a Chinese translation. Bilingual demands are made on her when it comes back because she has to check it for the accuracy of the content. She explains to me why there are errors in the Chinese translation:

(BE10) Fairy: I have to make many corrections. One reason is the content [of the brochure] is about technology, so Chinese copywriters are not so familiar with it. So the Chinese version is not the same as the English [not true to the English version]. So I have to make the corrections.

Table 5.4 MB Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE11-MB1	Maureen Chow (Female)
BE12-MB2	Herbert Chan (Male)
BE13-MB3	Simon Fung (Male)
BE14-MB4	Jennifer Liu (Female)

5.4.11 BE11-MB1: Maureen Chow

Management Trainee (Credit research)

5.4.11.1 Background

The first person I interviewed at MB Bank is Maureen Chow who has been working there for one year. MB Bank is the only international bank out of the four banks surveyed in this study. Maureen graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong with a Bachelor of Business. She majored in International Business and minored in French. She then got a job with the Hong Kong Trade Department in the Certification Department where she stayed for one year before leaving to join L'Oreal, the French cosmetics company as a marketing executive. Wanting to change her career direction, she decided to do an MBA in order to switch to banking.

She completed her MBA at the University of Texas in Austin in two years and also worked as an intern during the summer with an American bank in New York and Taipei. This was good preparation and armed with an MBA, she applied for her present job and was accepted into the management training programme at MB Bank.

5.4.11.2 The nature of Maureen's job

Maureen is one of the two Hong Kong persons in the Bank's management trainee programme. As part of her training, she is rotated among the different departments. This two-year programme aims to train banking professionals in corporate finance and investment banking. It is also regional in nature and draws participants from countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, India, and Australia. The training is conducted in Hong Kong and Singapore twice a year. Maureen says that she is excited by the dynamic international environment at the bank where she gets the chance to meet and work with people of different nationalities. In the past one year that she has been with the Bank, she spent six months in the credit department and six months in the capital market department working on research, sales, trading, treasury and derivatives. I ask her about her job rotation:

(BE11)

I: So you've tried two departments.
Maureen: Yeah.
I: Will there be others?
Maureen: Yeah. Others will be investment banking with some of [the] products group and also with the client management group.

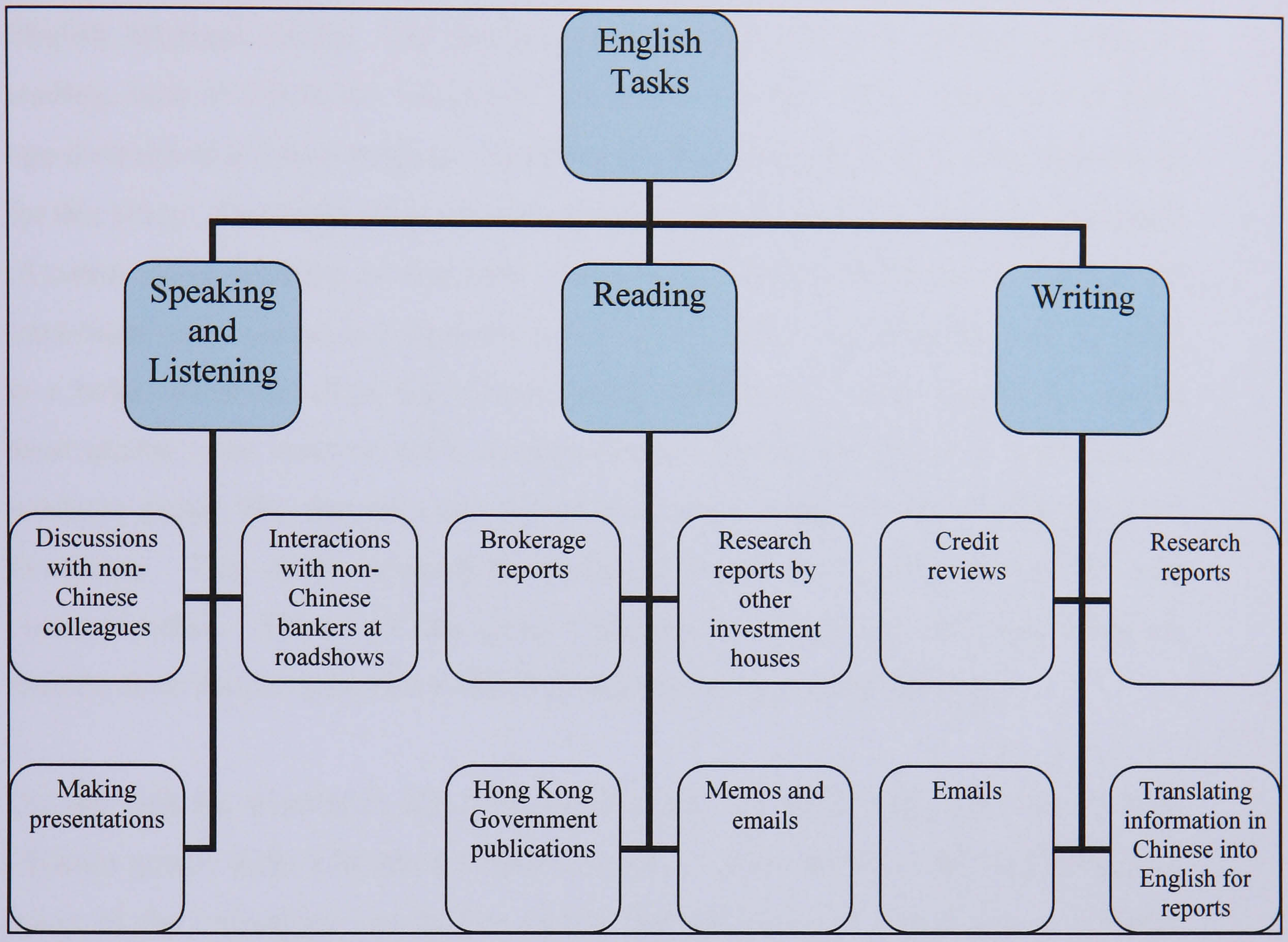
I ask Maureen how people are selected for this programme, and whether an MBA is a prerequisite and this is what she tells me:

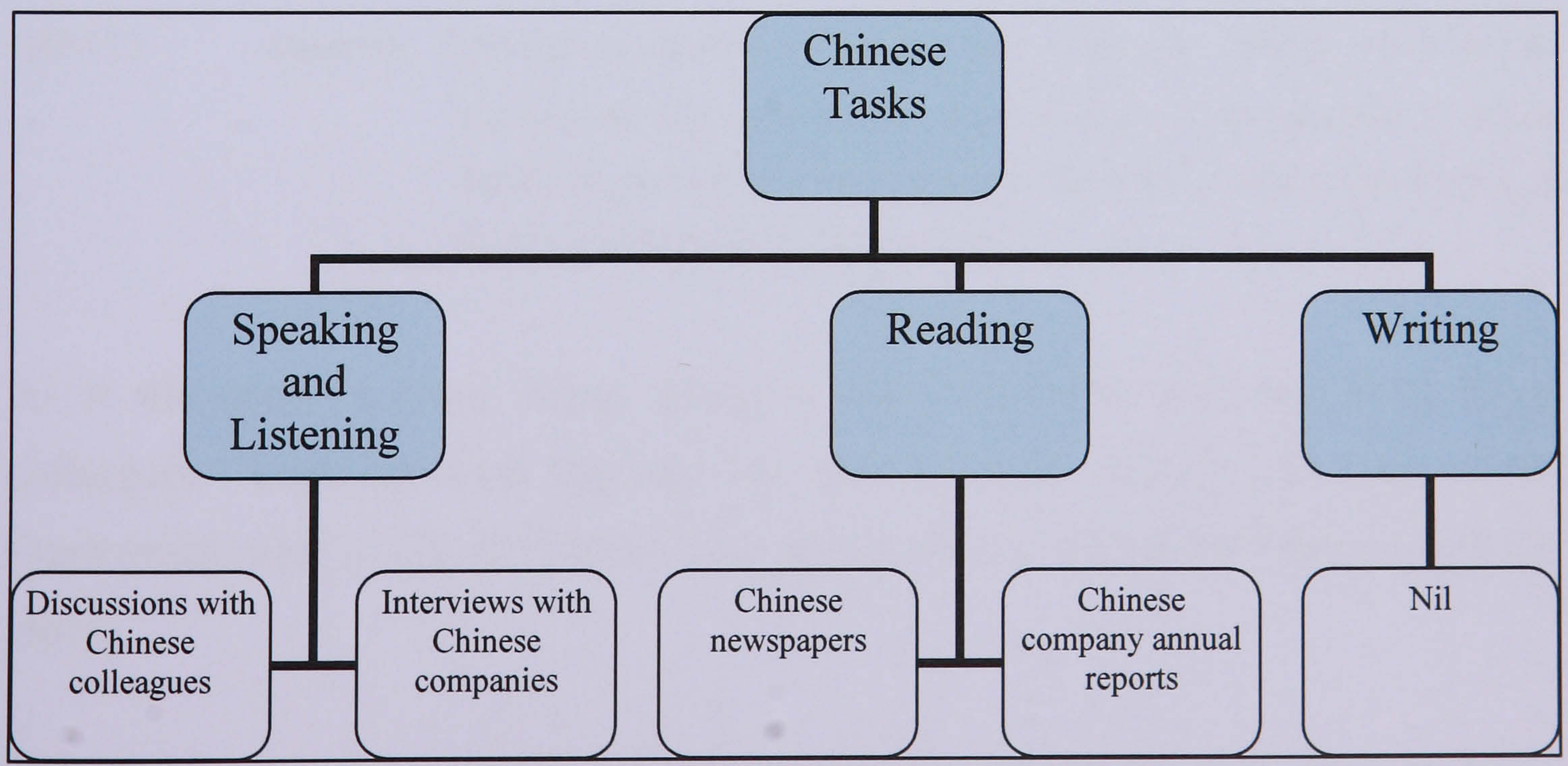
(BE11)

Maureen: They take [people with] BAs too. They don't have very rigid requirements but I guess it depends on your qualifications, whether you have any extra-curricular activities on your resume.
I: Do you have any idea what kind of profile …
Maureen: No. [laughs]
I: … they are looking for?
Maureen: Don't really know. [laughs]

She informs me that for the present year, the Bank is also selecting its new batch of trainees from other countries like Korea, Taiwan and Japan. This demonstrates the international nature of MB Bank. Diagram 5.11 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Maureen performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.11 BE11-MB1: Maureen Chow's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Management Trainee (Credit Research)





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.11.3 Language Maureen uses at work

Out of the 16 informants, Maureen is one of two who feel very confident about their English language ability. She gives herself a rating of four in writing and five in reading, both of which are "excellent" on a scale of one to five. Only two of them rate themselves a five in reading – Maureen and her colleague who is also interviewed for this study. Due to its international corporate culture, there is a more diverse group of nationalities working in this bank, resulting in much greater use of English for intra-bank communication compared to the other banks. The language used depends to a large extent on which department one is working in. If the department serves local clients, then most of one's colleagues are Chinese, but if one is working in a products group like mergers and acquisitions, then many of one's colleagues are foreigners. This factor determines whether Chinese or English is used for oral communication. There are also some colleagues who are sent to Hong Kong on rotation from the headquarters in the U.S. and they do not speak Chinese.

For her first six months in the credit department, her direct supervisor was a non-Chinese person from a Southeast Asian country. In the capital markets department, many of the colleagues and traders on the trading floor are Americans or Britons. This is what she says about her language use:

(BE11) Maureen: For credit department, I think like, half of the time, I have to speak English because my supervisor doesn't speak Cantonese or Mandarin. [...] And for the capital markets, most of time I speak in English because many of them are Americans or they are Brits.

As is the norm in Hong Kong, Maureen uses Cantonese with her Hong Kong colleagues. I ask her what language she uses when she talks to the Head of HR Department, who is a local Chinese. She pauses for just a moment before giving her reply:

(BE11) Maureen: Chinese. Because it's sometimes very odd if both of us speak Cantonese or both of us are Chinese and [we] speak in another language. [laughs]

From the above quotation, we see something about the local people's attitudes to English. We see that there is a psychological barrier to using English among Hong Kong Chinese for interactions with each other either in the office or in social settings. This has to do with the perception that English is the language of the former colonial masters of Hong Kong. This point has also been noted in other sections of this thesis.

Nearly all of the writing tasks including emails, credit reviews and research analysis reports, are in English. Maureen is at the present time doing research on the Hong Kong property market. The reading for this is 80 percent in English, but a small amount of the reading is in Chinese as she points out:

(BE11) Maureen: In terms of reading, I would think 80% in English [but] because we have to read some local newspapers and some of their annual reports. Some of them might be in Chinese. Some of companies in China. Actually they will have Chinese publications [...] company reports.

However, she points out that brokerage reports from other investment houses, research reports, and even some of the Hong Kong government publications are in English.

She does not normally meet clients but in order to research on Hong Kong companies, she has to call up the companies concerned, and ask questions in Chinese. There is also some translation work from spoken Chinese to written English when she interviews the company in Chinese, and writes up the research reports in English.

When she attends road shows where other companies are promoting themselves or when new bonds are being issued or a company is being newly listed, there is a great deal of English used because most of the bankers attending these functions speak in English. Conversational English is also used for casual gatherings where "if there are foreigners then you must use English". As part of the training programme, she also has to make two presentations in English.

Maureen tells me about the differences between her bank and other banks:

(BE11) Maureen: Well I guess we have a different target clientele and they [other local banks] are more on the consumer banking business.

I: What is the target clientele for MB Bank?

Maureen: Well we are moving from corporate banking to investment banking side. So we are not really on a head-on competition with the local banks right now. We don't have really strong retail networks as you may know and we don't have many branches and we are not in that type of business actually. We are more like the M & A, mergers and acquisitions, the advisory businesses so I guess it requires different types of skills. Because for the consumer banks or for the local banks, you really need to, the local staff, speak Chinese.

I ask her whether her bilingual ability in Chinese and English is highly valued:

(BE11) Maureen: [...] I guess if we have more businesses in China and if the market [there] starts picking up, then they will certainly need people like us. Right now at this moment I don't think [so]. Because we don't really have much businesses in China at the moment.

Thus, we see that although Maureen's bilingual skills are very useful, because of the Bank's interest in doing business in the region and not in China, a strong command of English provides her with a bigger advantage in the daily business of the bank. We shall discuss what difficulties Maureen experiences, if any, in carrying out tasks in English in the next section.

5.4.12 BE12-MB2: Herbert Chan

Management trainee (analyst)

5.4.12.1 Background

Like his colleague, Maureen, Herbert Chan is also in the Management Training programme at MB Bank. Unlike her, however, he had no previous job experience and was interviewed for the job immediately upon his return to Hong Kong after graduating from Oxford University in the United Kingdom with a Masters degree in engineering, economics, and management. When I interviewed him, he had been with the Bank for one year and was doing rotations in different departments to get the necessary training. He says that his combined degree taught him different skills as economics and management are "more about how to deal with people" while engineering teaches you "how to think analytically which is very important to (his) future career". He says that once he started thinking about his future career, he was always interested in working in the financial industry.

5.4.12.2 The nature of Herbert's job

Herbert describes his job as that of an analyst with the main duties of gathering and analysing information and writing reports. He has completed his stint in the credit department where he worked for seven months, saying:

(BE12) Herbert: I think for the two rotations, say my credit rotation, they really get my hands dirty and do some on-job training. I have to analyse a couple of local corporations. I was also responsible for [a] banking industry review. All these require a lot of reading, analysis and also reporting skills.

Herbert had to write a credit research report and he tells me what it is:

(BE12) Herbert: [...] analysing the credit performance of the company. So it's one particular type of research. There are other type of research, like you can analyse the financial performance. That's different.

Now, he is working on the trading floor gaining experience in treasury, fixed income (bonds) and foreign exchange. Herbert's daily work involves gathering financial information from various sources like Bloomberg, Reuters and other brokers' reports. He tells me:

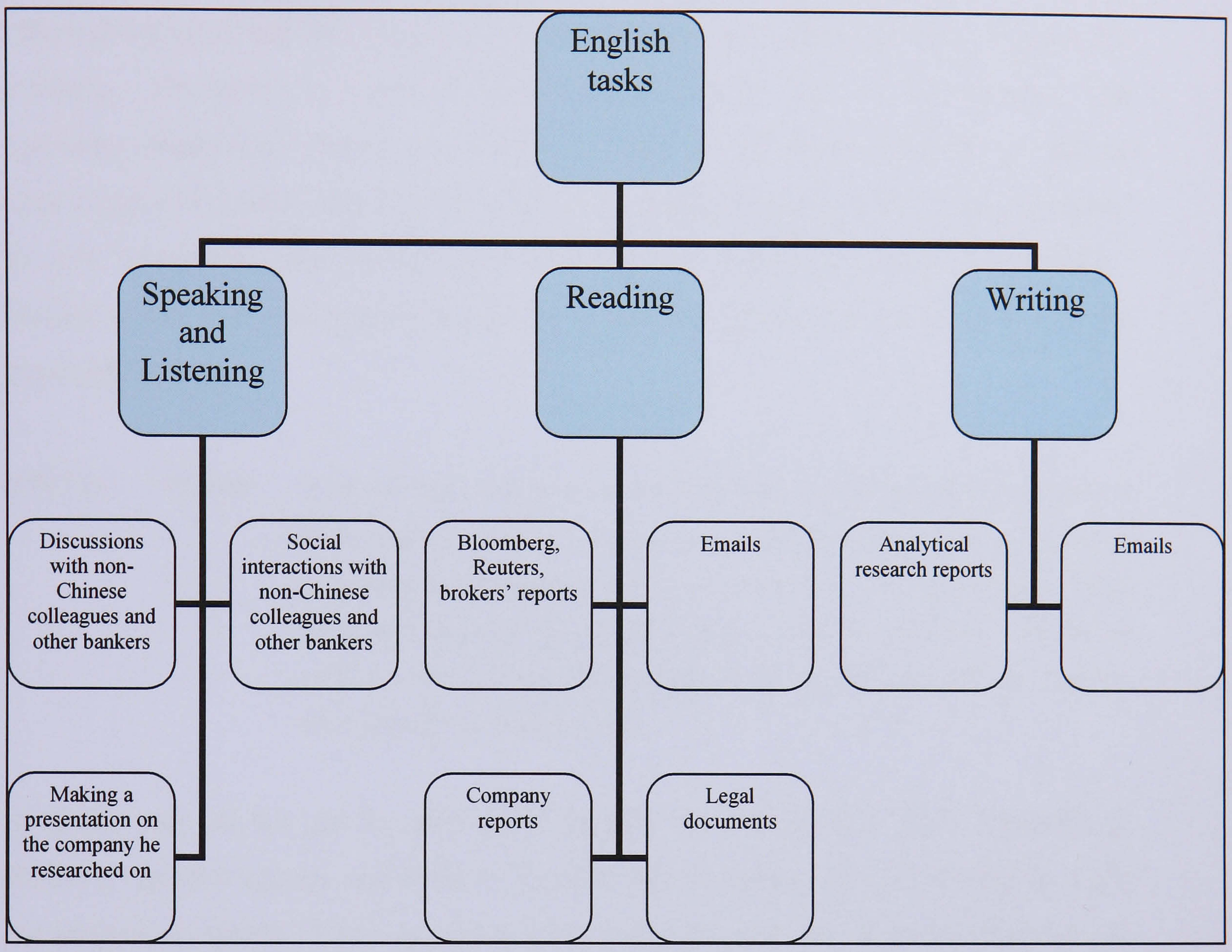
(BE12) Herbert: A major part of my job is actually reading this materials, gathering information. And then of course, you have to understand that, before you can interpret and do analysis on top of that. Qualitative and quantitative analysis, both very significant. And then you have to present that in a simple format for my boss.

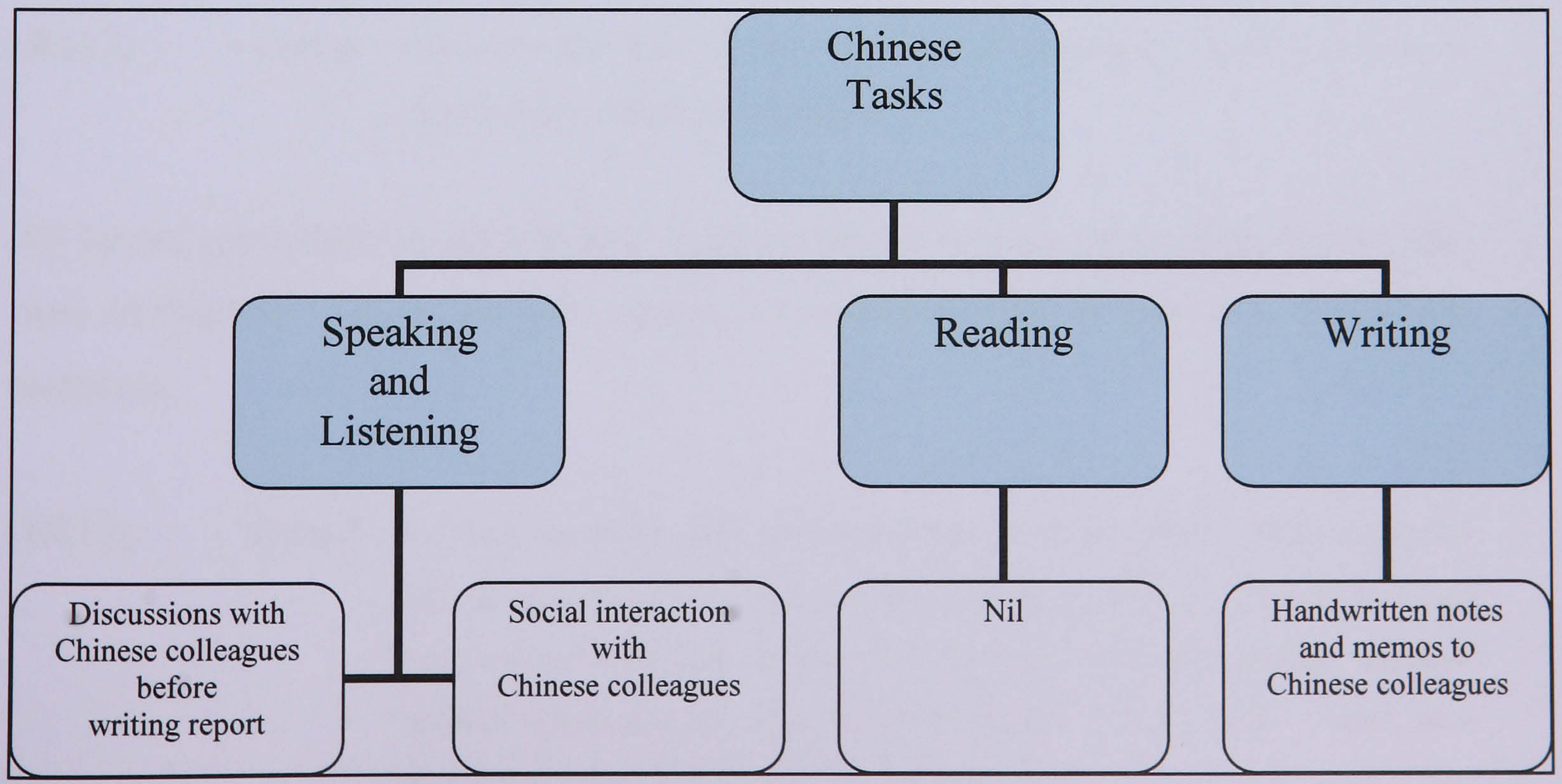
I: You present that orally or in written [format]?

Herbert: Written most of the time, but then you have to explain to your boss.

The written report can be as short as two pages, but he tells that "the longest [he has] done is about 30 pages." Diagram 5.12 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Herbert performs in his role at the bank.

Diagram 5.12 BE12-MB2: Herbert Chan's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Management Trainee (Analyst)





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.12.3 Language Herbert uses at work

Herbert's day starts with checking his emails, "a very convenient way of communicating inside the company." There may be 10 to 20 emails first thing in the morning. He replies to some of them while others are just for information. All company emails and internal memos are in English. However, he tells me that he uses Chinese for short, handwritten notes and informal memos to his local colleagues as it is "sometimes more comfortable with Chinese [people] to write [in] Chinese." He has to talk to his colleagues to ask for or to share information. He talks about the language he uses:

(BE12) Herbert: I get information from a lot of people both in Central [office] and also in Shatin [office]. I mean the question of choosing whether I ask in English or in Chinese is depending on who I am speaking to. So depending on which language I think the person will find more comfortable with. I would say 60% to 70% [of my communication is] in Chinese, 30% in English. Occasionally in Mandarin [too].

A major part of his job is reading in English for information from Bloomberg, Reuters, research reports and brokers' reports, and analysing the information to write his analytical reports. When he presents his report to his boss, he has to explain it to him in English:

(BE12) Herbert: You know that some of the boss here are expatriates. Yeah, you have to communicate with them in English.

All formal presentations, such as one on the company he was researching on, are also done in English. These research reports are written in English and tend to be quite technical:

(BE12) Herbert: We use a lot of like, technical jargon like "a certain ratio", "improve on the back of something." So there is a standard set of jargons. We tend to avoid some very exaggerating words. We can't use "the price leaped" because "leaped" apparently got some indication behind. So it's very ... yeah, you have to be very careful about the choice of words.

He spends about half of his working time writing such reports. He writes on his own but gathers the information with team members, holding discussions in both Chinese and English.

In addition to the more formal English that is used for written communication in the Bank, there is also a considerable amount of oral communication in informal English. Herbert tells me about the need for social interaction:

(BE12) Herbert: Anyhow, we are in banking profession. It's about dealing with people. I got clients, I also got boss and things. So it's all about hanging out, all about interacting with them. So you have to do that, a lot of social gathering.

I: Here in the office or outside?

Herbert: Both inside and outside the office. [...] Yeah, like actually this Tuesday, we have a roadshow. There are a lot of clients and investors coming. We also organise some golf day for our clients. All these occasions require some casual environment, some casual interaction. So I mean, that can present a challenge.

I: Present a challenge. Okay.

Herbert: Yeah, especially for new recruit.

We shall discuss these challenges that Herbert encounters at work in the next section.

5.4.13 BE13-MB3: Simon Fung

Programmer analyst (systems integration)

5.4.13.1 Background

Simon Fung is in the 21-29 age group, like the majority of the informants in this study. He graduated from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology with a Master of Philosophy in Computer Science in 1997. He earned his Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Science from the same university in 1995. After graduation, he worked briefly at the University, first as a demonstrator-cum-teaching assistant in the Information Systems and Management Department. Next, he worked as an Assistant Computer Officer in systems development at the R & D (Research and

Development) Corporation at the University for five months before leaving the University for the banking sector and joining MB Bank as a programmer-analyst. At the time of the interview, he had been with the Bank for five months. Not surprisingly perhaps, all three employees in this study whose jobs are computer or information technology-related are male, and Simon is one of them.

5.4.13.2 The nature of Simon's job

Simon's job is technical in nature and the tasks he performs at work are different from those performed by the other informants in this study. He works in a team of ten people who specialise in computer security and provides technical advice and solutions to the development teams in the bank. The development teams are computer personnel who work with various departments to develop online systems for their various operations. These online systems have to comply with the Bank's IT policy on security matters, so Simon's team helps them comply with this policy. I ask him about security in the bank:

(BE13) I: What do you mean by security?

Simon: How to protect data security. So that the data will be used by the right people and will not get [used] by some undesirable parties.

Simon's team develops a system for protecting the data security of the development teams. He first attends one or two short meetings to understand their requirements, and then works with a consultant to come up with a solution for the development team's system. He tells me about the various aspects of his work:

(BE13) Simon: [...] And then we will also prepare some training for the developers [development teams] so that they feel they can use this technology easily, properly. Yes, also we involved in some troubleshooting task. When they got some trouble, we will work with them side-by-side to try to spot whether our part got some problem and then try to make the corresponding configurations for them.

He explains that data security is a rather new area involving new technology. The field has been expanding rapidly in the past three years and there is greater concern about security because of the change from mainframes to smaller computers. As a multinational bank, MB Bank's security operations are centralised in Hong Kong and Simon's team needs to install similar systems in MB Bank's offices/branches in Australia, Japan and Singapore. He works under a regional project leader who oversees the Bank's computer security in the region. As a reflection of how new the field is, Simon's boss is a young man of thirty-two. He says that the work is tough and they have to work late nights frequently. He describes the challenges to me:

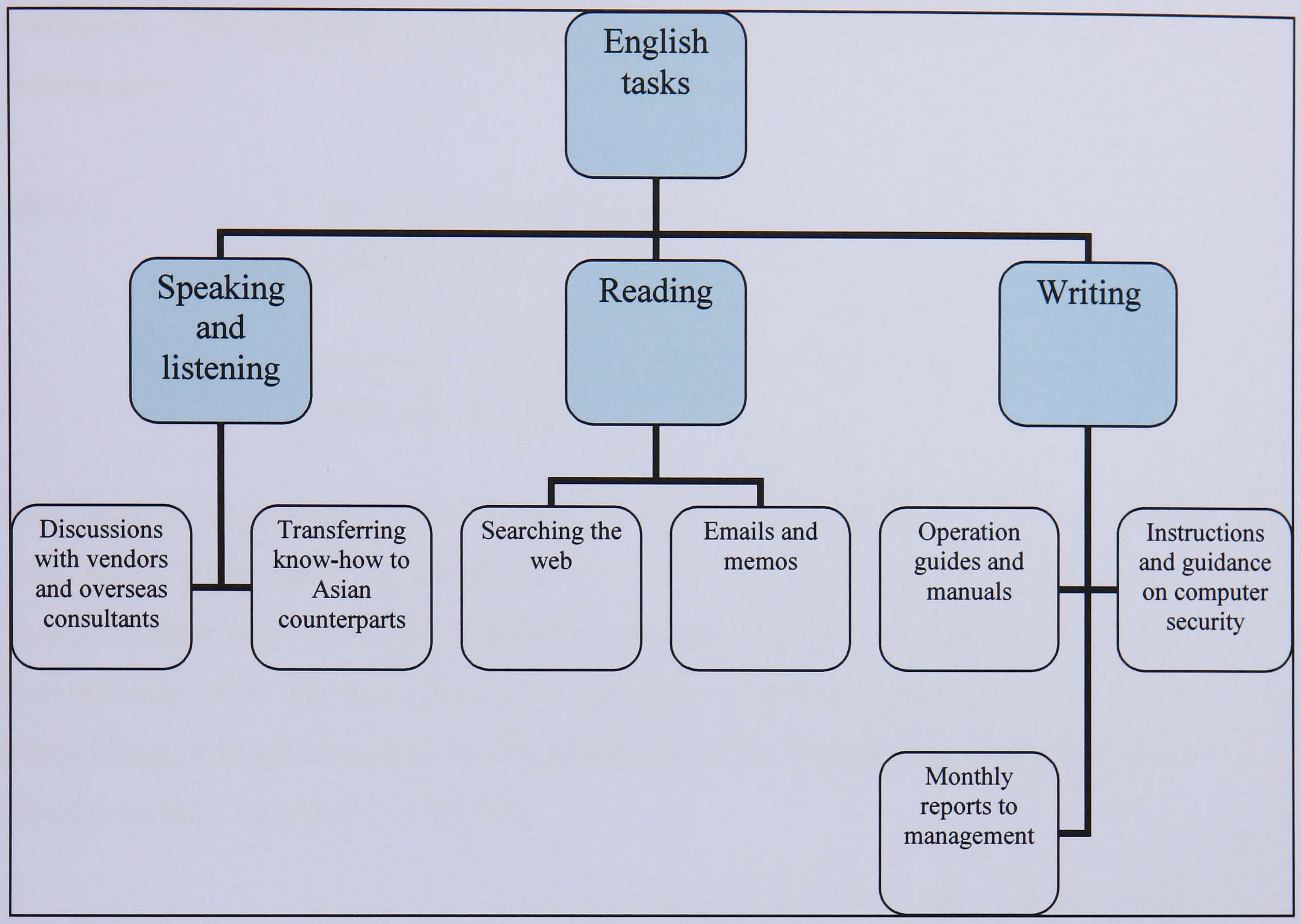
(BE13) Simon: Actually it's trouble shooting because the technology is too new. And there is always, when you bring a new components, and then just get some troubles to the old systems, and you need to figure out how to get around this, and know there is no guidelines, no expertise we [can] work with. And [we have to] try to grab some clues and then to find out how to get around the problem. Yeah, we always work [like] that.

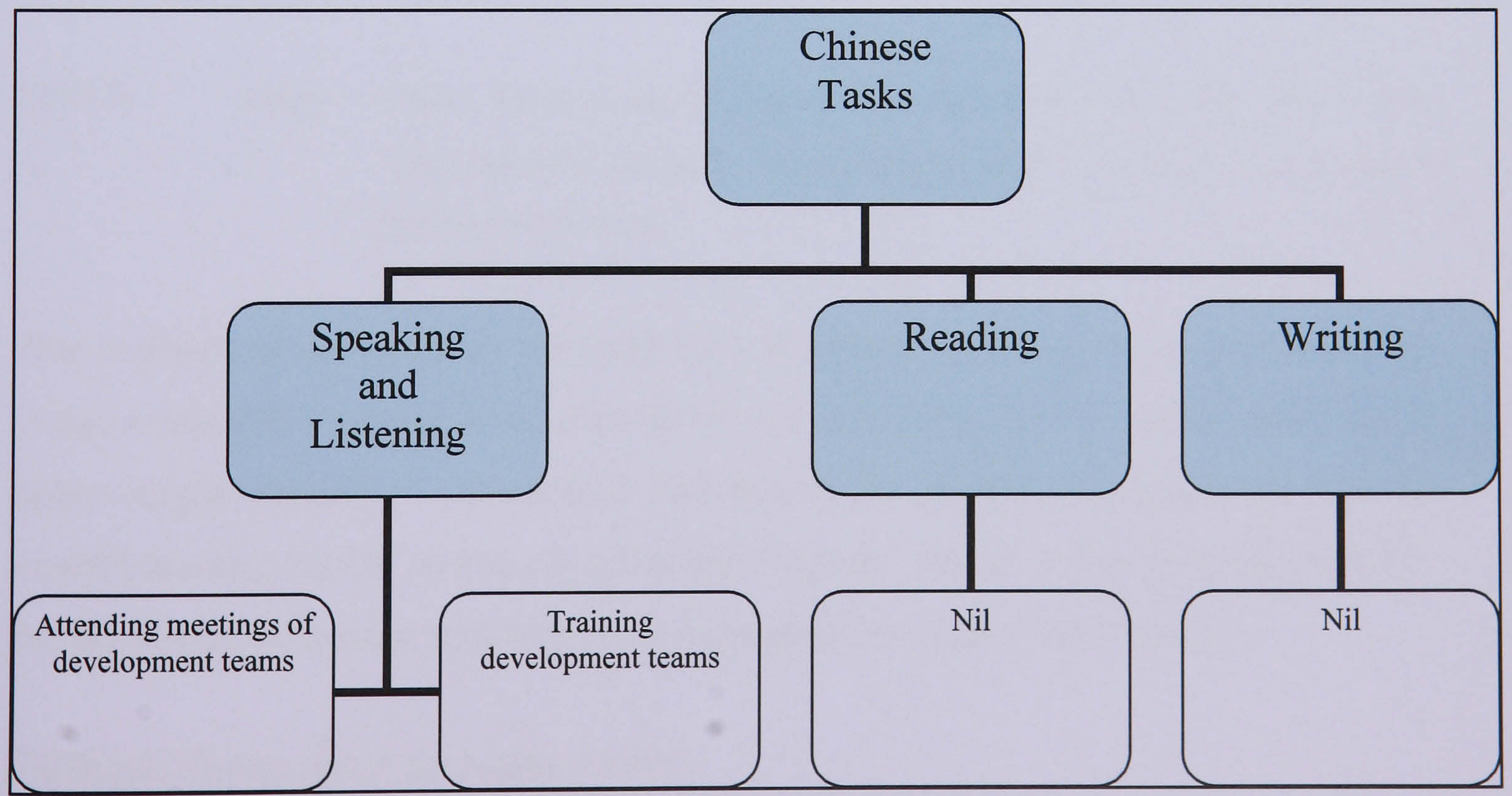
Towards the close of interview, he tells me his job is "very technical and [...] totally not related to banking." And he also makes this colourful remark about his job:

(BE13) Simon: Actually, I think not much people [like me]. It's a small population in a bank [who are] just like me because this kind of people going to the vendors [are usually working outside the bank as vendors].

Diagram 5.13 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Simon performs in his role at the bank.

Diagram 5.13 BE13-MB3: Simon Fung's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Programmer Analyst (Systems Integration)





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.13.3 Language Simon uses at work

Simon's work in computer data security is very important in banking and e-commerce. The technology is also changing very fast. He tells me how he gets his information:

(BE13) I: How do you get the information?

Simon: Mainly from the web, from some machine vendors, and then some seminars. [...] And there is [also] knowledge transfer from some consultants. Sometimes my boss will contact some consultants. They have more exposure [in this field].

This work is largely done in English because of the sources that it comes from. In his dealings with the Bank's other offices in the Asian region, English is also the lingua franca whether in face-to-face contact or over the telephone. Simon uses English to communicate with his boss, who is a westerner. However, following the norm in Hong Kong, oral communication with colleagues at the Bank during short meetings to discuss security systems is in Chinese.

The English written tasks include providing documentation to guide the development teams. Simon says:

(BE13) Simon: When I finish a system, I need to provide some design documents, some implementation details, [...] some training guides as well as some operation guide to other teams.

This writing task accounts for not more than 20 percent of his work. In addition, there is also a monthly report that his team writes for the management. Simon says "this is rather simple actually." The report includes all the problems encountered and the troubleshooting results written in technical language which is not comprehensible to the lay person because it contains "a lot of jargons and some buzz words".

I then ask Simon about his reading tasks:

(BE13) I: What do you read?

Simon: Technical stuff. [laughs] Mainly some technical reports, some minutes.

I: What minutes?

Simon: Other teams' meeting minutes. Because we work with the other teams and sometimes we don't have the time to attend their meeting so there is some minutes.

I: I see.

Simon: And some memos from our boss and then from the other teams.

To sum up, Simon uses English for reading, writing and some communication with non-Chinese colleagues and overseas consultants and vendors. On the other hand, he uses Chinese to communicate with his local team members and colleagues.

5.4.14 BE14-MB4: Jennifer Liu

Product Manager

Deposits and Investments, Retail Banking

5.4.14.1 Background

Jennifer Liu graduated from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University with a Bachelor in Business Studies. She majored in Marketing and joined an American bank as a trainee in the management programme. There she received training in the various departments as she worked in each department for a few months. Her final position was in Customer Service where she was operations supervisor in the Phone Banking Centre. She stayed at this bank for three years before leaving to join MB Bank, her second employer. Her reason for joining MB Bank was to work in marketing, her area of interest. She is currently Product Manager in the retail banking division and she works on the marketing of deposits and investment products.

5.4.14.2 The nature of Jennifer's job

Jennifer works in a team which focuses on deposits and investment products while a second team focuses on selling insurance products. She tells me how she views her main work in marketing:

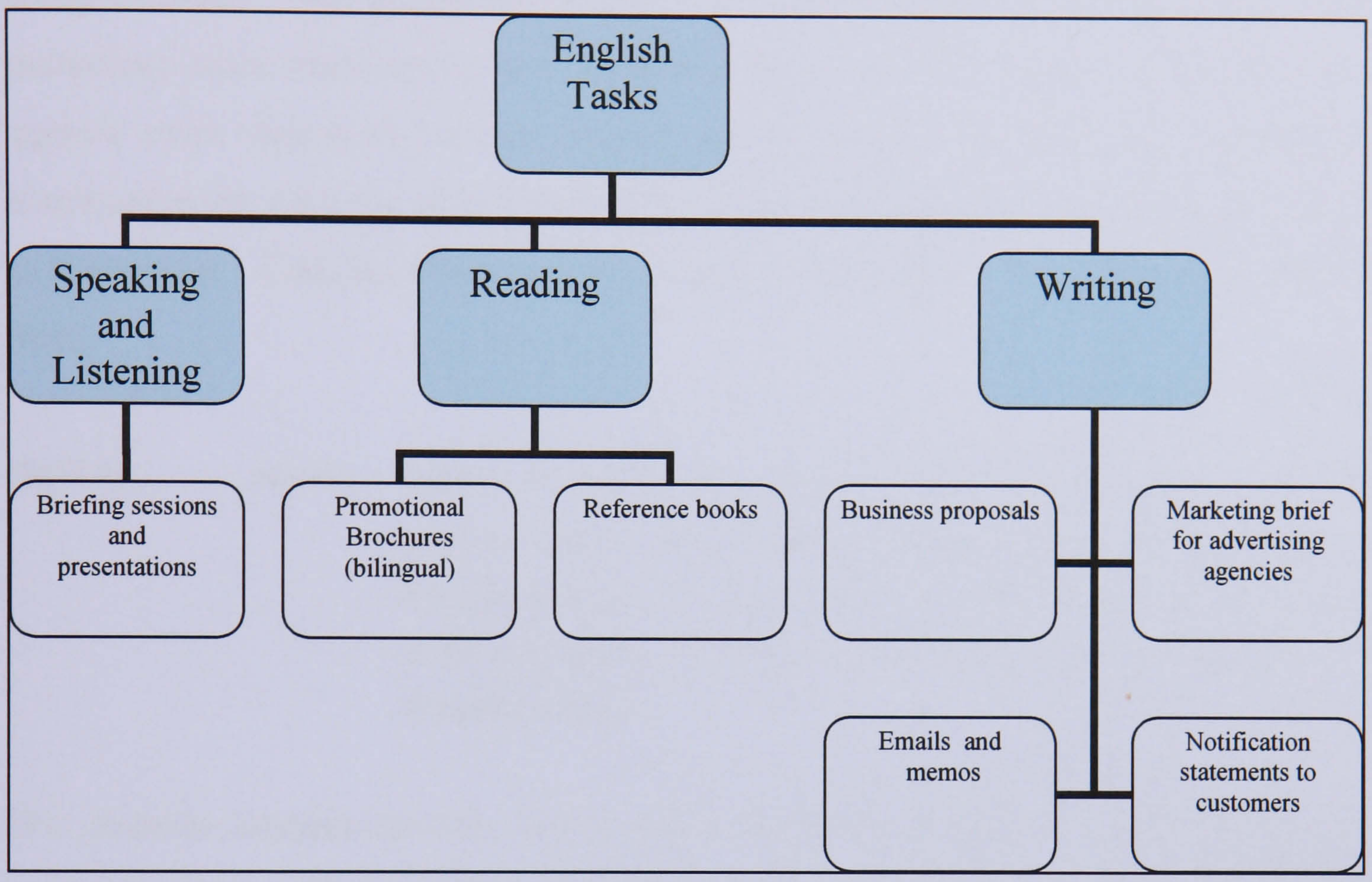
(BE14) Jennifer: [...] The job of a marketing person is the idea generation, like brainstorming. One of the major job that we are responsible [for] is the idea generation, what we are going to launch in the future [in order] to capture more customer or to generate more business.

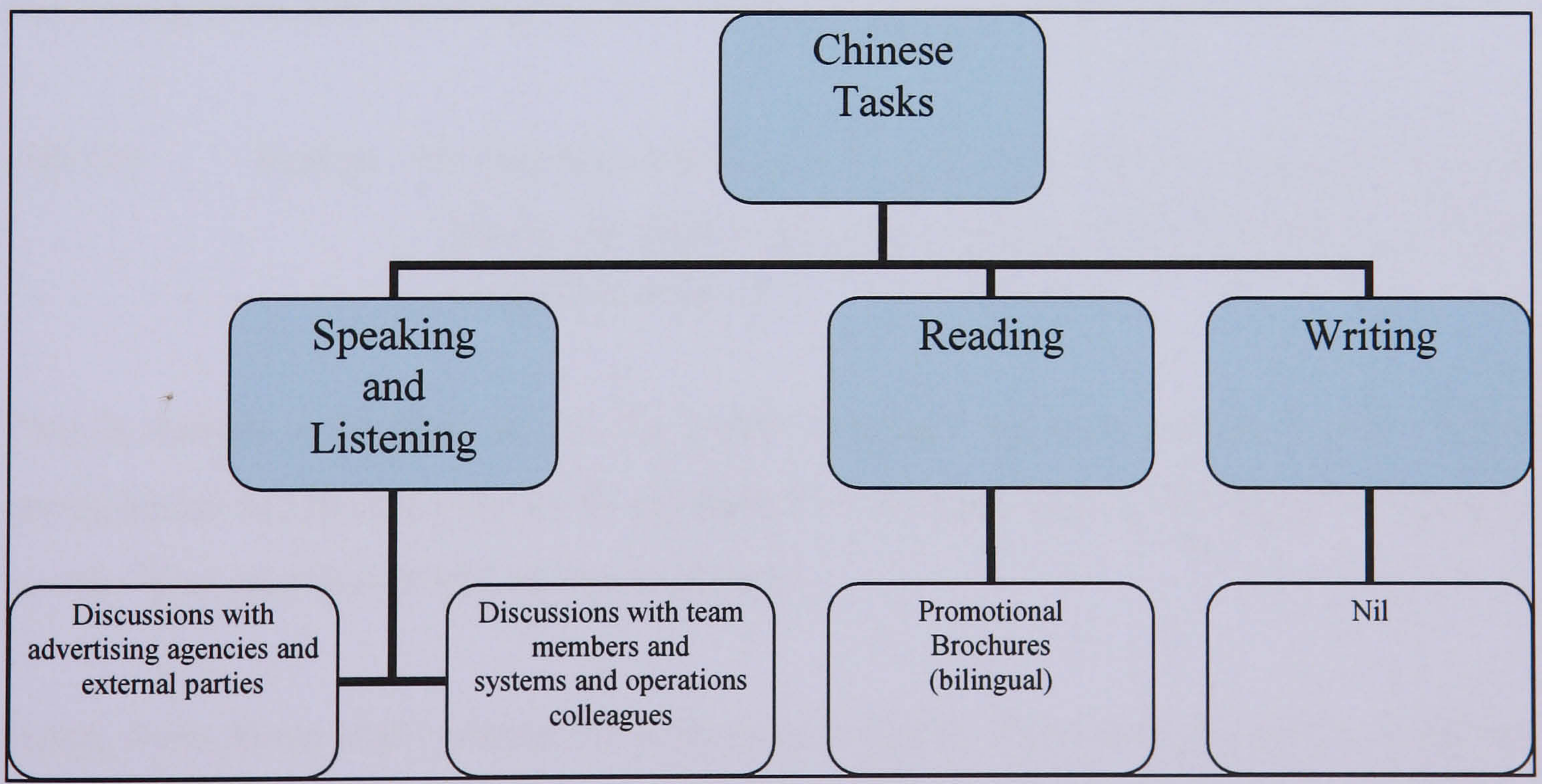
Her team is preparing to launch a new product, a monthly consolidated statement for the bank customers in which the information on their deposits, investments, mortgages, loans, credit card is put on one statement. Her work involves coordination with different parties, both within the bank and externally. She says:

(BE14) Jennifer: Before we are going to launch the statement, we have to coordinate with [the] system [s] party [the computer people] to finalise our user requirement. What we are going to incorporate into the statement, what we are going to do for the customer. So I need to coordinate with them to make it into production [...] And the other party that I need to coordinate [with] is the advertising agents, because we need to prepare some customer communication, so that customer know what we are going to do, what we have planned to give them for the statement. So [there are] different parties that we need to coordinate with.

Her coordination work also extends to the operations people, the branches of the bank and the phone banking people. Whenever there is a new product or a new programme to be launched, Jennifer needs to arrange a briefing session for the branch staff to disseminate information to them. She also visits the branches to gather customer feedback on the new product or programme from the staff in order to improve their marketing plan. Diagram 5.14 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Jennifer performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.14 BE14-MB4: Jennifer Liu's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Product Manager (Deposits and Investments)
Retail Banking





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.14.3 Language Jennifer uses at work

Jennifer works in one of two teams, totalling eight people. All of them are Hong Kong Chinese. This means that all the oral communication is in Cantonese. The marketing team brainstorms and generates ideas for launching new products to capture more customers and to generate more business for the bank. Similarly, communication with the advertising agencies and colleagues in other departments is in Cantonese. I ask her if she has any chance to use English at work and she replies thus:

(BE14) Jennifer: Because our boss is also a Chinese, so I don't have so many chances to speak in English. If I have more chances to speak in English, I think it's much more better. The only chance I need to speak in English is to speak to the legal party, the lawyer, because all the lawyer, all of them are English-speaking.

She consults lawyers because every project involves drawing up agreements with external parties. The promotional brochures and leaflets for the new products are bilingual in Chinese and English, and produced by the advertising agency. But the marketing team first has to give the advertising agency a brief. Jennifer explains:

(BE14) Jennifer: We need to give them a brief [...] We are not writing a paragraph for them but just the points or the idea, [...] the concept [of the product] that we are going to launch.

This is written in English, as are the emails, memos, and business proposals. Where promotional brochures have to be produced in two languages, the English version is written first, and then translated into Chinese.

Apart from these short pieces of writing in English, they have to write a business proposal for a new product to seek the approval of the management. Jennifer estimates that she works on three or four different projects in each quarter. However, it is the person in charge of that particular project who has to write the proposal, so she does not write more than one business proposal in a quarter. The length of the proposal is four to five pages and includes some analysis, justification of costs and expected benefits.

Most of the reading that she has to do is in English. She points out that even with the bilingual materials such as the promotional brochures, she pays more attention to the English version and the advertising agency uses the English version to translate into the Chinese version. She sometimes reads reference materials to research on a new product. If she needs to make a presentation, she does it in English. Jennifer says, "We seldom use Chinese as [the language of] the presentation". The reason for this is the multinational environment of MB Bank where English is the language for formal presentations.

Table 5.5 AB Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE15-AB1	Doris Ko (Female)
BE16-AB2	Lucy Liu (Female)

5.4.15 BE15-AB1: Doris Ko

Manager

Corporate Communications Department

5.4.15.1 Background

Doris Ko holds the position of Manager in the Corporate Communications Department. She has been with the Bank for three years at the time of the interview. Prior to that she worked in a food company doing quality assurance work for three years. She graduated in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Tennessee in the US, and also holds an MBA from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

5.4.15.2 The nature of Doris' job

Doris' work covers internal and external communication. The internal work involves working on the company newsletter which is produced on a quarterly basis. It is intended to "promote [the] company philosophy" she tells me. She collects articles written by other departments and puts them together. She also scans the Chinese newspapers in the morning and translates the relevant news items into English for the senior management. These are short English summaries of banking or company news. Another aspect of her internal work is collecting customer feedback which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The external work involves relations with the media, writing press releases and holding press conferences. It deals with the work of the corporate image. Doris handles the relations with the Chinese press because relations with the English press are generally handled by Paul Smith, the Head of Corporate Communications. Doris also handles function organisation. This involves contacting outside vendors and is very time consuming. She tells me about the attention needed for this work:

(BE15) Doris: We must be careful in handling it. Cannot afford [to let] things go wrong.

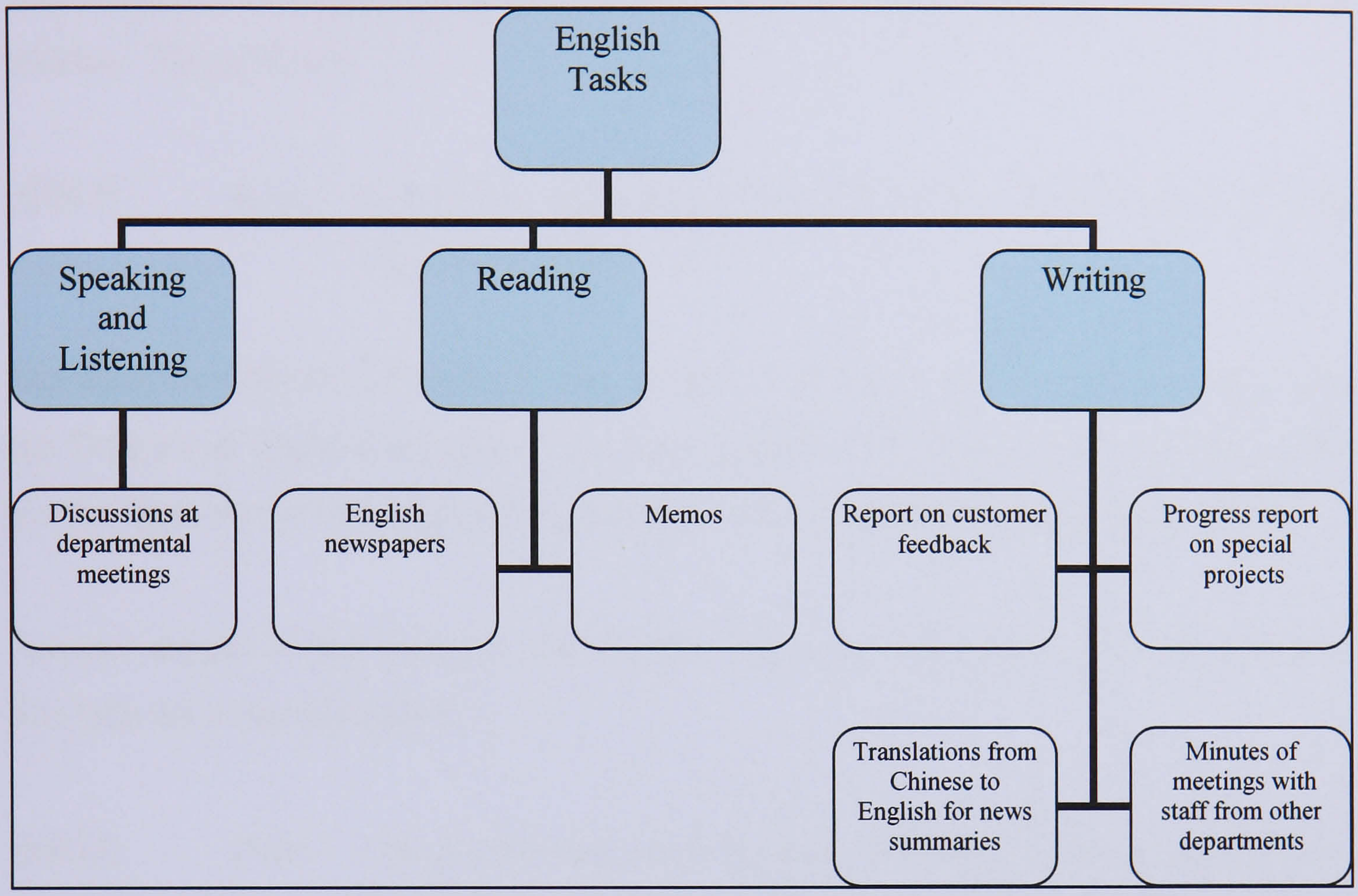
These functions include the annual dinner for the Bank's Committee members and the opening of new branches. For the latter, she has to "coordinate with the vendors for decoration, catering, arrange the run-down, guest arrival time, and so on."

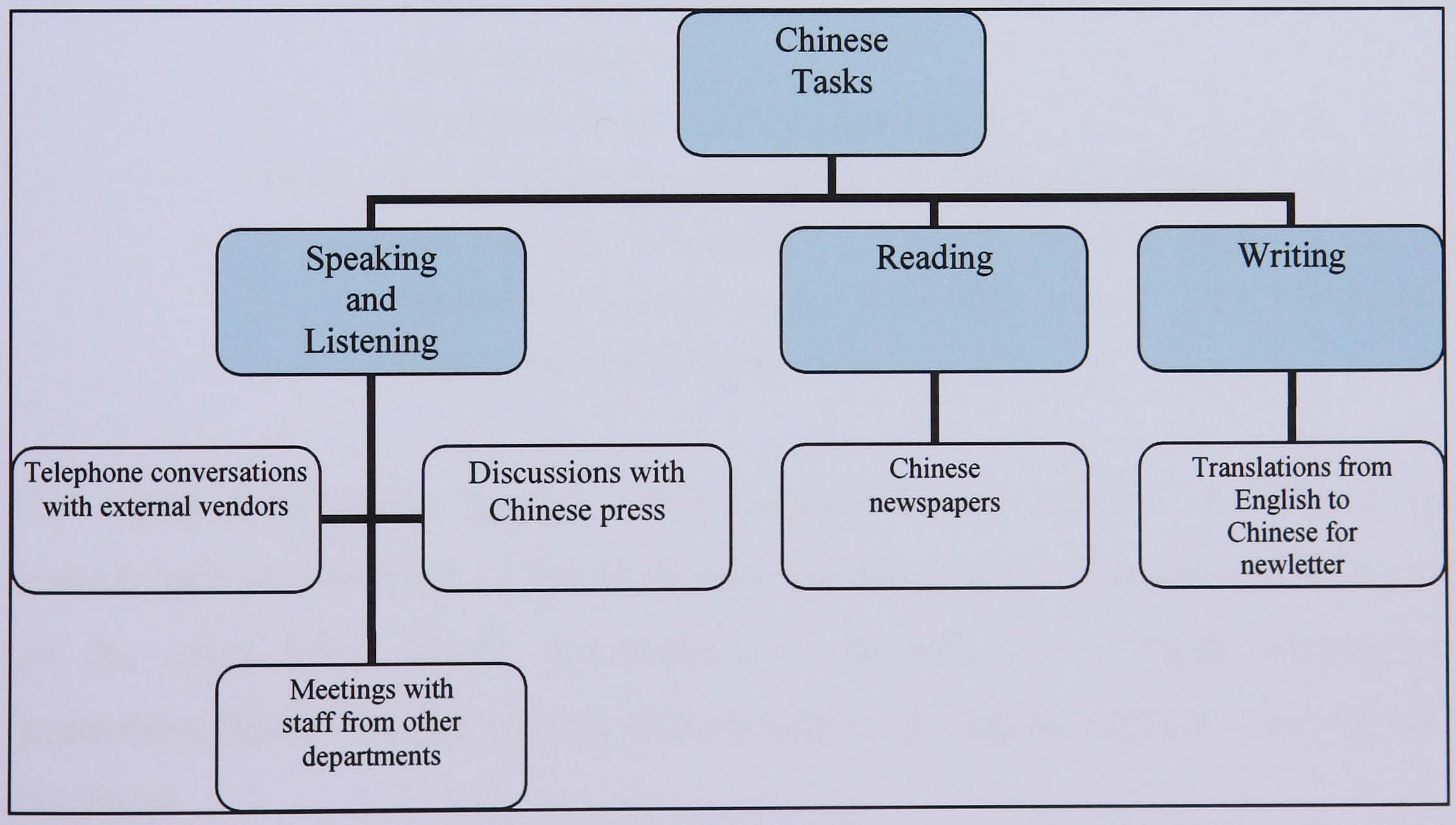
I ask how she sees the role played by the Corporate Communications Department, and she says:

(BE15) Doris: [...] the Department is playing a very important role. Externally when people want to approach the Bank, they have to approach us [first]. We're the one they have to contact with.. When outside people want to contact the Bank, they will contact us, they don't need to just like, shopping around. It is a good channel for people to get information.

Diagram 5.15 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Doris performs in her role at the Bank.

Diagram 5.15 BE15-AB1: Doris Ko's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Manager
Corporate Communications Department





**Nil* denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.15.3 Language Doris uses at work

The company newsletter is produced in English but there are also a few Chinese articles. She tells me:

(BE15) Doris: Newsletter is single language [English] but some specific topics, we do the Chinese translation.

She does the Chinese translation. She is also the person in the Department who does the Chinese to English translation of news clippings on banking and company news for the digestion of the senior management as we have noted in the previous section.

Another aspect of her work is dealing with customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. She tells me what this entails:

(BE15) Doris: I do reporting of customer feedback. When there are many complaints, no, not complaints, **suggestions** [her emphasis] coming in, I do the customer feedback in report format in English to management. We have to do the report immediately.

I: Do you have to reply to these suggestions?

Doris: We ask the department to handle it, rather than we handle it, because it's their customer. We are just the channel to collect the feedback. They [the department concerned] give us an investigation report, how they handle it, and how the case is closed.

This report is written in English. The language of departmental meetings is also English because the Head of the Corporate Communications Department is British. On the other hand, Doris' coordination work with the external vendors and "production house" for the printing of materials is, as may be expected, conducted in Cantonese.

5.4.16 BE16-AB2: Lucy Liu

Employee Relations Officer and Assistant Manager

Corporate Communications Department

5.4.16.1 Background

Lucy Liu works as Employee Relations Officer in the Corporate Communications Department. She graduated from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University with a degree in Social Work. She worked as a social worker in a government agency for three years before joining AB Bank. She has been at the Bank for two years, first in the Human Resources Department before transferring to Corporate Communications six months earlier.

5.4.16.2 The nature of Lucy's job

There are two parts to the work that Lucy does in the Corporate Communications Department. There is first of all the routine work such as translation of newspaper articles from Chinese to English, preparing for press conferences organised by the Department and other *ad hoc* projects in the Department. Then there is also Lucy's work involving employee relations and internal communications. This work involves manning the employee relations hotline and listening to staff complaints and then passing this information on to the senior management. She describes her hotline work:

(BE16) Lucy: I am so busy because these two days I received some complaints regarding on our XX project [a technology-related project]. I receive the complaints through the employee relations hotline. And I have to have a summary of what the staff told me. I have to write up the report to management and the concerned authorities.

The disgruntled staff may complain about big or small matters. Lucy gives me an example of a small complaint:

(BE16) Lucy: Then they will call my hotline. And even [over] a small matter. For example, the lighting on the ground floor is too dark. [laughs] Maybe like this.

Or it could be a bigger complaint involving staff tensions:

(BE16) Lucy: For example, few days ago I received the complaint from the branch. Complain about the branch manager's attitude and her manner really rude and something like that.

As part of her internal communications work, she organises dinner meetings between the senior management and staff members. The four senior management staff comprising the Bank's CEO (hereafter referred to as Mr. A) and three Executive Vice-Presidents (hereafter referred to as Mr. B, Mr. C, and Mr. D) meet the staff once a week on a rotation basis. Lucy, however, has to attend every one of these dinner meetings. I ask her when these dinner meetings are held:

(BE16)
I: Once a week. Monday nights or different nights?
Lucy: Monday, Saturday, Friday, Thursday. Yeah.
I: And this is after office [hours], is that right?
Lucy: Ya. After office hour, seven to eight. And Mr. A (the Bank's CEO) would like to have the dinner on Saturday night, I think.

She tells me that the original suggestion was for four dinners a week for exchanges with each one of the senior management. Lucy says:

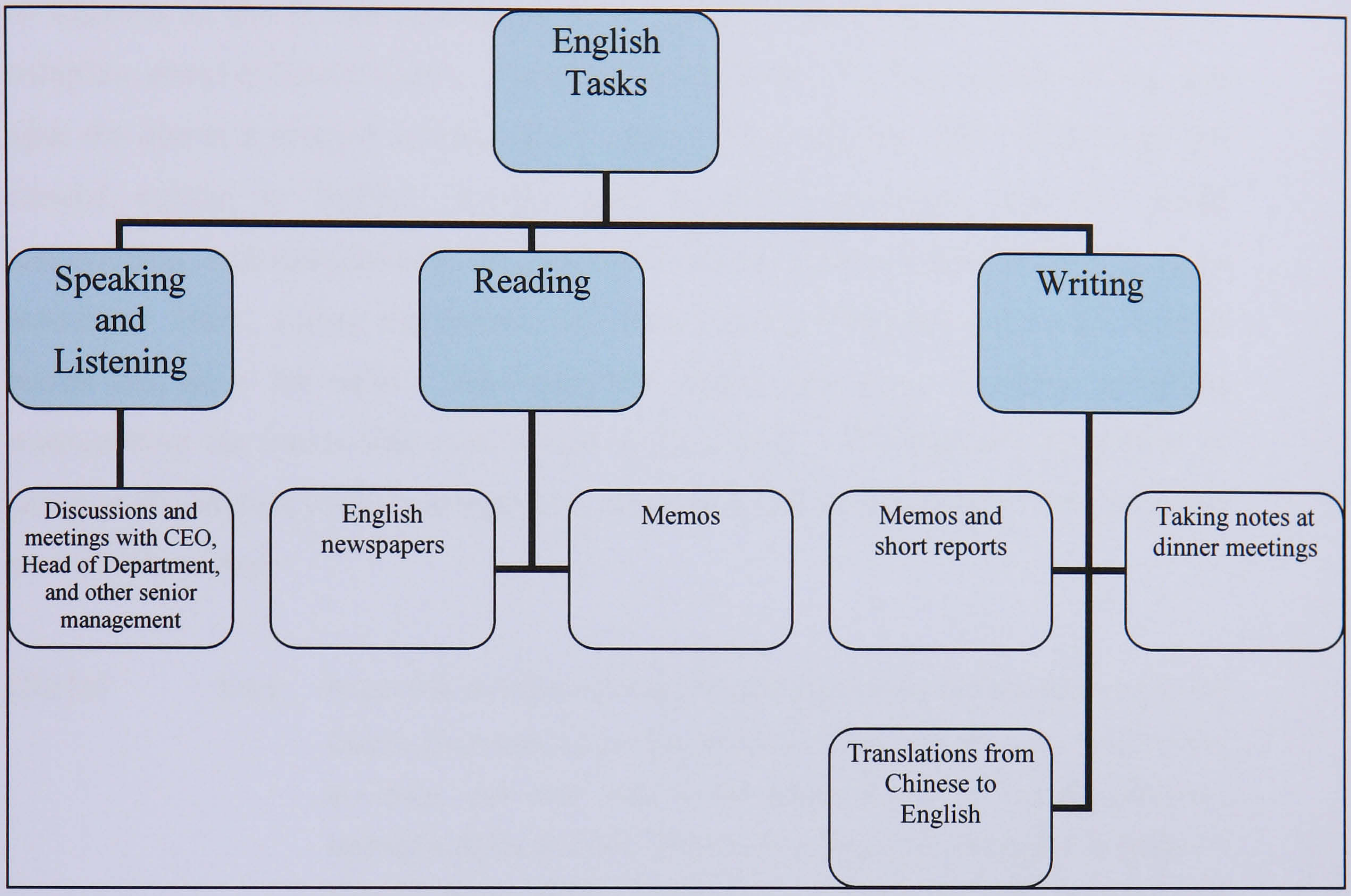
(BE16) Lucy: Before this schedule come out, you know, I have to [was supposed to] arrange four dinners per week. **It's impossible!** [her emphasis] I talk to Paul [her direct boss, the Head of Corporate Communications Department] and Paul talk to Mr. A and [they] come to a conclusion. Okay, [...] once per week only.

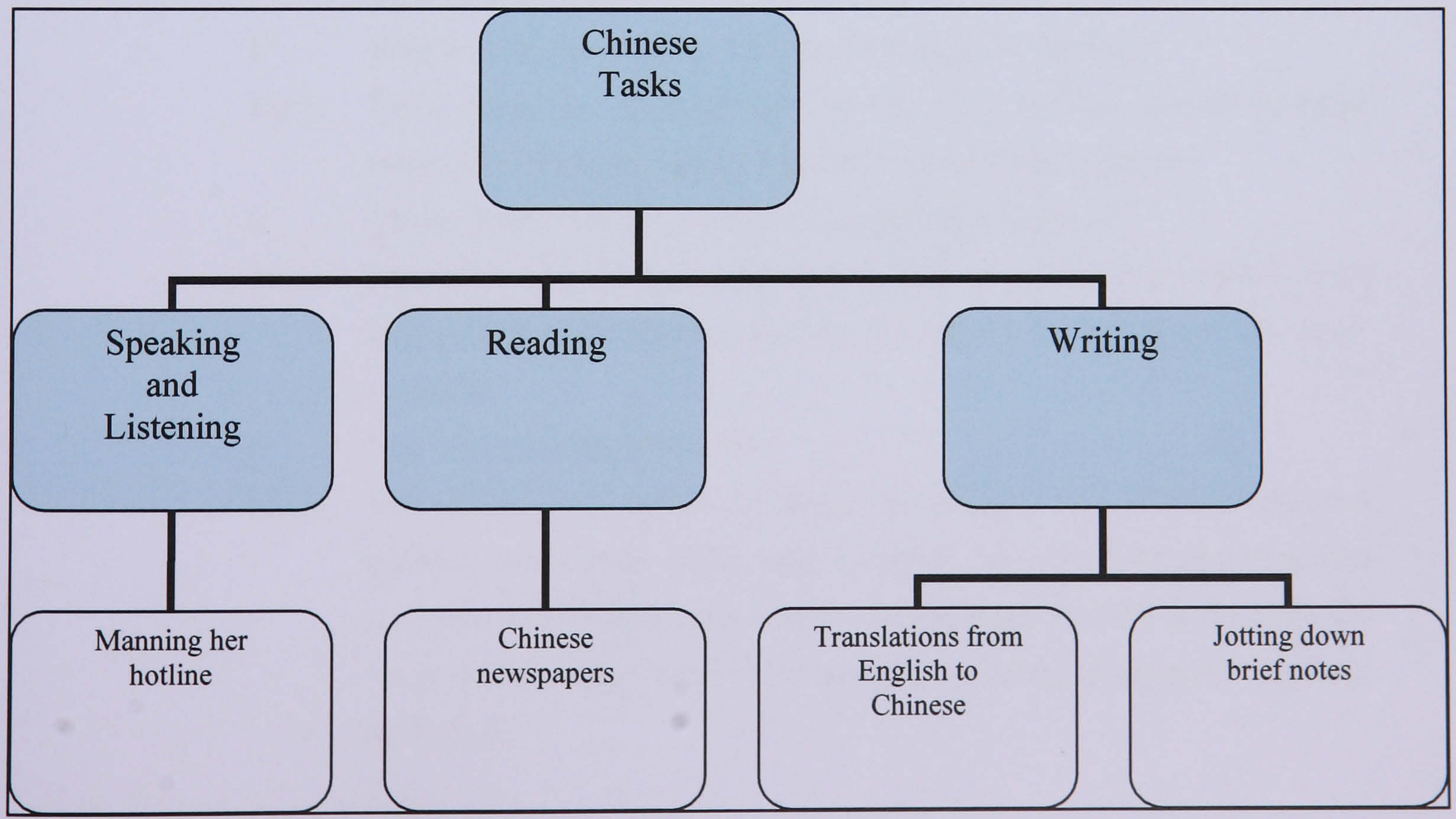
There is a considerable amount of work before each one of these dinner meetings. First, Lucy sends a memo to each staff member inviting her/him to the dinner gathering. This is followed by a phone call to each of them to check on the following:

(BE16) Lucy: Do you receive the memo? Have you received the memo? Do you have any opinions regarding MB Bank policies or any aspects of MB Bank? **And then** I have to jot down all the points and send the memo like this [she waves a memo to me in the air] to the management. **And then** maybe the management they may want to know some more information on regarding on any of the opinions. **And then** I have to check it for them. **And then** in the dinner, during the dinner with the EVP [Executive Vice-President], I have to mark down or write down the points what they have [said]. [all emphases are Lucy's]

We shall see the difficulties this presents for Lucy in the next section. From all the above, we can see that Lucy has a very busy schedule and her work extends past regular working hours. Diagram 5.16 provides an overview of the communicative tasks in English and Chinese that Lucy performs in her role at the bank.

Diagram 5.16 BE16-AB2: Lucy Liu's Communicative tasks in English and Chinese
Job: Employee Relations
Corporate Communications Department





****Nil** denotes nothing or a level so low as to be negligible

5.4.16.3 Language Lucy uses at work

Lucy works in both English and Chinese for her various tasks. She mans her hotline in Chinese as she is communicating with various local banking staff who call to complain about different issues. There are several steps involved before, during, and after the dinner meetings between senior management and the staff. First, there are memos written in English inviting staff to dinner meetings with the senior management, and summarising the issues the various members wish to raise at these meetings. Next, during the dinner, she takes notes in English and some Chinese words too, as is her habit. Then after the dinner, she writes a follow-up memo summarising the issues that were raised at the dinner. If someone's suggestion is going to be adopted by the management, she has to submit a proposal. She gives me an example of this:

(BE16)

Lucy: Some staff said Paul's [Head of Corporate Communications Department and Lucy's direct boss] name card is blue in colour, and my name card is white in colour, and some staff in the dinner raised the concern [that] the customers all the time ask, 'What is the difference?' So in order to unify the corporate image, so Mr. C decided that, the management decided that all the name cards will be in the same blue colour and we will take action immediately.

I: Does it make them happy? The staff feel happy about this?

Lucy: Yeah, I think so. Because they feel they are respected. The management **really** [her emphasis] respect what they said and their opinions.

I: Uhum. When will they issue the blue card for everybody?

Lucy: Not yet decided. Based on this decision, I have to submit the proposal to the management. [she shuffles through the papers on her desk] So many proposals.

I: You have to do the proposal?

Lucy: Just propose three options for them – to change it immediately **or** to set a deadline **or** to change all the name cards [to] the blue colour after they used up all the stock. And I calculate the cost of them. [pauses as she looks for the proposal to show it to me] Where is my proposal? [laughs; all emphases are Lucy's].

All the dinner meetings are conducted in English because none of the four men – the CEO and the three EVPs – are Hong Kong Chinese, and they cannot speak Cantonese. Similarly, Lucy's meetings with the CEO and her communication with Paul, the Head of Corporate Communications Department, are also conducted in English as he is a Briton. I estimate that the proportion of Lucy's work in English for both oral and written communication is about 60 to 70 percent and in Chinese for (mostly) oral communication is about 30 to 40 percent.

Among all the sixteen informants, Lucy is the one who has the most unique job duties and these special features of her work will be discussed in this chapter, thus requiring me to deviate from the pattern of discussion for the other informants. Lucy's work as employee relations officer in the Bank involves several different kinds of translation. First, she has to translate from one language to another – from Chinese to English and vice versa. This is the hotline work that she handles:

(BE16) Lucy: [...] I am responsible to [give] feedback to the management what the staff told me. [...] Why the people call my hotline, [it's] because they want the management to know that, so I have to report to management.

The feedback is not only from staff to senior management but it also goes in the other direction from senior management to staff. She tells me of the two-way nature of this feedback:

(BE16) Lucy: In the beginning, I focus ... try to express what the staff's ideas to the management. But one day, Mr. A said, 'Come on, Lucy! You are the employee relations officer. Okay, you are so kind. You express what they told you. But you have to disseminate what the management's idea and **values** [my emphasis] to the staff also, in two ways but not [only] in one way.'

The second type of translation work that Lucy does is from speech to writing, and to a lesser degree, from writing to speech. She tells me about the work that takes place during the dinner meetings:

(BE16) Lucy: During the dinner with the EVP, I have to mark down or to write down the points what they have [said]. You know, da da da da, **they just talk it** [my emphasis], they just talk what they like but I have to ... **so hard work to write down.** [my emphasis]

I: Yes. You mainly jot down the points in English, Chinese or both?

Lucy: In English. Sometimes a little bit Chinese words in there. [...] Maybe they speak, you know, when they speak too fast, I can't follow. I just write down the Chinese so that to remind myself.

I: [...] You don't use a recorder?

Lucy: Huh?

I: You don't use this? [pointing to my recording device]

Lucy: No, because if I use the recorder, they dare not to speak anything, I think, in the dinner. They feel uncomfortable. So I just write down and then I have to summarise all those points and extract what I have written. [laughs]

The third type of translation is from one culture to another – from senior management culture to middle and lower rank culture and vice versa. We have noted above the two-way flow of information and feedback that she is supposed to facilitate. She elaborates on this:

(BE16) Lucy: [...] So that's why I have to sit in the senior management meeting every Wednesday morning. Because Mr. A want me to know more about the bank, what they are doing, and then if the people or the staff ask for something regarding on the MB Bank policy or the situation, I can know what is the update and situation, and try to explain to them. So, that's why I'm in the management briefing meeting. Actually, I'm just, you know, middle level staff. I'm not eligible [laughs] to sit in the meeting.

5.4.16.4 Non-language demands of Lucy's job

The nature of her job necessitates my analysing her work in terms of both the language demands (in the section above) as well as the non-language demands (in the sections below) she handles on a daily basis. These non-language demands are firstly, mediation and conflict resolution in the work place and secondly, dealing with office politics.

5.4.16.4.1 Mediation and conflict resolution

Lucy tells me about the mediation role that she plays as employee relations officer:

(BE16) Lucy: Today and yesterday, I have received three anonymous calls from the staff. They did not identify themselves. Usually because they worry about their boss knowing it.

I: But [all] three were on the same subject?

Lucy: Yeah. They claimed that they represent a group of retail [banking products] staff to raise issue or opinion. Maybe they discuss for some while and come up [with] the conclusion and then ask someone to call me. The most difficult task to do is sometimes [...] they just complain but [it] involves their department head. It is quite sensitive and [involves] politics actually. So I have to talk to the concerned department heads and to deal with them.

I: Yes.

Lucy: I have to calm down both sides – calm down the staff and department head's emotion and let them know what the follow-up action [...] will be.

She also describes how she handles the complaints received on her hotline:

(BE16) Lucy: [...] I try my best to explain to them and let them know what actions I will be taking after the conversation. [...] try to, you know, alleviate their tension or their anxiety. [...] But they insist, 'Don't let my immediate supervisor know that otherwise I will getting into big trouble.' I say, 'Okay.' But how to handle or how to dilute the conflict between the supervisor and the subordinate is really difficult sometimes.

5.4.16.4.2 Dealing with office politics

There is a great deal of office politics at the Bank, as in any workplace, and in her role as employee relations officer, Lucy sometimes gets caught in the crossfire. She tells me about these tensions:

(BE16) Lucy: I don't know how to play the politics actually, you know. So they kick my butt all the time. [laughs] Yeah, it is I think the most difficult task for me. I have to learn more to deal with them. How to play the games in the business field. Because you know, my role, actually [...] to the senior managers, they dislike me because 'Aha, you always complain this and that to the big boss [Mr. A]. And you know, to the junior staff, they dare not talk to me. 'Aiyah! Lucy Liu! You know, she is close to the [senior] management. Don't talk to her anymore or don't talk to her about something. Otherwise she maybe she will report you to Mr. A or the management.

In a conflict between supervisor and subordinate staff, she is also sometimes at the receiving end of the former's anger:

(BE16) Lucy: For example, this time, the staff complained [about] the XX Project. Yeah, I have to contact the department head. [...] Wow! I just heard, you know, I just hold the telephone [away from my ear] and the head shout loudly [she mimics the shouting] 'Unfair to me!' You know, like this.

I: Yes.

Lucy: Sometimes, maybe they will shift their anger on [to] me.

Because of her important and sensitive job, Lucy says that she "directly report(s) to Mr. A", the CEO. She recalls another incident when she was caught in the middle of some serious office politics involving her direct boss when she was in the Human Resources Department of the Bank.

(BE16) Lucy: I have a conflict with the Head of Human Resources. Because someone complained [about] her, and I have to handle the case. But the point is, I am the subordinate. I was the subordinate of my boss. Someone complained [about] my boss. I have to handle [the case]. You see, there is a **really** [her emphasis] big conflict. I try to stand, you know, in the middle. And the one who complained [about] my boss is my good colleague, my good friend [but on the other hand] she is my boss. [...] So I just pass the case to Mr. A. [...] So Mr. A said, 'Okay, pass it to me. I handle it by myself. That's it. After that incident, my ex-boss really angry with me. You know, every day try to make something, let me [get] upset. [laughs] You know, because this is the politics.

Through the recounting of this incident, I learn that that was how she came to be transferred to the Corporate Communications Department, while retaining her work in employee relations work. In trying to dilute the political nature of her work and defuse the potential animosity and hostility from certain colleagues towards her, she describes her role as being just the messenger between the senior management and the rest of the staff.

(BE16) Lucy: I'm just the messenger, I told myself. [What] the people told me, I just write it down and then let you know, let the management know. [...] Actually, I bear in mind that [...] I'm the one to speak for the staff. And I'm [also] the one to communicate the management's message to the staff.

5.4.16.4.3 Lucy's relationship with her Head of Department

Lucy's direct boss is Paul Smith, Head of Corporate Communications Department. She appears to get along reasonably well with him. However, because she deals with staff complaints and intra-office conflict, she has a direct line to Mr. A, the Bank's CEO. She hints at the difficulty of having to report to two bosses:

(BE16) Lucy: Yes, so Paul asked me, 'What you are doing? You have to update me every day.' Because sometimes, I myself don't know what I am going to do sometimes. Because once the hotline rings, you know, once the staff complains or raise any opinion, I will be so **busy** [her emphasis] to write up the report and maybe we will have a meeting with Mr. A [...]

In turn, in my interview with Smith, he has this to say about Lucy's attitude towards her work:

Paul: [...] She's great. I mean, she said to me a couple of days ago, you know, she is getting the hang of things and that she actually wants me to give her more work. She is **nuts**! [his emphasis] 'What, are you nuts? Get lost! No way my giving more work for you to do. You've got enough work to do already.' She's got four dinners [dinner meetings between staff and the CEO and three EVPs during which Lucy has to take notes] in the next week.

In general therefore, it appears that she has an amicable relationship with her direct supervisor.

5.4.16.4.4 Lucy's people skills

What kinds of skills does Lucy need in her role as mediator and middleman? First, she has to be very diplomatic with the people she is dealing with. Second, she has to make certain decisions about how much she can take on herself in handling the conflict and what she has to pass on to Mr. A. directly, thereby bypassing her immediate boss, Smith, who wants to be updated daily. But Lucy has to decide how much information he should know, and what has to be kept confidential. The person acting as the go-between should be neither very senior nor very junior in the organisation, so that she has access to both levels of staff. Lucy enjoys certain "privileges" not normally accorded to those of middle level rank. For example, she attends the weekly senior managers' briefing sessions with the CEO. And she has a direct line to the CEO on a very regular basis.

After interviewing Lucy and getting to know about her job, one wonders about the importance of English proficiency in this job. She is clearly under great pressure trying to cope with the communicative demands of her job in English. She has much writing to do in English, and clearly labours over it. On the other hand, she brings many qualities to the job that others do not. Lucy is very personable and enjoys a certain amount of rapport with her colleagues. This rapport is built up through the language that they use to communicate with one another, i.e. Cantonese. Someone who does not speak Cantonese would be of no use in the same position. Certainly, someone with better English skills would be able to take notes and write memos, proposals and reports to the senior management with greater ease and fewer mistakes, but the complex nature of her work means that one has to balance the different demands of her work with her differing competencies in English and Cantonese. Furthermore, her training in social work and her experience as a social worker for three years before joining the Bank make her a suitable person for her hotline work. Ideally, the Employee Relations Officer in a Bank like AB Bank where the senior management are from foreign backgrounds is someone who is effectively bilingual, with a counselling or social work background. The reality in Hong Kong, however, is that such a person is difficult to find.

5.4.17 Summary of findings on informants' job nature and language use at work

It may be worthwhile to summarise here the findings on the job nature and language use at work of the 16 informants. I shall start by summing up the background information on their sex, age, and total length of work experience followed by their educational qualifications. Twelve of the 16 informants are female and four are male. Thirteen are in their twenties, while three are in their thirties. Their total work experience ranges between about two to three years to about six to eight years.

As regards educational qualifications, four informants hold Masters degrees, while the others hold bachelors degrees. Only one majored in English language and literature. Thirteen of the 16 employees were educated entirely in Hong Kong: six in the Chinese University, two each in the University of Hong Kong, the University of Science and Technology and the Polytechnic University and one in the Hong Kong Baptist University. One was educated at Oxford, one did distance learning courses from two different Australian universities and one graduated from the University of Tennessee in the US and then took her Masters from the Chinese University in Hong Kong. This information in tabular format is presented in Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in Chapter 6 (where the banks' recruitment policies are discussed).

As regards the nature of their job, they perform varied tasks in their respective positions. To classify them broadly, four informants are in marketing or selling retail banking products and services, three are in corporate communication, four are in the area of computer and information technology and Management Information Systems, two are in credit research and one each in secretarial support, investment analysis and human resources.

As regards the use of English at work, the picture is interesting and diverse. Seven (SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, HD3 and HD4) of the 16 employees use English primarily for reading and writing while one (HD2) uses English only for writing. However, eight (SD6, HD1, MB1, MB2, MB3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) use English in all the four linguistic areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Further analysis of the use of English for speaking and listening by the eight staff members reveals the following insights: SD6 provides IT support and uses English for oral communication with vendors from Australia and the USA about twice a year. HD1 is an investment analyst and uses English for discussions with English-speaking counter parties from other investment houses and for business lunches where social English is used. All the four employees of MB Bank, and in particular, MB1 and MB2, are required to speak English because the bank is a branch of a multinational bank and it has many international members of staff, particularly at the more senior positions. Both AB1 and AB2 work in the Corporate Communications Department and they report to a British Head of Department. In addition, AB2 reports directly to the Bank's CEO who is a non-Chinese. Thus, in all the eight cases where English is used for oral communication, it is with English-speaking colleagues and associates.

As regards the use of Chinese at work, all 16 informants without exception use it for their speaking and listening tasks, but only one (HD4) uses it in all the four linguistic areas. Seven informants' (SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, SD6, HD1, and MB3) use of Chinese is only restricted to speaking and listening tasks, they and do not read or write in Chinese. However, seven informants (SD1, HD3, HD4, MB1, MB4, AB1, and AB2) also read in Chinese, with most of them reading Chinese newspapers for work. Five informants (HD2, HD4, MB2, AB1 and AB2) also do some writing in Chinese while six (HD2, HD3, HD4, MB1, AB1 and AB2) do translations from English to Chinese or vice versa.

Basically, the significant fact that emerges from the data is that almost all oral communication is in Chinese – except when communicating with non-Chinese people – and all written communication, both internal and external, is in English. This is corroborated by other research on workplace communication (Chew, 2000; Evans, 1999; Evans and Green, 2001). Individual details have been presented in Table 5.1 (overall information on bank employees in four Hong Kong banks) as well in the diagrams on the communicative tasks of each employee.

5.5 Interviews with the 16 informants on job difficulty and solutions adopted

The 16 informants face various types of difficulties in their use of language at work in their respective banks. These range from writing in English to speaking in English, from business English to social English. This section will detail how the informants describe their job difficulties, so that a clearer picture of the work realities in these four banks will emerge. Their perceptions about their training needs in English, whether the bank provides English training for them, and their interest in such training will be discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5.1 BE1-SD1 Vicky Wong's difficulties and her solutions

Vicky has been with SD Bank for six months and she tells me that as a new employee, she finds it quite difficult to pick up the new skills:

(BE1)	I:	Do they have a management trainee programme here?
	Vicky:	They don't have. So I found this quite difficult for me to pick up the job.
	I:	So how do you learn all the skills?
	Vicky:	They send me out for the VTC (Vocational Training Institute)[29] for some short course ... three days or two days but frankly speaking, it's not enough for how to [do] the banking operations, how to sell the banking products to our client. It's not enough. Totally not enough.
	I:	Uhum.
	Vicky:	I have to learn during my job [on the job]. Yeah.

I ask her if there is someone who is able to teach her pick up these banking skills:

(BE1)	I:	Is there somebody, your supervisor, who teaches you?
	Vicky:	He is very busy actually. [laughs] Supposed he will teach me. [He is supposed to teach me] But now, he is doing the banking project with me,

[29] The Vocational Training Council or VTC as it is commonly known is a government-funded training body which was established in 1982. It provides vocational education and training for school leavers and adult learners to acquire skills to enhance their employment prospects. It also operates industry-wide training schemes and professional examinations. Altogether some 147,000 full-time and part-time places were available during 2002 for both school leavers and people in employment (Hong Kong Yearbook 2003).

the internet banking project with me. After this banking project, he may have more spare time. [Then] he can teach me.

I ask her about the difficulties she faces:

(BE1) I: What's the most difficult thing then?

Vicky: Oh the banking knowledge. Yeah. If you are not in the industry, you don't know how to do all the job.

I ask her how she overcomes this difficulty:

(BE1) I: How do you get your banking knowledge?

Vicky: Er ... reading books. From my current job, when the client call in, they have so many questions. Then I ask my colleagues. [laughs] That's one of the way ( ) I can learn my banking knowledge. And also from those short courses – three days or two days training.

I ask her about these short courses:

(BE1) I: Do you take many of those?

Vicky: In VTC, the vocational school, I took three courses and in another organisation called the HKMA[30], I took one courses.

When asked if there is any difficulty with language, Vicky tells me that in her present job she seldom uses oral English as most of her clients are local people. However, on those rare occasions "when I need to use English with my clients, I think I need more training". As for the writing of bank proposals and memos in English, she adopts a very pragmatic attitude:

(BE1) Vicky: I'm learning, and we do the job.

I: You're learning on the job. After you write, does somebody else go over it?

Vicky: Yeah. My supervisor. But it is not the grammatical problem or the language problem. [laughs] Usually is the banking concept or the banking knowledge.

[30] HKMA stands for the Hong Kong Management Association which is a private professional association of managers in Hong Kong. It offers part-time courses on various topics likely to be of interest to its members. It is not to be confused with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority which also has the same acrononym.

We shall see how interested she is in language training in Chapter 7.

5.5.2 BE2-SD2 Fiona Fan's difficulties and her solutions

Although she rates herself a 2 (poor) in writing and a 3 (average) in reading, Fiona says that she does not find writing the minutes of the monthly meeting difficult. In the written questionnaire, she does not state the source of difficulty in her daily tasks. In the interview, however, she says that when she first came to work at the bank, she found that she was not prepared in terms of the English training she had received at university:

(BE2) Fiona: When I left school, my English was worse [poor]. I could not write the minutes and the reports. But now it's okay.

I ask her if she is taking any steps to improve her English and this is her reply:

(BE2) Fiona: I tried to read newspapers, but I've given up because it is so exhausting. When I go home, I'm so tired, so no mood to read.

It would appear that Fiona is not unduly disturbed about her present level of English because she does not face any big difficulty at work.

5.5.3 BE3-SD3 Catherine Leung's difficulties and her solutions

Catherine's difficulties stem from both the language demand and her lack of financial knowledge. She talks about the difficulty in writing memos to other departments:

(BE3) I: Now when you are writing your memos and emails and all that, do you find that it's easy? Is it manageable or do you have some difficulties and problems?

Catherine: Maybe I feel a little bit difficult.

I: You feel a little bit difficult.

Catherine: **Yes**. [her emphasis] For example, let's say when I make a mistake … something about the personal loan. I have to ask the loans department to correct this. But first of all, I have to write down the memo to give to our branch manager to sign on the memo, and then send to the loans department. Maybe sometimes it is more easy to say in Cantonese. However, it is a little bit difficult when I have to write [it] down in English.

I ask her if she feels she needs help with this task and she replies emphatically:

(BE3) I: So do you think you would benefit from some kind of help in writing memos?

Catherine: **Yes, I think I need help.** [emphatically]

I: How would you get that help?

Catherine: [laughs].

I: Are there language training programmes or courses that you could take?

Catherine: I think in this bank, there is no English programme for the staff. As I remember, just the Mandarin [course is available].

So for the time being, Catherine's only solution is to pass her memos to her supervisor. She says, "When my branch manager see some mistake, she will correct me."

As for her reading tasks, Catherine does not have any difficulties in reading the memos and circulars from the Marketing Department about new products that are being launched. However, she admits to a lack of knowledge about retail banking products and wishes to build up her banking knowledge. She speaks frankly about this:

(BE3) Catherine: Although I've worked here for more than one year, but I think I don't have enough experience. When I have to communicate with the customer [who has] a complaint or maybe I have to learn more about the retail banking products. Because from my point of view, the retail banking products of SD Bank is a little bit … I think is less than any other bank in Hong Kong, for example, Hong Kong Bank and Hang Seng Bank. So maybe [if] I have the chance, I just tell you, maybe [if] I have the chance I will move [to] another bank. Uhum. To learn more.

I: To get a different experience.

Catherine: **Yes. Yes.** [her emphasis]

Catherine says language is sometimes the source of her difficulty because she is not familiar with certain financial terms or at other times, she wants to provide good customer service and she wants to "write down in a more proper way" so as to get the best results. Her views about what kind of training the bank is willing to provide for its employees will be discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5.4 BE4-SD4 Ida Law's difficulties and her solutions

Ida tells me that she needs to write memos in English, but this is not difficult:

(BE4)	I:	And is that [the writing job] difficult?
	Ida:	Not much because it's just a simple writing and I can handle it all.
	I:	I see. Is there a form? Some kind of standard format?
	Ida:	Not a standard format because I need to write just like the branch memo and also the memo to [accompany] my statistic report. Not a standard format but I need to write in a different style.

Ida tells me she learnt to write tasks from her previous job:

(BE4)	Ida:	Some [the learning to write] is come from my first job [laughs] because in the first job, it is the Asia Pacific headquarters [of a multinational company dealing in transportation air-conditioning], so I need to speak and written a lot of English memo and communicate in English. So I know a lot of ... a lot of skill how to write this in English.
	I:	Oh, so the first job required more [from you] in English?
	Ida:	Yes, **right**. [her emphasis]

At another point in the interview, Ida reiterates that she has no problems with writing memos and emails in English:

(BE4)	Ida:	So I also need to ask them [the IT department] to do a lot of programme, so I need to send an email to confirm the job.
	I:	[...] request the IT department to write software?
	Ida:	Yes, right.
	I:	[...] But this is no problem for you? These memos and emails?
	Ida:	No problem.

5.5.5 BE5-SD5 Rex Ho's difficulties and his solutions

Rex tells me that he spends about 60% of his time on writing tasks in English. I ask him if this poses any difficulty for him:

(BE5)	I:	How do you find it? Is it difficult or is it manageable?
	Rex:	It's manageable.
	I:	Is there some kind of standard format that you follow?
	Rex:	Yes. There is template in our company, our department. We have design [a] template.
	I:	Okay. So that makes it a lot easier?
	Rex:	Yes. Not just easier. It is also build up a standard [it maintains a certain standard].

He tells me that the average length of the writing is ten to twenty pages, and after the document is done, it is distributed to the users for their comments. I ask him whether anyone edits the documents for grammatical errors. However, he tells me that the users only note its contents and not its language:

(BE5)	Rex:	They [the user-departments] mainly focus on the content, I think.
	I:	But does anyone else check your grammar or correct it before it is finalised?
	Rex:	Sometime my boss will correct. [laughs]
	I:	Only sometimes. Not always?
	Rex:	Depends on their workload. [laughs]

Rex does not find that the writing tasks pose a big challenge to him because of the design template that he uses to write the user requirement documents, planning and scheduling documents and post-implementation review reports. We shall see in Chapter 7, however, that he would be interested in receiving training in how to write reports and minutes.

5.5.6 BE6-SD6 Kenneth Kwok's difficulties and his solutions

Kenneth's self-rating of his English ability is 3 (average). He uses English for reading manuals and procedural reference books, a task that he says is not difficult:

(BE6)	I:	So is it easy to read the manuals and reference books in English?

Kenneth: Quite easy because I'm interesting in the subject and also know the subject. So [it's] easy.

He also uses English to write memos requesting the IT department to make changes to the programmes used by colleagues in various departments. I ask him what the source of difficulty is in doing this job, and he says it is the language demand. Interestingly, he does not point out any difficulty in the matter of his communication with the technical vendors from Australia and the U.S. The reason could be because it only happens twice a year. He is more concerned about coping with the part-time courses that he is currently enrolled in. He is studying for his Master in Accounting degree through distance learning with Curtin University, Australia, and needs to improve his English:

(BE6)

Kenneth: **I'm more interesting in the English because it's so useful for me.** [his emphasis] Right now, I take the Master of Accounting. I focus the problem that my English is not well.

I: So you find that you need to improve your English?

Kenneth: Yeah. **Must**. [his emphasis]

I: Why?

Kenneth: Because on the master degree you must require more English in writing the assignment. Because in the advance level [...] the essay [is] on your finding, on your opinion.

In order to improve his English, Kenneth is taking another part-time course outside of office hours. He tells me:

(BE6)

Kenneth: I take another course to improve my English. I have already take [...] for three month. It's offered by the HKMA (Hong Kong Management Association) [...] The title is ... I forget ... [He pieces it together after a while] Certificate in Writing for EDP professional.

I: What is that?

Kenneth: Electronic data processing.

Kenneth tells me the weaknesses in his English stem from the weak foundation in his secondary education. He describes his problems with English:

(BE6) Kenneth: Yeah. **I find the gaps.** [his emphasis] How in writing, when I writing the message, I find it so difficult because [of my lack of] vocabulary.

I: You mean how to put the words down?

[But he does not answer my question, and instead he continues]

Kenneth: I write using the dictionary and also try to find similar word [...]

I: [I misunderstand what he is trying to say] That's a good strategy to try and find similar work in English. Try and copy the structure. Use that as your model. That's a good strategy.

Kenneth: But also the grammar is not well [good] [laughs]

I: You can buy a good grammar book.

Kenneth: Are you have the reference?

I: Yes, there is a book.

Kenneth: Would you write down your reference?

I: Sure. I'll write it down for you.

Kenneth tells me how the demands of his job leave him too tired to look at his English books:

(BE6) Kenneth: Because right now, my job is so busy. Once I have complete the job and back to home is so tired.

I: Yeah.

Kenneth: So when I look in the book I have no interesting.

I: Yes. I think it's difficult. You are doing a distance accounting course and then you also have this writing course.

Kenneth: Yeah.

We will discuss Kenneth's interest in English training in Chapter 7.

5.5.7 BE7-HD1 Kara Chan's difficulties and her solutions

Kara discusses at some length her lack of confidence in using social English at seminar presentations and luncheon meetings which she is sometimes required to attend. Much of the discussion about the financial products is in English and while she has no problems in listening, she admits that her oral English "is not that good". At the round table luncheon in these events, there is "both business talk and social talk". The objective she says is "relationship building." Kara finds that she cannot express herself fluently on these occasions. She gives examples of her difficulty:

(BE7) Kara: [...] The point is for our daily conversation with foreigners, especially those native foreigners, [...] Sometimes we cannot express ourselves in a very fluent [way]. I think of myself is not good enough to communicate with the foreigners to express freely some of the feelings. Well, sometimes we have to go out for lunch with the counter parties. We may say the daily conversation or the practical usage are not enough to express. Even have a dinner, sometimes how to order for the meal [...] especially I can say colloquial English expression is not enough for local graduates, I think.

She points out the advantages that students from overseas universities have over the students from local universities:

(BE7) Kara: So when you compare the local students to the foreign students

I: Overseas ...

Kara: Students from overseas universities, they have more chance to deal with the foreigners, the native speakers, English speakers. So they have more, how can I say ... [they are] more fluent and have more expressions.

The frequency of such lunches with English-speaking banking professionals from other banks is about once a fortnight. She thus feels a need to brush up her oral English. Kara has tried to do this in several ways. First, she took an English course organised by the Chinese University of Hong Kong after office hours, but found that the level was too low for her. Next, she took a course organised by the Training Department in the Bank. But it was on practical English writing for executives which she found was also unsuitable for her as it was a course on how to write letters, minutes, faxes and memos. She has also tried to improve her English by watching a TV programme on travel presented in English by two local presenters. It was a weekly thirty-minute programme, which ran for ten weeks. She found it very informative and interesting because the presenters talked about how to pronounce certain words correctly, how to use certain words, and the differences between British and American expressions. Kara's views on what English training would be suitable for her are discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5.8 BE8-HD2 Cherry Wong's difficulties and her solutions

In Personal Banking, Cherry has to write proposals in English. She says that the English she studied in school and at university was for academic purposes, and did not adequately prepare her for workplace writing. She says:

(BE8) Cherry: For business writing, we really don't have much opportunities to practice in schools or university. [...] so when we come to work in a bank or other companies, it is [requires] quite a different style, I think. We need to write it more strictly and more directly.

Before the proposals are sent out to other departments or to the senior management, they are submitted to her immediate supervisor to be checked for accuracy:

(BE8) Cherry: [My] immediate supervisor is the product manager. When he is not around or when he is on leave [as he is] right now, I have to give it to my senior manager [to read]. They will always give us some advice on the written, on the English we use, or the content.

I: Do they make a lot of revisions and changes or not much?

Cherry: Some grammatical correction they will [make], they will give some advice also [on] the content.

Cherry says that in her previous post in Corporate Banking, there was a greater need for her to communicate with clients over the phone, and not much paperwork. Now in Personal Banking, however, there is more writing to be done in English and thus, this creates "a stronger feeling to have to enhance [her] written English." She feels that a course in business writing would be helpful, but she has no time at present to do anything about it:

(BE8) Cherry: I have considered taking a business writing course outside our job, but I'm really quite busy [...] so I can't squeeze any time [laughs] to take [a] course.

She makes an interesting point that sometimes, the source of difficulty is neither the financial content nor the language demand. She says:

(BE8) Cherry: Sometimes we involve [in] some legal issues. When we come to make some contracts or agreements with customers or potential partners, we have to use [...] the word very carefully because it involves our bank's benefits [profits]. [...] but some terms and regulations or some contracts or agreements, we have to pass our draft to our legal department first. It must be reviewed by our company solicitor before we sending it out.

5.5.9 BE9-HD3 Ophelia Yip's difficulties and her solutions

In general, Ophelia is able to handle her work without much difficulty and appears quite confident. Because she is newly recruited and has been at the bank for only one-and-a-half months, she has not been assigned too many duties. As she points out to me at the beginning of the interview, she is "quite fresh here so my work is just limits to this level and maybe later, I will have more projects to handle." In response to my question, she says:

(BE9) I: Do you find your job challenging?

Ophelia: I can deal with it. [laughs]

I ask her whether she finds the writing in English difficult:

(BE9) I: So all these tasks [writing memos, customer complaint and opinion letters], you find not difficult for you to do in English?

Ophelia: Yes.

I: Do they ever get read by Mrs. Tong, corrected and returned to you for changing?

Ophelia: Yeah. Sometimes.

Thus, after she has written up the monthly report for the Group Management Committee and the minutes of the monthly meeting, these documents are reviewed by Mrs. Tang and some amount of correction is done before they are circulated. But Ophelia does not seem perturbed by this as she is quite confident about her language skills (she rates herself a four – excellent). However, because she is new in her job, she has some difficulty in using certain financial terms, but she quickly points out that she seldom has to use such terms. She says that some of her difficulty comes from her lack of knowledge about Human Resource matters due to her limited experience:

(BE9) Ophelia: Actually for the language demand it is okay. So I think the source of difficulty will just come [from] the financial content. But sometimes, it's not financial, it's HR content.

5.5.10 BE10-HD4 Fairy Tsang's difficulties and her solutions

The work of the Corporate Communications Department is "70 percent internal communication and 30 percent external communication". Fairy feels comfortable doing her written tasks in English. Since she majored in English language and literature at university, she feels more comfortable writing in English than in Chinese, but she says she is also able to translate Chinese newspaper articles into English. She also handles the task of correcting the inaccuracies of the Chinese translations done by external translators. For the internal newsletter, she does only the first stage of the writing and correcting of English articles, as all the drafts are then passed on to her Head of Department:

(BE10) Fairy: I pass on the articles to my Head. She [in turn] sends them to the external copywriter to do the corrections and improve the English. **So I don't have to worry.** [my emphasis]

She feels that the challenges she faces come from the financial content rather than the language demands. Because of her relative inexperience at the job, Fairy is not asked to draft the speeches for the senior management, a task that is handled by her Head. However, she thinks that in the future, she will be called upon to do some of it, but that is not a present cause for worry.

5.5.11 BE11-MB1: Maureen Chow's difficulties and her solutions

Since Maureen appears to be a competent bilingual in Chinese and English, I ask her the following question:

(BE11) I: I mean, are you more comfortable with Chinese or English?

Maureen: I think in terms of speaking, I will prefer Chinese but sometimes when you [have to] speak in financial terms, I would rather speak in English because it's very difficult to translate those terms in Chinese.

Thus, we can see that English is the language of banking and Maureen is more familiar with the English financial terms and expressions. It takes extra effort to translate the original English terms into Chinese. The dominance of English in many important domains such as international finance and education has been noted in Chapter One.

Maureen appears fairly confident and says that she finds the management training programme manageable. In the questionnaire, however, she indicates that the challenge during consultation sessions with clients come from both the financial and language demand. She explains that she encountered one experience where during the consultation session with a client, she found it difficult to give oral responses:

(BE11)	Maureen:	I think spoken [was difficult]. The reactions, you know. You have to come out with suggestions or proposals. I think this is where the challenge come from.
	I:	You mean it's more impromptu and on-the-spot?
	Maureen:	Yeah.
	I:	Is it because it's on-the-spot thinking? Is that right?
	Maureen:	Right, right.
	I:	Whereas for writing you have time to think about it.
	Maureen:	Yeah, yeah. You don't want to say something that is wrong. [laughs]

Maureen recalls that both English and Chinese were spoken during that meeting with the client, and the challenge was to make appropriate responses quickly without saying the wrong thing. The writing tasks, on the other hand, give her time to think and hence, are less of a challenge for her.

5.5.12 BE12-MB2: Herbert Chan's difficulties and his solutions

Like his colleague Maureen, Herbert is one of only two of the informants who rate themselves the highest in their English ability. He rates himself a 4 (excellent) for writing and 5 (excellent) for reading. In writing his research reports on companies, Herbert usually uses a database in the computer to adopt a standard format for his reports. He also asks his colleagues for some help:

(BE12) Herbert: You can ask around [...] You can reference to other people, how they write the report, and you gradually pick up the norm being used inside the bank.

His report is read by his bosses, and I ask him the following:

(BE12) I: Do they edit it?

Herbert: Yeah. They add in their own opinions, but usually it's nothing to do with, like, grammatical errors, nothing to do with, it's not in proper format. But it's usually because they got more insight into the industry, into the financial sector, so they add in their own expertise into the report.

I ask him if his bosses suggest changes in the organisation and structure of the report, and this is his illuminating reply:

(BE12) Herbert: They will. Occasionally, they will. I think the main point here is that they will say, "Okay, the management got a different perspective. If you put it this way [it] may not attract their attention enough, so why don't you change your order, change your sequence, so that the management may get [a] better picture of the idea you want to present."

I ask him about the challenge of writing reports:

(BE12) I: So how do you find the task? Is it challenging or is it very easy?

Herbert: It is challenging, but the challenge mostly comes from [the fact] that you need to really know the industry. As a fresh graduate from college, I know very little about the financial sector, so that's the main challenge.

One of the key points that emerges from the interview is his belief that the best way to learn about the job is from the people around him. We see this in the following exchange:

(BE12) I: How do you cope with the lack of knowledge?

Herbert: My way of coping with that is basically, by talking with more people and then, you get a flavour about their opinion.

I: You get a what?

Herbert: Get the flavour about the industry. You get to know more about how the industry operates. It's basically by sharing with other people, sharing their experience that you get to know more. Because I also attended some training classes as I mentioned before which is organised by the bank. That is helpful but not as helpful as talking with each other.

I: Talking with colleagues here or externally?

Herbert: Colleagues here, your peers, your boss. That would be very helpful.

I ask Herbert how he gets around the problem of busy colleagues:

(BE12) I: You find that people have the time to talk to you and teach you?

Herbert: That's a good question. [laughs] People are busy, but you need to find a suitable occasion and suitable moment to intercept their work. Yeah, that's what I learn here. People are always busy.

He also tells me what he thinks is important for new bank recruits to possess:

(BE12) Herbert: I think that one of the very important requirement of the banking industry is for the newly recruited members to be learning very quickly. And also be able to interact with people easily. So training will be good of course, but it may not be that important.

We also discuss the matter of senior colleagues as role models for the new recruits. Herbert describes the characteristics of role models in banking. They are "very charismatic persons [with] their own style and charm which even when you just first met them you will feel the [their] sincerity". I ask him about the skills these role models possess:

(BE12) I: Is it more to do with social skills or financial knowledge?

Herbert: Both. Social skills definitely is very important, and also their expertise, their knowledge. I mean, you will find that they are usually very sharp persons. They will not bluff along. They got their knowledge to definitely say some comments or opinions. And also, their social skills. They are always very humorous people.

I ask him about the backgrounds or training of these role models, and this is his interesting observation:

(BE12) Herbert: I think what I've noticed is that usually, they got some overseas experience with the Bank, so they have been located in overseas office. I think that would help a lot especially if they are located in the big financial centre outside Hong Kong. Then [this] gives you the exposure and also gives you a wider circle of colleagues to hang around, and yeah, that would help a lot in terms of interaction with colleagues.

In terms of their nationality and where they are from, half of them are local and the other half are foreigners comprising of Americans, Asians, Australians and Britons.

In discussing the difficulties he encounters at work, Herbert talks about written English versus oral English. He finds written English easier because since primary school days, he has been taught how to write formal English. He adds that writing gives him more time to change things around, whereas spoken language is more spontaneous and he has to think of the correct response quickly. Therefore, the time factor makes oral English more demanding. His second difficulty with oral English is that the English taught in school is more formal, and there is very little exposure to colloquial and social English which are needed for social interactions at the Bank. As we have noted, the corporate culture at MB Bank is more international compared to the other local banks. There are many occasions such as roadshows, golf days, and other such functions where there is a great deal of social interaction and "that can present a challenge, especially for a new recruit." So I ask him the following:

(BE12) I: Does the company help you with that? Knowing that it might present a challenge for new recruits?

Herbert: Not that I'm aware of. But I think that comes with experience. Say, when you've handled your clients for five years and more, right, you know how to deal with them naturally.

I: Five years is a long time.

Herbert: Yeah, it's a long time. But yeah, that really comes with experience.

We shall return to this issue of how the company can help its new employees in Chapter 7.

5.5.13 BE13-MB3: Simon Fung's difficulties and his solutions

Simon tells me the difficulty he has in using English to talk about non-technical matters to foreign technical staff. He recounts a two-week trip he made to New York for "some knowledge transfer" during which he found that he could explain the technical ideas to his New York colleagues, but found the conversation-making at lunches difficult. This is what he says:

(BE13) Simon: [...] Somehow working with some New York guy [...] on technical [matters], I think it's okay. I can explain the technical ideas. I think it's okay. But for the daily life [laughs] I got some trouble [...] I'm not good at ... to talk with some daily things.

I: What daily things? You mean casual conversation?

Simon: Yeah, casual conversation.

However, the communication with non-Chinese colleagues for daily work presents little difficulty for him:

(BE13) I: How about daily use? Do you find language is an issue for you at all or not an issue?

Simon: Should be okay, because I'm rather technical and we no need to translate the wordings. We share a common vocabulary so when I talk about this, they can get it [...] Yes, I think [it is] not a problem.

He then makes an interesting projection into the future about communicating with senior management. He says:

(BE13) Simon: I think this should [would] be some problem when I [need to] interface with those senior management but I've not had that experience [laughs] because I'm just a junior staff here. [laughs] I just imagine when I've some idea; I want to try to channel this idea to senior management. Then I think language should be very importance and how to explain the technical idea [...] in a form of more interesting, attractive manners to the senior management.

I: To explain it to a non-technical person.

Simon: Yeah.

5.5.14 BE14-MB4: Jennifer Liu's difficulties and her solutions

All of Jennifer's written communication including business proposals, the brief she writes for the advertising agencies, emails and memos, are in English. But she only needs to write business proposals infrequently as this task is divided among her team members. I ask her about the editing of the proposal after it is written:

(BE14) I: Does the boss read it and make corrections?

Jennifer: Oh, **sure**. [her emphasis]

I: Yes?

Jennifer: They will give comments.

I: Do they correct the English?

Jennifer: Sometimes, sometimes.

Because it is not a frequent task, she does not consider it difficult. Jennifer tends to be more descriptive and less evaluative in answering my questions. It does not appear that she will talk about the difficulty of the task even if there is one. Emails and memos are just short casual notes so they are not a problem for her. The Bank uses many small advertising agencies in addition to one big agency, so as to spread its work among different agents. She liaises with them in Cantonese but does the writing of the agency brief in English. This is in point form and short summaries. Overall, Jennifer says that the difficulty she encounters at work "is not the financial knowledge, but it's more like the language." I ask her how she rates her English skills and she replies, "I'm just average", but she does not feel any need to improve her English. She does, however, indicate a strong preference to have a tutor for individual lessons in English instead of taking a regular course; this will be discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5.15 BE15-AB1: Doris Ko's difficulties and her solutions

Doris does not explicitly express any specific difficulty that she encounters at work. However, she says this about her work:

(BE15) Doris: Daily [there is] a lot of communication work between insider and outsider.

I: Can you give me an example?

Doris: For example, for customer suggestion, I have to discuss with other staff, get information, make enquiries. I have to counter-check with them, what they have done, talk to them, ask for details. This is the inside work. In [my] normal work, [I] have to communicate with the staff.

This communication with the staff of different departments is time-consuming. She says that her work is made up of "tiny little bits", so it is hard to describe her work to me. This could be considered one difficulty of her job. The other difficulty is the writing in English that she has to do. These are the short reports, news summaries translated from Chinese to English for the senior management, and minutes of meetings with staff of other departments. Before these documents are sent out, they are routinely checked and edited by her British Head of Department. Doris does not feel very confident about her English and she expresses some interest in English language training to improve both her written and oral English skills. This will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5.16 BE16-AB2: Lucy's difficulties and her solutions

Lucy faces different types of difficulties in her everyday work. First, there is the difficulty of keeping track of "so many minor points", as she describes her various duties. She has a plan to get better organised:

(BE16) Lucy: Actually, I am going to get a checklist, just put a tick, then remind myself to follow closely, and don't miss any points. For example, the lighting on the ground floor is too dark. They have installed two light. I don't know where it is. I have to check.

Second, there is the difficulty of taking notes during the dinner meetings between senior management and other staff members. But she tells me that Mr. A has proposed a solution for her:

(BE16) Lucy: But after talking to Mr. A, he [is] really [a] concerned and considerate person. So he say, 'Okay, just once per week [frequency of the meetings] and you just jot down the points, but not in details.

Third, when there is some problem concerning employee relations, she refers it to Mr. A, who solves the problem very quickly. I ask Lucy about this:

(BE16)

I: Does he [Mr. A] take action very quickly?

Lucy: **Yes**. [her emphasis]

I: He takes action very quickly?

Lucy: Immediately. [laughs] [...] Actually, Mr. A, I think, he is quite ... he is open mind person and he accept and welcome the opinions from the staff. [...] Sometimes when I have really, you know, some big problem ... I will honestly talk to Mr. A and he really listen to me. So he is a kind person actually.

I: But you find he is also very effective in handling the problem?

Lucy: Yeah, very effective. **Yes**. [her emphasis]

Thus, we see Lucy's solutions to the problems she encounters in her hotline work. She mentions the difficulty she has in writing many memos and short reports and also says that it is difficult to be taking down notes at the dinner meetings which then have to be written up in a memo for the senior management's information and action. In her writing, she makes common grammatical errors, her Head of Department points out to me. Her writing is edited by him before it is sent out to the senior management.

5.5.17 Summary of findings on job difficulties and solutions adopted by the informants

This section summarises the findings about the difficulties that the informants face in using English at work, and the solutions they have found for these difficulties. Although this study is primarily about their difficulties in the use of English, some of them have also briefly mentioned their other difficulties such as those with banking knowledge, banking products, human resource knowledge, financial knowledge, legal issues and employee relations. Solutions for these **non-language difficulties** include seeking help from other colleagues who are more experienced, taking short courses in the subject (in the case of SD1), or passing the job on to the most senior supervisor (in the case of AB2). One of them (SD3) even plans to eventually move to another bank in order to learn more about banking products.

In the matter of difficulties stemming from **language demands,** five informants (SD1, SD4, SD5, HD3 and HD4) report that they have no English language difficulty, while another (SD2) reports having had initial difficulty in writing but states that this is no longer the case. Further analysis reveals that some informants do not express any difficulty because they can either pass their writing on to their supervisors to be checked for errors and corrected (as in the case of HD3 and HD4), or they have a standard format or template that they use (as in the case of SD5).

Of the remaining 10 informants who report, or are identified as, having some difficulty stemming from the English language demand, six (SD3, SD6, HD2, MB4, AB1 and AB2) have difficulty in writing memos, proposals or reports and taking notes, while the other four (HD1, MB1, MB2 and MB3) have difficulty in oral communication. Three from this latter group (HD1, MB2 and MB3) report not being familiar with social English. The need to give quick and accurate verbal responses in English is also cited as a difficulty by two of them (MB1 and MB2), who are actually the most competent users of English among the 16 informants in this study. The most common solution for their writing difficulties is to pass their writing to their supervisors for correction (as is done by SD3, HD2, AB1 and AB2). One such supervisor (that of HD4), in turn passes it on to an external copywriter for further correction and improvement of the language. Only two informants (SD6 and HD1) try to solve their language difficulty by taking a course after office hours – a writing course for SD6 and a speaking course for HD1. But HD1 discontinued taking the course because it was too basic to be helpful to her. The remaining eight informants (SD3, HD2, MB1, MB2, MB3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) are not doing anything about it. Individual details about the informants' difficulties and the solutions that they adopt are presented in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Summary of findings on job difficulties and solutions adopted by the informants

Bank Employee	Difficulty stemming from banking or financial knowledge	Solution(s) Adopted	Difficulty stemming from language demand	Solution(s) Adopted
BE1-SD1 Vicky Wong	√	Asks colleagues; takes 2-3 day courses; learns on the job	X	
BE2-SD2 Fiona Fan	X		√ Initially, in writing minutes and reports, but now, no difficulty	Tried reading newspapers after work, but gave up because she was too tired
BE3-SD3 Catherine Leung	√ Lack of knowledge of banking products	Will move to another bank if possible	√ Writing memos; some financial terms	Passes memos to her supervisor for checking
BE4-SD4 Ida Law	X		X	
BE5-SD5 Rex Ho	X		X No perceived difficulty	Follows a template; users read the document only for its contents and disregard the language
BE6-SD6 Kenneth Kwok	X		√ Writing memos; expresses difficulty in coping with part-time accounting course	Takes a part-time course on technical writing
BE7-HD1 Kara Chan	X		√ Social English at business lunches	Tried different English courses but did not find them relevant to her needs; watched TV programme that talked about language use
BE8-HD2 Cherry Wong	X		√ Writing proposals; legal language/issues	Checked by her supervisor who corrects errors; also checked by Legal Department
BE9-HD3 Ophelia Yip	√ Lack of Human Resource knowledge because of inexperience	Not stated	X No difficulty expressed	Her work is checked by her supervisor and sometimes corrected
BE10-HD4 Fairy Tsang	√ Lack of financial knowledge because of inexperience	Not stated	X No difficulty expressed, as she handles only the first stage of writing and editing tasks	All drafts are passed on to her Head of Dept. who in turn sends them to an external copywriter for correction
BE11-MB1 Maureen Chow	√	Not stated	√ Giving suggestions or proposals verbally to clients on-the-spot	Not stated

BE12-MB2 Herbert Chan	√ Lack of financial knowledge for writing reports	Asks colleagues who are more experienced	√ Oral communication, because of the need to give correct answers quickly; casual interaction in English	Reasons that these skills take time to develop
BE13-MB3 Simon Fung	X		√ Making casual conversation	Not stated
BE14-MB4 Jennifer Liu	X		√ Little difficulty in writing proposals, because she does not write them very often	Expresses the desire for a private tutor for individualised English lessons
BE15-AB1 Doris Ko	X		√ Writing in English	Work is checked and edited by her Head of Dept.
BE16-AB2 Lucy Liu	√ Problems concerning employee relations	Passes them on to the Bank's CEO	√ Keeping track of many on-going projects and tasks; Taking notes at dinner meetings; Writing error-free memos (as pointed out by her Head of Dept.)	Makes a checklist; Jots down only the main points; Work is checked and edited by her Head of Dept.

√ signifies presence of difficulty
X signifies absence of difficulty

5.6 Summary

This chapter began the analysis and discussion of the data collected from the 16 informants. I first explained how the interview data is very important, because the very language that the informants use in the course of the interviews demonstrates their English standards, in addition to providing interesting information about the work they do in the banks. I next provided, in tabular format, the overall information about the informants (section 5.2) and then provided some explanatory notes on the transcription conventions adopted by me (section 5.3).

I then presented detailed verbatim accounts of the interviews with the informants on the nature of the work they do and their language use at work. These detailed accounts have been presented for employees BE1 to BE16 from the four banks, in their own voice, but with my comments where appropriate. At the end of this section, I have briefly summarised the information. This was followed by extensive accounts of the difficulties the informants experience in doing their work in English and what solutions they have for these difficulties. Again, at the end of this section, I briefly summarised the information, followed by a table.

Some of the findings from this chapter form the background for the discussion of the differences among the four banks and their different corporate cultures, which follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Findings and discussion: corporate cultures, big Discourse and small discourses at the banks

6.0 Introduction

Taking forward the discussion of my findings in Chapter 5, this chapter looks at the institutional or organisational context of this study, within the Hong Kong setting to explore the relationship between the proficiency in and use of English by different levels of employees in the four banks on the one hand, and the different types of banks and their resultant corporate cultures on the other. The chapter first looks at the role of a bank as an integral part of a modern economy and the various services that banks provide to the public. It then discusses the differences among the four banks in Hong Kong that participated in this study in terms of their corporate culture, international orientation and exposure, staff recruitment, and the use of English by their staff to perform their duties. These differences can be directly correlated to my findings in Chapter 5 about the educational backgrounds of the staff, their need to use English and their ease in using English at work. There is also a brief discussion of the influence of organisational and industry practices on language use at work.

The chapter then focuses on AB Bank, one of the four banks in the study, to explore two illustrations of how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. The first analyses a senior managers' meeting at this bank. I had requested for, and been granted, the very rare privilege of not only being introduced to the CEO of the Bank, but also of attending a weekly meeting of the senior managers of the Bank, which was also attended by senior staff from the Corporate Communications Department. (My interviews with the staff at its Corporate Communications Department are already presented in Chapter 5.) This meeting presented to me a fascinating ringside view of 'Discourse in action' at the Bank, which is now presented here in this chapter. The discussion was about various important issues of the day, including the 'Y2K problem', which was an important consideration with all banks at the time this meeting took place. Primarily, the meeting was about taking stock of what progress had by then been made in respect of various matters and discussing strategies for what still needed to be done or achieved and also provided a real life illustration of Boden's (1994) analysis of meetings.

The second illustration analyses the discourses of the Head of the Corporate Communications Department on English at the bank, through which another exploration of how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse was conducted. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of some subsequent changes in the Bank.

6.1 What is a bank?

Banks play a vital role in the well-being of any modern economy and society. They function as intermediaries between savers (depositors) and borrowers. They accept funds from many different sources and lend those funds for many purposes to a wide range of borrowers. In other words, a bank basically buys and sells credit. It also provides various different types of financial services to its depositors and borrowers, as well as to the general public. These services include, among others, commercial or corporate banking; consumer banking; data mining; foreign exchange transactions; remitting and receiving funds; investment analysis and advice; insurance; leasing; factoring; credit and debit cards; and share trading and portfolio management as well as trust and estate management for customers. As can be imagined, any bank also has to market itself as well as its products and services to society and the world at large, so as to attract customers.

In addition, of course, there is the internal administration and management of a bank which, again, entail numerous diverse activities, such as planning and budgeting; operations; compliance with Central Bank regulations; treasury operations and the bank's own investments; human resource management; information technology; public relations and others. Spanning both these dimensions – the external and the internal – is Corporate Communication, which is an important department in a bank.
Like other companies and systems, a bank needs inputs, which must be organised effectively to produce the services it provides – its output. Input consists of people, information, knowledge and other things. People are needed to staff the bank, to carry out the multitude of tasks that have to be performed. Given the already

globalised and still progressively globalising world that we live in now, bank staff now necessarily need to possess multifarious competencies and skills and know about such diverse areas as investment, taxation, leasing, factoring, credit cards and so on. They have to deal with many different types of customers ranging from the large corporation to the retiree living on limited savings. They may have to advise customers on a wide range of financial matters, some simple and others requiring a high level of expertise.

Banks operate in an exceedingly competitive environment and constantly face diverse challenges, both inside and outside the industry and, naturally, their success depends on their ability to meet these challenges. They need to be highly efficient in their operations. This depends on the quality of their workforce. The personal qualities of bank staff have to be developed by education, training, and varied work experience and in order to be successful, a bank must ensure satisfactory staff development. The employees must also keenly participate in training programmes in order to advance their knowledge and expertise if they are to enjoy a successful and satisfying career in banking.

The management of a bank must ensure not only that it is offering the needed services, but also that the right inputs go into the system in order to achieve its aims. It must ensure that the bank has sufficient experienced and trained staff to deliver the planned output to its existing and new customers. Therefore, it is imperative that the inputs of the bank are organised in a way most conducive to producing the required output. As a system, the bank contains many smaller or sub-systems, to bring this about. Bank management has the responsibility of planning, organising, directing, coordinating, and controlling the system for which it is responsible. It must consider its objectives and it must pay attention to all parts of the system – its input, output and operating methods – in order to achieve maximum profitability for the bank.

The point that is relevant for our purpose – which, of course, also has immense significance by itself – is the fact that language (or more accurately, people's language skills) plays a vital role in this process. On the one hand, different people speak different languages and there are so many of them; on the other hand, as we saw in Chapter 1, English is fast emerging as *the* global language, at least in certain specific domains or sectors, which most certainly include international finance and banking. Therefore, it would be interesting to observe and analyse how people (especially those who are not English-speaking) cope with English.

6.2 Differences in corporate cultures and use of English among the four banks

6.2.1 Similarities and differences among the four banks

The third research question in this study asks:

What differences are there in the proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees in the four banks, and to what extent are these differences in language use a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures?

The next four sections examine the proficiency and use of English by different employees in the four banks. This is followed by two illustrations at AB Bank exploring the impact of corporate culture on discourse practices at two levels of bank management. The first illustration in Section 6.2.6 is an analysis of a senior management meeting at AB Bank, and the second illustration in Section 6.2.7 is an analysis of the discourses of the Head of the Corporate Communications Department at AB Bank.

In a legalistic sense, all the banks I studied are Hong Kong banks. Hong Kong law requires a bank operating within its territory, regardless of ownership, to be incorporated as a bank within Hong Kong and to follow Hong Kong's strict banking laws. Unlike most Asian countries, Hong Kong freely allows even complete foreign ownership of banks as long as they abide by these two conditions. However, not all Hong Kong banks are equal in their international exposure. An American bank with a Hong Kong subsidiary will naturally try and use this subsidiary as part of its international network to serve its internationally minded individual and corporate clients. Such a bank will recruit staff and train them to deal with international business situations and will routinely bring staff from abroad to manage its Hong Kong operations. It will also send Hong Kong staff abroad for training. On the other hand, most small and medium "local" banks in Hong Kong primarily serve the Hong Kong market and are largely managed by Hong Kong people. However, even they have to deal with international clients in a trade-dependent city such as Hong Kong. Therefore, they may also have some foreign or local staff with an awareness of international practices working in them. In the end, however, these small and medium banks serve mostly the Hong Kong market and will not recruit and train their staff to be part of a sophisticated international network of banks. The four banks that participated in this study represented three categories of banks – first, small and medium local banks; second, multinational banks; and third, what I refer to as "hybrid" banks.

6.2.2 SD Bank and HD Bank – small and medium local banks

Table 6.1 Summary of SD Bank and HD Bank informants' degrees and universities

Identification Number	Name	Major/Degree	University graduated from
BE1-SD1	Vicky Wong (Female)	BBA Marketing	University of Science and Technology
BE2-SD2	Fiona Fan (Female)	BsocSc Public and Social Administration	City University of Hong Kong
BE3-SD3	Catherine Leung (Female)	BBA Business Studies	City University of Hong Kong
BE4-SD4	Ida Law (Female)	BSc Quantitative Analysis for Business	City University of Hong Kong
BE5-SD5	Rex Ho (Male)	BSc Quantitative Analysis for Business	City University of Hong Kong
BE6-SD6	Kenneth Kwok (Male)	BSc Computer science	Australian university (distance learning)
BE7-HD1	Kara Chan (Female)	BA Economics	University of Hong Kong
BE8-HD2	Cherry Wong (Female)	BA Economics	University of Hong Kong
BE9-HD3	Ophelia Yip (Female)	BBA Human Resource Management	Chinese University of Hong Kong
BE10-HD4	Fairy Tsang (Female)	BA English Language and Literature	Hong Kong Baptist University

SD Bank and HD Bank are representative of the small and medium local banks. Hence, we note that nine of the employees interviewed are graduates of Hong Kong universities while one (SD6) earned his degree from an Australian university through a distance learning course. Four of the SD Bank employees (SD2, SD3, SD4 and SD5) are graduates from the same university, the City University of Hong Kong. Of these four, one majored in Public and Social Administration, one in Business Studies and two majored in Quantitative Analysis for Business. Apart from these majors, the other employees have degrees in Economics, Marketing and Human Resource Management while the employee who did a distance learning programme majored in Computer Science. Only one employee (HD4) from these two banks (and in the entire study) majored in English Language and Literature from the Hong Kong Baptist University. Table 6.1 gives a summary of the informants' majors and the universities they graduated from.

The work these informants do at these two banks ranges from giving loans to customers (SD1), selling retail bank products such as credit cards and life insurance (SD3) and deposit products (HD2), investment analysis (HD1), data mining and numerical analysis of data (SD4), information systems and IT support (SD5 and SD6), secretarial assistance to the General Manager and Zone Managers (SD2) and Head of Group Human Resources (HD3), and corporate communications work (HD4). All of them report to a Chinese supervisor, and almost all their oral communication is in Cantonese. The one exception is HD1 who does investment analysis and has some opportunities to speak in English to foreign counter parties and investment analysts from global investment firms. This need to use social English in addition to financial English causes some difficulty for her. The other informants generally do not have any great need to use English beyond some routine and predictable patterns of usage in written form and therefore do not feel unduly challenged by their average proficiency (as rated by themselves and as evident in their interview transcripts) in English.

6.2.3 MB Bank – a multinational bank

Table 6.2 Summary of MB Bank informants' degrees and universities

Identification Number	Name	Major/Degree	University graduated from
BE11-MB1	Maureen Chow (Female)	BBA International Business; MBA	Chinese University of Hong Kong; University of Texas, Austin
BE12-MB2	Herbert Chan (Male)	MSc Engineering, Economics and Management	Oxford University
BE13-MB3	Simon Fung (Male)	MPhil Computer Science	University of Science and Technology
BE14-MB4	Jennifer Liu (Female)	BBA Marketing	Hong Kong Polytechnic University

In contrast, the informants from MB Bank reflect the different recruitment practices of a bank with multinational operations. MB Bank is a subsidiary of an American bank, and the two management trainees (MB1 and MB2) interviewed in this study are university graduates from the US and UK respectively. MB1 has an MBA from the University of Texas at Austin[31] and MB2 has a Master's degree in Engineering, Economics and Management from Oxford University. They are both being trained to perform the more sophisticated international operations of banking and finance. They operate in an English-speaking environment a great deal of the time at work, and interact with both local and international colleagues. Both of them report to English-speaking supervisors. Both of them are required to carry out research, write analytical reports, and make presentations in English at a much higher level of skills than that required for routine form filling. Both of them express that the speaking demands present some challenge to them because they need to be able to perform quickly and spontaneously in an appropriate manner.

The other two employees (MB3 and MB4) work in the back office and are graduates of local universities. MB3 has a master's degree in computer science, works in computer security and needs to use English at work with overseas consultants and vendors and with the Bank's staff in other Asian offices. He also reports to an English-speaking supervisor but the language is mostly technical and does not pose any great difficulty to him in his everyday work. MB4 works in the marketing of

[31] Ranked 51 of the best national universities in the US by US News & World Report and ranked 17 out of the top 50 public national universities. This information is obtained from US News & World Report (2006) *America's Best Colleges(2007 edition)*. Washington DC: US News & World Report.

retail products with Chinese colleagues and reports to a Chinese supervisor. She has to write proposals in English but not frequently and it does not appear to require very high-level English writing skills.

6.2.4 AB Bank – a hybrid bank

Table 6.3 Summary of AB Bank's informants' degrees and universities

Identification Number	Name	Major/Degree	University graduated from
BE15-AB1	Doris Ko (Female)	BSc; MBA	University of Tennessee; Chinese University of Hong Kong
BE16-AB2	Lucy Liu (Female)	BSW Social Work	Hong Kong Polytechnic University

AB Bank is an unusual hybrid. Its branch network is confined to Hong Kong but it is owned by London-based investors. Because of its international ownership, its aspirations are higher than a bank of similar size operating within Hong Kong only. It also had a foreign-born and foreign-educated CEO who was trying very hard to modernise it through training and bringing in internationally-minded management. The three EVPs at the Bank were also foreign-born, and the Head of the Corporate Communications Department where I conducted my study was a British man. In a sense, it was a meeting of the two main streams – "local" and "international" – in Hong Kong banking and therefore, was a good subject for this study.

From Table 6.3, we see that AB1 has a Bachelor's degree from a US university, the University of Tennessee[32] and an MBA from the Chinese University of Hong Kong while AB2 has a Bachelor's degree from a local university. However, as the Head of Corporate Communications points out in the next section in this chapter, she (AB1) probably did not use her time in the US improving her English substantially. Her work in the Department deals mostly with media relations with the Chinese press, contacts with external suppliers and vendors, and translating written communication from Chinese to English and vice versa. On the other hand, AB2's work focuses on employee relations as we saw in Chapter 5. She uses Chinese with her local

[32] Ranked 95 of the best national universities in the US by US News & World Report and ranked 44 out of the top 50 public national universities. This information is obtained from US News & World Report (2006) *America's Best Colleges (2007 edition)*. Washington DC: US News & World Report.

colleagues. Both of them report to a British Head of Department but AB2 has frequent and direct communication in English with the Bank's CEO as well. She writes memos and reports in English but makes many common grammatical mistakes as pointed out to me by her Head of Department and her work has to be edited by him.

Since this study was conducted, a number of local Hong Kong banks have been bought by large international banks which are trying to internationalise and modernise the banks they have acquired. This is part of a global trend whereby small financial institutions are bought up by large ones. This also means that the local staff working in Hong Kong's smaller banks will have to retrain themselves to succeed in this sector.

6.2.5 The influence of organisational and industry practices on language use at work

Among the literature surveyed, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (1999a) define "business writing" as that which "always involves or facilitates doing business" (p. 2) and "where the purpose of the texts produced as a result is to buy or sell goods or services, or to facilitate the buying and selling of goods and services" (p. 2). The writing carried out by the employees in the four banks in this study is clearly for this purpose. Nickerson's 1999 study on "The use of electronic mail in a multinational corporation" investigates the use of English in the in-coming and out-going email communication of one Dutch manager working in a large multinational corporation in The Netherlands and examines why English, rather than Dutch, is used. Her findings suggest that the decision to use English is determined by situational and communicative factors. Dutch employees communicated electronically with other Dutch employees in Dutch unless a non-Dutch-speaking employee also required access to the communication. There are both differences and similarities between the Dutch study and my study. The difference is that my informants from the Hong Kong banks informed me that emails were almost always in English because some of the offices did not have Chinese Windows. The similarity is that in the Hong Kong workplace, employees use Cantonese in all oral interactions with other local colleagues unless the presence of non-Cantonese colleagues requires them to use

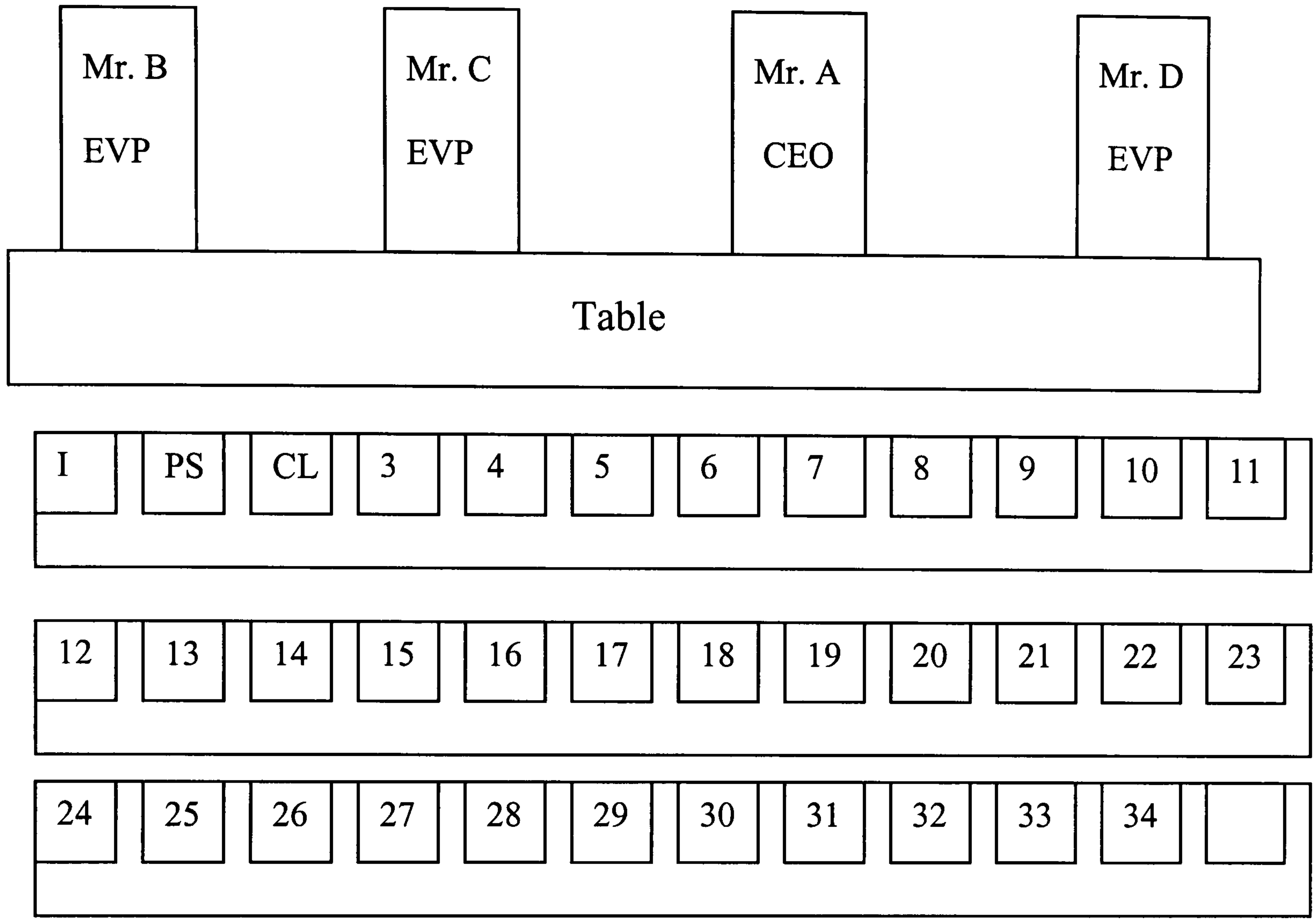
English. Nickerson's study (1999) concludes that the use of English in emails in that particular multinational organisation in The Netherlands is embedded in the organisational practices of the corporation.

This was also the case with all the four banks in my study. There was a sliding scale in the use of English with the greatest use of English among colleagues in the one multinational bank (MB Bank); AB Bank in the middle position with the foreign senior management being unable to speak Cantonese and thus requiring those Chinese employees who communicate with them to do so in English; and the other two local banks (SD Bank and HD Bank) showing the least use of English among colleagues apart from their written communication. However, apart from the organisational practices of individual banks, there was another very significant factor at work. As we saw in Chapter 1, English has penetrated deeply into a very diverse range of international domains ranging from international organisations and conferences to international tourism and Internet communication. Several domains have come to be totally dependent on it, one of which is international finance and banking. Thus, at the highest level of factors determining language choice and language use at work, international finance and banking operate in English, and even the small local banks in Hong Kong have to use English for much of their documentation work. At the next level below this, the different types of banks and their resultant corporate cultures also affect their language practices as the following two illustrations from AB Bank will demonstrate.

6.2.6 The corporate culture of AB Bank and its Discourse as viewed through a senior managers' meeting

I had the rare privilege of being introduced to the CEO of AB Bank, Mr. A, and of being granted permission to attend a meeting of the senior managers. This valuable opportunity afforded to this researcher of being present at this senior managers' meeting allowed me to gain a better understanding of this Bank's corporate culture and its Discourse. At this important weekly meeting that was conducted one morning in September, 1999, I could take notes but I was not permitted to use a recording device. In Chapter 3: Literature review, we have noted how according to Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996), the new capitalism seeks to create new goals, core values, a vision, a culture and so forth. The authors describe them collectively as *Discourse* with a capital D, as opposed to *discourse* which simply "means 'a stretch of spoken or written language' or 'language in use' " (p.10). Gee (2005) provides a further elaboration of this distinction when he writes that "People build identities and activities not just through language but by using language together with other "stuff" that isn't language" (p.20). He continues to say that "I use the term "Discourse," with a capital "D," for ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (p.21). In the senior managers' meeting, one sees at a more general level, the playing out of banking Discourse as defined by Gee (2005) while at a more specific or local level, one sees the playing out of AB Bank Discourse with local actors enacting such Discourse. One notes the orderliness in the way the meeting and reporting by each member were conducted as each member of this distinct community enacted his/her "socially recognizable identity" Gee (2005). The report on how this senior managers' meeting was conducted in the section below clearly illustrates this notion.

Figure 6.1 Seating Arrangement at Senior Managers' Meeting



I = Interviewer

PS = Paul Smith

CL = Cindy Lam

Figure 6.1 shows the physical layout of the meeting with Mr. A, the Bank's CEO, and Mr. B, Mr. C, and Mr. D, the three Executive Vice-Presidents (EVPs), seated at the table in front. There were three rows of seats facing them and I occupied one seat on the extreme left in the front row. Seated next to me on my right was Paul Smith, the Head of the Corporate Communications Department, and seated to his right was Cindy Lam, one other staff member from Corp Com (as it was referred to by the staff) as indicated in Figure 6.1. The other senior managers in attendance variously occupied the rest of the seats. There were a total of 29 men and 9 women in attendance, not including me. The atmosphere at the meeting could be described as both solemn and jovial. It was solemn because the people in attendance were discussing serious business about the Bank's activities and operations; yet it was also jovial because of the jokes cracked by various staff members, and in particular by Mr. A. Indeed, the meeting began with a joke from him.

Mr. A and the three EVPs walked into the conference room at 9:00am. Mr. A was smoking his usual cigar. He spoke into the microphone to test that it was working and said, "Can you hear me?" One of the EVPs answered in the affirmative, and he immediately retorted, "Not you, **them**." (his emphasis). Paul Smith then announced my presence to all, and asked me to introduce myself. I introduced myself, thanked Mr. A for letting me sit in Corp Com for the past several weeks (though not on a daily basis) getting to know about the work they do. I also thanked Mr. A for giving me the opportunity to attend that morning's meeting.

Mr. A replied, "We would like to welcome you. I want everyone to be on their best behaviour. No dirty jokes, you understand?" This was greeted by some laughter from the audience and some people replied, "Yes." This was followed by a wisecrack from Paul Smith, which was intended at the same time to reassure the participants about my presence at the senior managers' meeting. He told them, "Suan has signed a Confidentiality Agreement so anything you say will **not** (his emphasis) be held against you."

The morning's business then began in earnest with each head of department or supervisor giving their report to the four men at the front. Paul Smith started by reporting on the Y2K issue and what the Corp Com Department was planning to do in terms of media management. He passed the microphone to Cindy Lam next to him and she briefed the participants about the planned Y2K seminar being held for the bank's customers at one of the hotels in the coming week. Mr. A asked Cindy Lam, "Who are the speakers and how are we going to manage the presentation?" He asked several more questions about the planned event and said he would like to take a look at the presentation, ending with the words, "Very good, thanks."

The microphone was passed to the third speaker who was seated next to Cindy Lam and he gave his report. In this manner, each of the senior officers in turn gave his/her report, and Mr. A either raised questions or made comments. Thus, as Boden (1994) points out, meetings involve a great deal of talk. And as she further adds:

> But who talks when, to whom, and for how long is no casual matter. Talk revolves round the table on a turn-by-turn basis, one speaker at a time... Turn-taking, turn allocation, turn

> transition, speaker selection, indeed the whole gamut of the Sacks *et al.* turn-taking model, take specific shape and direction in meeting settings. (p.82)

The issues covered at this particular meeting ranged from Y2K to cash balances in the Bank's automated teller machines (ATMs), to what was written about the bank in a magazine which had gotten the facts wrong. On this issue which Mr. A himself had raised to draw the participants' attention to the article, he directed a question to Paul Smith, "Did you write the letter (to clarify the misinformation)? When?" Paul Smith replied, "Yes, and I've given you a copy. And it's been sent off." The reporting from other senior officers continued and covered credit cards, loans, the introduction of two new staff members from another branch, the Fitness Centre at the Bank (which Mr. A was extremely proud of), car parks for sale, real estate for sale, the running of a training programme on trends in risk management, and a report from the Legal Department. At this point, Mr. A said, "I need an update." Suddenly, somebody's mobile phone rang. A man got up and left the room. Mr. A turned to look at me and explained, "He is expecting a baby. His wife is in Australia. When something like this happens, we **all** (his emphasis) get involved. Not in making the baby, but...," he joked. There was laughter from the audience. Referring to Boden (1994) once again, she states that "all meetings are bounded in time and space. But most of all, they are interactionally bounded ... Interruptions come as invasions of meeting space – whether late arrivals or telephone calls – and are discouraged" (p.87). Mr. A felt compelled to explain to me, present at this meeting as an outside observer, the reason for the brief and unusual interruption.

After this interruption, the briefing resumed with speaker number 33 reporting on a road show to promote housing loans. The last speaker was speaker number 34. The individual reports ended at about 9:30am. Then, one of the EVPs briefed the participants on technology matters and housing loans. The other two EVPs did not have anything to report to the staff. Mr. A then took the microphone again. He told the staff about his recent meeting with a senior officer at the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), Hong Kong's financial regulatory body. He said, "We discussed technology, Y2K, etc. He continued to praise AB Bank as one of the **best managed** [his emphasis] banks in Hong Kong. He mentioned three banks as giving a headache to HKMA. He did not mention any names, but all of you know which these banks are". He continued to brief the staff on other matters. He ended the meeting with a ringing exhortation to his staff to give their best efforts to achieve the bank's goals, and I quote him here in full:

> Mr.A: Year 2000 is not going to be easy. When we have plans, we cannot let it remain as a plan. We need a **strategy** [his emphasis], commitment, dedication. The management thinks of a strategy. But we have to depend on our people to carry it out. We may have one incident; we may have one hundred incidents. We have to prepare for the one hundred incidents. I don't wish **anybody** [his emphasis] to take time off between now and the early part of next year. I thank you all for coming to this meeting and I'll see you again next week.

The senior managers' meeting was over at 9:50am. Mr. A walked up to me and shook my hand, saying, "I hope it was useful." I said, "Yes, thank you. It was very insightful."

Goffman (1974) asks the question, "What is it that's going on here?" In this report of the senior managers' meeting, we are able to observe the Discourse and discourses of AB Bank in operation, as noted in the first paragraph of this section, 6.2.6. We recognise what each participant (their *identity* that is referred to in the quotation below) in this close-knit community of senior managers at AB Bank was doing (their *activity* that is referred to in the quotation below). As Gee (2005) describes it,

> The key to Discourses is "recognition." If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others *recognize* you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here-and-now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). (p.27)

Similarly, Merry (1990) writes about the same concept:

> Discourses are aspects of culture, interconnected vocabularies and systems of meaning located in a social world. A discourse is not individual and idiosyncratic but part of a shared cultural world. Discourses are rooted in particular institutions and embody their culture. Actors operate within a structure of available discourses.

> However, within that structure there is space for creativity and actors define and frame their problems within one or another discourse. (p. 110)

At the same time, the senior managers' meeting allows us to also observe a particular corporate culture at work – that of a "hybrid" bank (see section 6.2.4) using English to conduct its meetings at the senior management level. In Chapter 1, section 1.2 on "The spread of English", we note how English has penetrated deeply into many domains in the world and how some domains such as international finance have come to be totally dependent on it. The reporting of this meeting is a concrete example of the use of English, the global language, in the banking sector in Hong Kong when both Chinese and non-Chinese banking personnel conduct their affairs. The same kind of meeting is unlikely to be conducted at a small local bank with a different corporate culture in Hong Kong. We note how Mr. A had a corporate plan for running the bank with the bank's objectives and how they were to be achieved set out.

We also note how, in this real life and penetrating illustration of the importance of the "business of talk" at a senior managers' meeting, the participants' encounters are "organizationally occasioned events through which members generate both immediate interaction and larger organizational agendas" (Boden, 1994, p.202).

Decisions had to be made and appropriate strategies worked out on a large range of policy matters. The bank management needed information on what was taking place within the bank as well as without. It needed to know what income was being generated by each of the services it provided as well as the costs of its various inputs. It also needed up-to-date knowledge of the effectiveness of the bank's operating methods, for these might need to be changed because of changing circumstances. For example, it might decide to cease to offer a particular service because it was unprofitable, or the reverse, as was the case during the meeting when Mr. A told the senior managers, "We should reschedule loans for quality companies that have cash flow problems", an easing up of regular Bank policy on corporate loans.

A bank also needed to receive and constantly assess information from outside the business. Changes in the economy and in society would impact on the bank's operations. We see this in Mr. A's recounting of his meeting with a senior official of the HKMA and the action that he said AB Bank would take following this meeting. A bank also had to be aware of what its competitors were doing, and several times at the meeting, Mr. A referred to their competitors. Only through such monitoring of the system could the senior management know if the implementation of its corporate plan was going smoothly or in case things were going wrong, would it be possible to take remedial action to put things right. Staff at the bank also needed to know where they fitted in, what contribution they were expected to make, and how they should go about meeting the objectives expected of them. In his closing speech and exhortation to his staff, Mr. A made this clear to all members present. This senior level meeting clearly illustrates Sarangi and Roberts' (1999) point that is raised in Chapter 3: literature review that the workplace may be understood as "a social institution where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are played out and professional knowledge is constituted" (p.1). Mr. A's chairing of this meeting demonstrated how he led the bank in his role as CEO at the same time that it demonstrated the corporate culture of AB Bank headed by a foreign CEO as a player in the bigger game of a city (Hong Kong) intent on being a major international financial centre in the world.

The senior managers' meeting also serves as a reminder to us of Johnstone's (2002) assertion discussed in Chapter 3: Literature review that discourse is shaped by its context, and in turn discourse shapes its context. Specifically, the senior managers' meeting shows us how:

- Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language.
- Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants.
- ...
- Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes. (p.9)

6.2.7 The corporate culture of AB Bank and its Discourse as viewed through the discourses of its Head of Corporate Communications Department

6.2.7.1 Why these discourses matter

The second illustration of the corporate culture of AB Bank and its Discourse appeared through another lens. This was a series of discourses by its Head of the Corporate Communications Department, a Briton in his late thirties by the name of Paul Smith (pseudonym), who spoke at some length on various aspects of English in the banking world in Hong Kong, what may in fact be labelled as "Smith's discourses on English discourse in banking" gathered through his working experience in Hong Kong. After examining this interview data, it became clear that Smith's discourses on English provided a valuable insight into the corporate culture of this particular bank and was yet another enactment of bank discourse (in both big *D* and small *d* ways) for the following reasons.

First, one of my aims is to explore the ways in which texts help shape professional perspectives of human experience. By looking at Smith's texts, i.e. the transcribed data from the interviews he gave, we are able to see **his** professional perspective of his lived experience. Bazerman and Paradis (1991) state that "textual construction is an essential part of this (exploration), giving shape and stability to the versions of reality located in the subject matter" (p.5). This is particularly true and valid in the case of Smith who not only made a living from his language skills (in addition to his financial and banking knowledge) but also demonstrated himself to be a person who paid a great deal of attention to words and word play. For Smith, his everyday professional reality was very much shaped by his language and other people's language, and through an examination of his language and what he said about language, i.e. his discourse on language, we get the very rare opportunity to better understand this department and the work it did within the overall corporate culture of AB Bank, as well as the role that Smith performed in the Bank.

Second, Smith was a **concrete** example of the importance of good language skills in the banking and financial sector. From his personal success story, we see how the need for good English skills in the financial sector in Hong Kong in the 1970s plus other social and political factors such as the fact that he was a Briton in a British colony, enabled him to move rapidly up the career ranks. His individualised accounts provide the actual fleshing out of the theoretical notion of the importance of good English for economic success in society. The social and political environment in Hong Kong may have changed today as it is no longer a British colony, but the need for good English in the banking sector remains the same and what is more likely, enhanced today. This role may not be filled by Britons today to the same extent as in the pre-1997 days, but can it be filled by Hong Kong people? This indeed is one of the issues that this study investigates.

Third, Smith's role in the bank also entailed editing the English writing of his colleagues in the department to bring their language standards up to the desired level. There continues to be such a need for someone like him to play this role not only in Smith's bank, but also in the other banks in this study. People like Smith provided a solution to the question asked in this study, "How are the difficulties encountered by the bank employees in carrying out English tasks solved?" In a bank such as AB Bank with a more international-looking management team, the recruitment of a Briton in a senior position meant that some of the English language problems faced by local staff were rectified by the editing and correction work of people such as Smith. At the same time, it highlighted the role of English as the language of international banking and it also highlighted the corporate culture at AB Bank where the CEO and other senior management personnel were foreigners operating in English.

For the reasons outlined above, this section looks at Smith's discourses on the subject of English. Following Blum (1952) who calls his interviews 'interview conversations and Burgess (1984) who speaks of 'interviews as conversations', this section reports on my interview conversations with Smith on the subject of banking Discourse and discourse. It is evident that Smith was eager to present his views. Buchanan *et al.* (1988) offers a possible explanation:

> Most people are flattered by reasonable requests to talk about themselves, and to pass on their experience, where they know it will be used in an academic context, to help with a project or on educational courses. The opportunity to reflect on one's working

life systematically and to extract valuable lessons for others can be an extremely satisfying, but rarely experienced, process" (p.57).

Another explanation is provided by Rosen (1988) who suggests that the "autobiographical impulse", the urge to make our lives coherent by telling about them, must be a human characteristic. Furthermore, Linde (1993) and Schiffrin (1996) show how, by telling stories, people create individual identities and provide themselves with a comfortable sense of their role in society.

6.2.7.2 Discourse on his (own) English

Smith engaged in extended story telling in one lengthy interview. First, he talked about **his** (own) English – a bankable skill that he had. Smith arrived in Hong Kong in 1985. He possessed something that was in short supply – English language skills – and got a job in a brokerage firm editing other people's writing. He said:

Paul: The English standard then for the analyst, despite the fact that they were university educated [...] majority of them were gweilos [Cantonese term for white expatriate male]. But even **then** [his emphasis], I had to edit [their writing] because for them, they basically came from an economics background [...] you know, more into the numbers side. They were accountants more than anything else. So they were okay when it came to crunching numbers but expressing them [was another matter altogether].

Smith offered an interesting theory about the type of personality needed for a good analyst and why such people are so well paid:

Paul: I mean, the analyst's job is ... you have to be schizophrenic basically because at one point you have to sit down for five hours a day, crunch numbers until you're **blue in the face** [his emphasis] and then the next moment, you have to stand up in front of the crowd of people and say, 'I've found this because of the number crunching that I've done. This is my conclusion 123'. And you've got to sell yourself. So you've got to be introvert and extrovert at the same time; it's really weird. That's why I think they get paid so much. It's because basically, you know, you have to be a split personality.

He went on to say that such people were a rare breed:

Paul: You tend to find that people are either one or the other. Either they're very extrovert and very weak on the numbers, or very strong on the numbers but timid as little mice, and can't say anything out and let people know what's going on. So, rarely you get, **very rarely**, [his emphasis] you get a combination.

Thus, according to him, it was because he possessd this rare combination of skills – the ability to analyse numbers and to write up **and** talk about the results – that Smith had done so well for himself in the financial industry in Hong Kong. Not bad, he said, for someone without a university education:

Paul: In the end, there was no one questioning, you know, 'Well, actually, what **do** you do, Paul? What **do** you have?' You know, the research that I was writing, in the end, I think, was pretty good. Certainly on a par with anyone else. [emphases are Paul's]

I: Yes, right.

Paul: I was writing the research. I was thinking to myself, 'Well actually, you know, that's not bad,' considering you know, I didn't go to school. I don't have any of these fancy degrees or any of these things, sorts of things that these guys have learned from their books.

There was no doubt that Smith was a quick learner and his achievement was remarkable by any standards. It was also possible because of Hong Kong's economic boom during those years. Six years after his first job in Hong Kong, Smith had become the Head of Research at another stock broking firm and he said this job entailed different responsibilities from his previous two jobs:

Paul: So then, that was very different because I wasn't in charge of editing. Obviously we've reached the stage where actually editors were an individual job on its own whereas previously, I think quite often, you had editor-analyst combined. We had reached the stage where because of the increase in volume and the fact that the stock market was doing very well, that you know, editing became a singular position on its own inside stock broking companies and very well paid as well. [...] So in a few cases now, you have editors who are as important and certainly their pay is comparable to sort of analyst [...] [laughs] In 1985 when I was sitting there, and doing the editing in that magazine to thinking that **now** [his emphasis], it is a, you know, very high-powered, high-paying job. It's amazing. They have **whole teams of editors** [his emphasis]. Unbelievable. [softly, to himself]

6.2.7.3 Discourse on other people's English

Second, he talked about **other people's** English. As Head of Research, Smith found himself in a different position. He now had to hire editors and analysts. He talked of the great difficulty he had in finding people with good English:

Paul: For that six years, [I was] in charge of hiring people. [...] They used to come to me and obviously put their best foot forward and say, you know, 'I'm so and so and I want a job as an analyst.' And I'd look at them and say, 'Well, you know, you need to be able to do two things. I suspect that you are probably good at crunching the numbers, but can you stand up and speak?' **Generally speaking, you speak in English because the fund managers are basically gweilo, and even if they are Chinese, they would tend to want to speak in English anyway. And that's where you know, 99% of the people that called me or would want to come to speak to me would fall down – [it] would be on the English side.** [emphasis added] It's astonishing!

I: These were all Hong Kong people? Hong Kong Chinese?

Paul: Generally, but amazingly, most of them would be educated overseas.

I: Hm.

Paul: Usually in US or Canadian universities. Mainly US universities [...] Okay, I'll give you an example. I won't name a name. [...] She has an honorary master's degree in statistics from Cambridge University. I think she minored in economics and she can hardly speak a word of English.

So from Smith's account above, university graduates from Canada, the US and the UK were not able to speak adequately in English. This brings us back to the employee from MB Bank, Herbert Chan (MB2), who made the point several times in the interview that he was very concerned about improving his oral English for his job demands. Herbert Chan's realisation of the importance of being able to speak English well for a successful banking career in Hong Kong and his determined efforts to become a better English speaker set him apart from many other local bank employees. Indeed, Herbert Chan's case validated the point Smith was making. I asked Smith for a comparison between the overseas graduates and the local graduates:

I: And yet [...] these overseas university graduates are considered better than the local university graduates, right?

Paul: Yes, hmm, that's true. I mean, I have seen some local Chinese University graduates, and they are even worse.

I: But your frank opinion is that at least what? 80 percent, more than 50 percent are unable to speak proper English?

Paul: **I'd say at least 80 [percent]**. [emphasis added]

At another point in the interview, Smith stated that the standard of English of mainland Chinese professionals in the financial industry compared very favourably:

Paul: I think in the commercial world, I come across a lot more mainland, top level mainland [...] They've probably been educated overseas but now they've come back after graduating or whatever, and they're in Hong Kong. They are originally from China, went overseas, come back to Hong Kong...

I: Get into the financial industry.

Paul: Yeah. They're usually the top of their profession. [...] **The amazing thing is that I tend to find their English is very strong.** [emphasis added] I think maybe because, oh, they are a little bit older. I think they spent a lot more time overseas than perhaps the Hong Kong graduates.

I: How old are these people?

Paul: They are all turning to be around my age. Sort of late thirties, early forties. [...] yeah, I tend to find although the accent is a bit odd but I mean, their English is top quality. You know, really very, very good. [...] Certainly, when you look at it compared to the Cantonese [-speaking people]. I mean, it's much, much better. [...] So there it is. It's a couple of forces going on. There's the expansion of the growth of population and therefore you feel like there's less gweilos around. There are less gweilos in nominal terms anyway. And then you've got this other influx coming in on top of that. **Top-notch, educated mainlanders coming to Hong Kong, impeccable English.** [emphasis added] So it's a strange mix of things that's going on.

Our interview-conversation of Hong Kong graduates' English turned to his colleagues in the Corporate Communications Department. He then used the example of one of them, Doris Ko (AB1), to venture an explanation of why even those who studied in universities abroad were unable to speak English:

Paul: The reason why is because, as I think you would probably find with Doris, when she was in university overseas, **she probably spent most of her time with Cantonese-**

> **speaking students** [emphasis added] and therefore [it] was a situation where she didn't encounter much of what was going on. [...] spent all of the time with all the Cantonese- speaking girlfriends and as a consequence, didn't mix and didn't get out and didn't try it. What I am **really amazed** [his emphasis] is how can they pass examinations? How can you take a two-, three-hour examination, where I presume you have to write something?

In the excerpt above, Smith asked the same question that many Hong Kong employers are asking – what ***do*** universities test? Then he gave his frank opinion of the writing of another colleague in the Department, Lucy Liu (AB2). He held up a memo written by Liu and made the following remarks:

> Paul: Lucy went to a Hong Kong university. This is her written English, unedited. [shows me something Lucy has written] I saw the *send* was wrong straightaway. The grammar's incorrect too.

Then he picked up another of Lucy's memos and said:

> Paul: Yeah, this is unedited as well. [looking at the memo written by Lucy Liu] How do they get ...? I mean it's not an English test, so I suppose in that respect, because they're not taking an English language degree, therefore they are not being tested on their English while they are being tested on the content, right? On their logic? So you'll understand what she's saying when you read it but ...
>
> I: Well ...
>
> Paul: For me as an editor, it's a bloody annoying document. [laughs]

We see in the several excerpts above where Smith discussed the learning that was supposed to have taken place at university, whether it was overseas or in Hong Kong, that he was genuinely puzzled as to how so many graduates were able to pass their exams and acquire their degrees when in his opinion, they could perform at expected standards in the workplace. This sentiment is widely echoed by many other Hong Kong employers.

6.2.7.4 Discourse on writing a style book for AB Bank

While looking at one of the documents he showed me, I noticed that both British English and American English spelling were adopted, and I asked Smith which variety was used at the Bank. He told me it was American English because the CEO and one EVP were both American-trained, and another senior bank officer in charge of investment banking was also American. So he told me his efforts to use British English in spelling had been in vain:

Paul: Nothing I can do about that, but I shall try. I'm still trying to find my own ...I did a style book. [...] You want to look at it? [laughs] [...] There were loads of these different types of style books [...], so in the end I tried to incorporate all the best parts rather than ...

I: Just using one.

Paul: Just simply rehash one. [...] Oh, here it is. Style – Star Book. [He begins to read parts of it aloud] 'The aim of this Star Book is to give general advice on writing, to point out some common errors and to set some arbitrary rules'. Framework is based on what I consider to be the best quality business magazine available, *The Economist*, and then, George Orwell, my favourite.

I: Hm. [laughs]

Paul: [Continues reading from his Star Book] 'Six elementary rules on the English language: Never use a metaphor if it's something you have seen in print already. Never use a long word where a short word will do. If possible, cut out a word if you can cut it out. Never use a passive'. Although that's a big argument you know, never use a passive. 'Never use a foreign phrase, scientific word or jargon if you think of an English everyday equivalent. What am I trying to say? What word would express it?' That sort of thing, and on and on. [Reads from the book again] 'Avoid repetitions, avoid repetitions, avoid repetitions, avoid repetitions.' [laughs] I got a bit in here about all the different prepositions. 'Watch your prepositions.' No, I'm not going to print this out. It's too embarrassing.

So in this interview, Smith had shared the secret of his success in the banking world (his English language ability); his views of how other people had failed to perform (their English language ability); his puzzlement at what universities taught their students; and finally, his style book to help the staff at the Bank write better English. Smith's life experience illustrated the absolute importance of English for a successful career in the banking sector in Hong Kong. It was all the more remarkable because he did not possess tertiary qualifications. Many Hong Kong students aspiring to a banking career put an inordinate amount of emphasis on acquiring paper qualifications such as MBAs and neglect their language skills. Such people could well learn some valuable lessons from Smith's real life experiences. Smith's story telling on English in the banking sector served to confirm my own observation of the situation in the four banks surveyed in this study that my informants from these banks possess *Discourse* (with the capital "D") to a greater extent than *discourse* (with the small "d") in English. Working in banks and having been exposed to the specific organisational and business environment at their workplaces, they are able to talk, listen, read, write and generally act in their specific roles and settings, displaying a particular "bank employee identity"; hence we can say they have the capacity for *Discourse*. However, their difficulties in using English in certain work situations as discussed in Chapter 5 highlight the need for more targeted training to enhance their capacity for English discourse.

6.2.8 Changes at AB Bank

About one year after I first started my visits to AB Bank and with hopes of a second round of visits during the summer break from teaching, I made a telephone call to Paul Smith to arrange the schedule of visits. He informed me that there had been changes at the Bank and he was no longer Head of Corporate Communications. There was a new Head, Sharon Pang, who had come in about a month ago. One other staff member in the Department, Cindy Lam, who used to concentrate on media relations, had also left the Bank to work in an insurance company. Smith himself was now concentrating on doing what he used to do – financial analysis. He told me about his new duties:

> Paul: I will be watching the market and spotting trends. I suppose this is what I do best. [...] I need to monitor the market quite closely. I will be scanning the internet.
>
> I: Are you a one-man band?
>
> Paul: Yes, I am a one-man band, one-man **bank**. [his emphasis]

Smith said that it was all part of the plan that the boss had in mind, "part of the restructuring that was going on." He was too expensive to be doing Corporate

Communications. He told me that he would tell the new Head about the project I had with the Bank after she had had time to settle down. They were quite busy with a new branch opening the following week. We agreed to try and fix my next visit for a few weeks later. However, when I next went back to the Bank at that time, the new Head of Corporate Communications was not keen on letting me observe the work of the Department, and my visits to AB Bank stopped.

There were to be even more changes later. Sharon Pang herself did not last long and one year later, she too left. In 2003, AB Bank was bought by an Asian company and renamed. In 2004, Mr. A, the Bank's dynamic CEO retired. In late 2006, Mr. A died at the age of 65. A fitting epitaph for Mr. A would be that he was a big man in a small bank.

6.3 Summary

This chapter explored the relationship between the proficiency in and use of English by different levels of employees in the four banks on the one hand, and the different types of banks and their resultant corporate cultures on the other. First, the chapter looked at the role of a bank in a modern economy and at some of the services banks provide to the public. The chapter also discussed the differences among the four banks in this study in terms of their international orientation and exposure, staff recruitment, and the use of English by their staff to perform their duties. I demonstrated the direct correlation between these differences and my findings (in Chapter 5) about the educational backgrounds of the staff, their need to use English and their ease in using English at work. The influence of organisational and industry practices on language use at work was also discussed. The chapter also looked more closely at AB Bank, one of the four banks in the study, at firstly, a meeting of senior managers and secondly, the discourses of its Head of the Corporate Communications Department, to explore two illustrations of how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. Finally, the chapter noted how my study of AB Bank ended with the subsequent changes that took place in the Bank.

The findings discussed in this chapter about the differences in the corporate cultures and use of English in the four banks will be seen to have some bearing on training-related issues, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Findings and discussion: training matters

7.0 Introduction

Keeping in mind the picture of different corporate cultures among the four banks that we saw in the previous chapter, this chapter now considers what is perhaps the central aspect surrounding them, namely the English language. It begins with a discussion of the type and duration of English language courses that the informants attended at university before they entered the job market and how they feel university English courses may be made more effective. I also interview the informants about whether the banks provide English training aimed at upgrading the staff's English skills; whether they have undergone any such training at the bank; what interest they have in English training and the amount of time they think is needed for these courses. In the course of my interviews with the informants, I had asked them specific questions on these points and I quote extracts from the transcripts both to gather their views and to let them speak for themselves. My findings on the informants' English lessons at university are then summarised in the form of a table and a short description. My findings on their English training in the bank and their training interests are also summarised in another table and some explanatory statements about the data.

I go on then to put forward some considerations on training in the workplace, in the context of the unprecedented changes that have been taking place in the workplace in the last fifteen years. I briefly touch upon various issues relating to such concerns as the importance of language, literacy, numeracy, skill development and vocational reform, as well as upon how training is perceived in general. I then proceed to discuss the scope and role of workplace education; the efforts of the Hong Kong government in terms of policies and programmes; and what methods or approaches could be adopted for workplace education and training in general and education and training in the banking sector in particular. In doing so, I take note of the contributions of some researchers who have dealt with these topics hitherto.

I then consider, in some detail, the five-university project on *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong* and then present my own views on what universities can do to improve the English standards of their students. Finally, in the light of what I learnt from the informants, I present my views regarding what the banks themselves (in their capacity as employers) can (and should) do in the matter of augmenting and improving the English skills of their employees.

7.1 Interviews with the 16 informants on their university English courses, training needs and interests

This chapter examines the last two of my research questions:

- What type of English language courses did the bank employees take at university and what are their views on improving the effectiveness of university English courses?
- Are the bank employees getting English training at the bank, what type of English training are they interested in and what is the duration that they think is needed for such training?

In my interviews with the informants, I ask them questions about their English language courses at university to find out what and how much was taught. I also ask them how they feel university English courses may be improved. Some of the informants have more to say about what they studied at university than others. I also provide documentary evidence of their views on training matters as expressed to me in the interviews. Some have also given more thought to their English language needs than others, and some express a greater interest than others in undergoing language training at the bank. Their views are no doubt shaped by their present need or lack of need for English in the bank as well as their working schedules.

Table 7.1 SD Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE1-SD1	Vicky Wong (Female)
BE2-SD2	Fiona Fan (Female)
BE3-SD3	Catherine Leung (Female)
BE4-SD4	Ida Law (Female)
BE5-SD5	Rex Ho (Male)
BE6-SD6	Kenneth Kwok (Male)

7.1.1 BE1-SD1: Vicky Wong

Internet banking, loans and overdraft facilities

Assistant Account Officer, Commercial Banking Division

7.1.1.1 Vicky's English lessons at university

Vicky spoke very briefly about her English lessons at university. She took a one-year English course for business students and it taught her how to write academic papers and give oral presentations. It was of some help to her in her studies but she could not recall the specific details.

7.1.1.2 Vicky's language training interest

Most of Vicky's clients are local people so she does not use much English in her daily work apart from her reading and writing tasks. She does concede, however, that she would require more training in English should the situation change. She says:

(BE1) Vicky: When I need to use English with my clients, I think [laughs] I [will] need more training. But [now] majority of the customers is Chinese so we need to use Chinese.

She works in the Commercial Banking Division and tells me that this division does not run in-house training programmes. She says:

(BE1) Vicky: We don't have in-house training for Commercial Banking. But we do have in-house training for Consumer Banking.

I: Oh.

Vicky: Because they have so many peoples. Our team only have 40 marketing people for Commercial Banking. It think the company think it is not worthwhile to spend [money hiring] a whole training team to teach [only] 40 people.

Later on, she repeats this:

(BE1) Vicky: So I think the company will not put so much resources into training the marketing people [who are] in Commercial Banking. [...] Of course, if we are a very profitable team, if we contribute, then we can get more. But currently because the Hong Kong economy is not very good. Actually, it is quite poor. Most of the business are not doing really well. [...] We are facing a lot of risk when lending money to those kinds of business. So our profit and our income is getting smaller and smaller. [...] So our business is quite difficult and thus [laughs] I think the company may not contribute so much training resources into our team.

I ask her if she would like to be sent on a training programme and she says:

(BE1) Vicky: **Of course.** [her emphasis] [laughs] Of course.

She tells me the reason for her interest:

(BE1) Vicky: I'm in a team that will take up some larger customer [such as] the listed company and usually, they are financial controller or accountants, maybe [they are] foreigner.

I: Yeah.

Vicky: My banking knowledge is not enough. This is the first thing. I need my supervisor or the colleagues to help me ... building up my banking knowledge. **And then I [also] think our language is not fluent enough to persuade them to use our banking services.** [my emphasis] These two major weaknesses I have to overcome.

Vicky has analysed what she needs to become a better bank officer. We talk about the kind of training she is interested in:

(BE1) I: So what kind of language programme do you think would be useful for you?

Vicky: If for the banking staff, it's more appropriate to incorporate some banking knowledge inside the training, or some banking practice inside the training.

But she realises the financial constraints operating on her bank and she says:

(BE1) Vicky: We are a local bank. [laughs] First a local bank. Actually, I know their training budget is very limited. If they have to train up some people, I think they will train up their banking knowledge only. [laughs] They suppose when you graduate from the university or you have several years of working experience, you should have no problem in communications.

She stresses the fact that hers is a local bank several times when talking about the budget for training. Vicky points out that local banks do not emphasise training for their staff. She thinks that her other colleagues also need language training. She tells me that there are various types of writing tasks such as proposals, credit reviews, proposals for renewing a client's credit facility, and so on. However, all these different types of documents are written in the same way by her colleagues. She says:

(BE1) Vicky: Actually, they use the same wording [laughs] for those customer[s] and **I think also they need the language training also.** [Vicky's emphasis] Actually, the language is the same. [laughs]

I: So it's not really appropriate?

Vicky: Yeah.

I: Not really appropriate.

Vicky: It's acceptable because it's only a review. [laughs] [...] Usually we look at the financial data. If we are the boss, then we see the financial informations, the annual report or the statement. Then using those numbers the management will have a sense of whether it is appropriate to grant [credit to the customer] or not.

Although Vicky expresses these views about the usefulness of language training, she does not write anything on this item in the questionnaire. Perhaps the reason is that she feels it is not something that is likely to happen in her current work environment.

7.1.2 BE2-SD2: Fiona Fan

Secretary to General Manager of Branch Management

7.1.2.1 Fiona's English lessons at university

Fiona expresses her views on the English she took at university at some length. In her first year, she took a course on 'Introduction to Business English' which covered how to write memos, minutes and business reports and also included business role plays and job interviews. She says that it was too long ago to be relevant to her present work, and thinks that there should be more English courses throughout her university education. She says:

(BE2) Fiona: It should be offered not only in Year 1, but also in Year 2 and Year 3. It should not stop at Year I.

She also thinks that it is good to prepare students in both academic English and business English. She says:

(BE2) Fiona: If it only focus on academic English, maybe it is a bit bore. You have to tell students it is useful to their career. Maybe first year can concentrate on academic English. Then third year English course can shift to Business English.

Fiona would like to have more practice and more interesting activities. She says:

(BE2) Fiona: Course work is not useful; practice is more useful. English role play is more interesting than course work in English. Students like to spend more time on interesting role play than writing essays. The course should also give students more opportunity to speak English.

7.1.2.2 Fiona's language training interest

I learn that Fiona has had a long-term interest in studying English. She says that there is no opportunity to improve her English in her present environment. After her 'A' levels examination, when she first applied for university admission, she had applied to study English as her major at the Hong Kong Baptist University "but I failed (to get in). Actually, I like English". So she ended up studying Business Studies at the City University. After she started working in the bank, she applied for a part-time course in translation at the City University from where she graduated, but her application was rejected. In terms of training interest for her present job, she puts down practical writing and oral presentation skills for a period of three months to help her improve her English. In conclusion, Fiona is different from many of the other bank employees in that she is interested in English. However, in her present working situation, she is not able to channel her interest into concrete action.

7.1.3 BE3-SD3: Catherine Leung

Retail banking products, Customer Service Department

7.1.3.1 Catherine's English lessons at university

At university Catherine took a Business English course in her first year of undergraduate studies. She says it was "very general and too long ago". In her opinion, the English course should be taught in all three years so as to "train the students continuously", echoing the same sentiment expressed by her colleague, Fiona Fan (SD2) who also studied at the same university. She says that the balance between English lessons and business subjects should be "fifty-fifty". She thinks that students should have more opportunity to do Business subjects such as Marketing during regular class time, but they could take English lessons on Saturdays or in the evenings. She feels that students would be willing to study English but the course should be related to their future careers. She recalls that most of the Business Studies subjects were taught in English although sometimes when the lecturers thought that the students did not understand the subject very well, "they tried their best to describe in Chinese". Catherine feels that academic English should be taught just for a short period of time and that more emphasis should be paid to Business English to prepare students for the workplace.

7.1.3.2 Catherine's language training interest

Catherine's job requires her to write memos in English to colleagues in the other departments in the bank. She faces some difficulty doing this task, so I ask her the following question:

(BE3) I: So do you think you would benefit from some kind of help in writing memos?

Catherine: **Yes, I think I need help**. [her emphasis]

I: How would you get that help?

Catherine: [laughs].

I: Are there language training programmes or courses that you could take?

Catherine: I think in this bank there is no English programme for the staff. As I remember, just the Mandarin [course is available].

This is her diplomatic way of telling me that the bank does not offer any English language training for its staff. I then ask her the following question:

(BE3) I: Can you suggest to your manager or go [to take a course] outside if they don't provide something [at the bank]?

Catherine: I don't have such power. [laughs]

Then she says that it may be more fruitful to talk to the Training Department:

(BE3) Catherine: Maybe I can tell to some colleagues which are in the Training Centre of our bank.

I: Tell the Training Centre people. Yeah.

Catherine: I think it's much more useful.

I: Yeah.

Catherine: Because most of the programme are organised by them. So maybe when I suggest to have English programme, they will consider.

But immediately after saying this, she realises that this is not in line with the Bank's regular training policy and she says:

(BE3) Catherine: Actually, I think if I really tell to, for example, training officer of our bank, they have to see whether it is cost effective. Or maybe they think, 'Are you the staff that need the English most?' Or maybe they will organise a training course but **not** [my emphasis] for the staff who are on the section of Customer Service, because I have told you I just take 20 percent of our times in written English. [She spends only about twenty percent of her time on her written tasks in English] .

She goes on to say:

(BE3) Catherine: So maybe, they may think in order to increase the profitability of our bank, they have to think, 'Maybe I have to organise some course to improve their selling skills rather than to improve their English.'

When asked to indicate what kind of English training she would be interested in getting, Catherine expresses an interest in a course on written communication to help her in writing letters to clients and business reports to her superiors. According to her, the course should be held two to three hours a week and last for two to three months. As noted in 7.1.1.2, another SD Bank employee, Vicky Wong (SD1), would also like to have English training, but like Catherine, she feels that it would not be given high priority by the Bank. This issue is one of investing in training and raising long-term productivity, versus incurring short-term costs, and this is an issue where local banks may prove to be short-sighted. This issue will be further discussed in section 7.4: *What bank employers can do: Lessons from the interviews.*

7.1.4 BE4-SD4: Ida Law

Marketing Officer

7.1.4.1 Ida's English lessons at university

At the university, Ida took a compulsory one-semester English course on writing and speaking skills which was to help students do their assignments in English. She thinks that the English courses at university should teach students memo and report writing, as this is "more helpful for student from the school to the office". Moreover, such courses should be conducted for all three years at different levels of difficulty. She says it should be structured as follows:

(BE4) Ida: I think is not just for Year 1, it's also for Year 2 and Year 3, but in different level [for the] course [work]. (...) Maybe for the Year 1, just for memo writing and Year 3 will be a more long report writing.

7.1.4.2 Ida's language training interest

I ask Ida about undergoing language training:

(BE4) I: And do you think there is a need or there is no need (to take a language course) in your present job?

Ida: Em...no need. [laughs]

She thinks that in the future as she develops her career, presentation skills in both English and Chinese will be more important to her. But she reiterates that it is not needed for the present "because now my job is more concentrate on doing the paper work." Giving her views on the length of a training course in presentation skills, she informs me that it should run once a week for two to four weeks and each training session should last two hours. She would like a short course because she says, "If it take long, it will disturb our job. So I think two to four weeks that's good enough."

7.1.5 BE5-SD5: Rex Ho

Assistant Manager

Organisation and Methods (O&M) Department

7.1.5.1 Rex's English lessons at university

Rex cannot remember the details of his English course at university as it was "so many years ago". But he remembers it was on business and memo writing. The university course "gave us a basic approach of writing". He makes the interesting comment that "in the real [world] situation every company have their own cultures". He tells me what he thinks university courses should focus on:

(BE5) Rex: I think they should focus more on some basic training in English because different department (of) different company have different culture in writing.

I: So the university course should be basic and general?

Rex: General, yes.

I: But work-related or academic-related? For course work or workplace English?

Rex: It's better to focus on workplace English.

I: Not on university studies?

Rex: I think they should more emphasis on work training. It's because if you (can) adapt to the outside environment, you will be better [be more competitive in the job market].

Thus, Rex believes that universities should prepare students for the workplace. This is the same view expressed by his colleague, Ida Law (SD4), who graduated from the same university, the City University of Hong Kong, and who also majored in the same subject.

7.1.5.2 Rex's language training interest

In Chapter 5, we have noted that Rex does not think he has any difficulty coping with his English demands at work. This is because he has a template to follow when doing his writing. I ask him if he thinks he would benefit from a training programme in English. He replies in the affirmative. Next, I ask him if he has ever attended any language training programme during his six years at SD Bank and he replies in the negative. He tells me this:

(BE5) Rex: Maybe there is a much more higher priority training that we should take, like focus on our job. We have several trainings on project management.

I: Oh. Several training programmes on project management. Okay.

Rex: Maybe this is directly related to our job nature.

I: So it is of higher priority?

Rex: Higher priority.

In the questionnaire on what kind of English training he would like to receive, Rex indicates an interest in a course on writing reports and minutes stating "twenty half-day sessions" for the duration of the course. When I ask him whether sessions lasting half a day would be too long, he says that he is thinking of a few hours, and decides on a figure of two to three hours per session for a total of 20 sessions.

7.1.6 BE6-SD6: Kenneth Kwok

Systems Analyst/IT Support and Database Designer
Department of Management Information Systems (MIS)

7.1.6.1 Kenneth's English lessons at secondary school

Kenneth started his working life after secondary school, so this section will briefly describe his English lessons at secondary school instead of at university. His studies at secondary school were conducted in Chinese and he received very little English training in listening, reading and writing. He says his "basic skills on the English is poor". He completed his university education through distance learning at an Australian university after working for several years. Kenneth studied computer science at various times during his career.

7.1.6.2 Kenneth's language training interest

Kenneth is currently enrolled in two courses after office hours. He is studying for a Master in Accounting degree from Curtin University, Australia through distance learning. At the same time, he is taking a Certificate course in writing for electronic data processing. These two courses plus the heavy work demands at the bank leave him with very little free time. He has not taken any training courses in SD Bank. I ask him what kind of communication skills training would be helpful to him and he says:

(BE6) Kenneth: I think the English, also the Mandarin.

I: English and Mandarin. Okay. For English, you think writing or speech or both?

Kenneth: I think writing.

I: Writing. You've put down *Duration of the programme* 'half year'. How frequently?

Kenneth: Once a week.

I: How many hours each time? Two hours?

Kenneth: Two or three hours.

I: [...] Speaking? Three months shorter? Also about the same kind of hours?

Kenneth: Because writing is do more exercise to improve [one requires a longer course duration for improvement].

I: All right.

Thus, he is interested in a six-month course for writing and a three-month course for speaking. Both should be conducted once a week for two to three hours each time. Before our interview ended, Kenneth wants to ask me a question that has been on his mind for a long time:

(BE6) Kenneth: I think I want to ask a question. I want to know how to [...] the best way to improve the English.

I: What's the best way?

Kenneth: Yeah. Because I found [have been asking] that question so many years [but] I cannot find the answer.

I: There is er...there isn't a quick solution. Language learning takes a long time, but I think what is very important is that you must expose yourself to the language. If you are not exposed to the language, you only look in the textbooks, then it's difficult because you don't hear the sounds. You don't know how it's used, so when you are using it, you may sound like you are speaking Chinese instead of English. So the exposure is important. That's one thing. The second thing, I think, is using it. **You must give yourself the chance to use it.** A lot of Hong Kong students are taught in the classroom but they hardly use it because the teacher explains things mostly in Chinese and they don't have a chance to use it. When they are outside, they are also very shy and reluctant [to use English] and not motivated. So I think one, is exposure to the language; and two, is using the language.

Kenneth: Thank you. [laughs] [...] I think working in Hong Kong, you must be, to advance myself, to protect myself, to learn more skills on something even though [whether it is] the IT or the English.

Table 7.2 HD Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE7-HD1	Kara Chan (Female)
BE8-HD2	Cherry Wong (Female)
BE9-HD3	Ophelia Yip (Female)
BE10-HD4	Fairy Tsang (Female)

7.1.7 BE7-HD1: Kara Chan

Investment analyst

7.1.7.1 Kara's English lessons at university

Kara has clear views about the lack of oral English training in the local school system. She makes this point several times during the interview. She says:

(BE7) Kara: [...] But in terms of the language, I think more on the oral English would be better because I think, maybe being a local student, I think the oral training is not enough.

I: In school you mean, and university?

Kara: In school, in college and even in the university. On the written, I think is probably already gained enough because in Hong Kong, is more concentrate or focus on training the student how to read and write, starting with kindergarten. And the grammatical, how can I say? Even the grammatical is strong enough, I think, to graduates or even to undergraduates.

I: Enough.

Kara: I mean, enough for their work to read or write. But the point is, for our daily conversation with foreigners, especially those native foreigners, [...] Sometimes we cannot express ourselves in a very fluent [way]. [...] **especially I can say colloquial English expression is not enough for local graduates, I think.** [my emphasis]

She thinks local university students are disadvantaged in their lack of oral skills training. Her own experience at university in Hong Kong was no exception. The English course in her first year at university taught her academic and practical writing such as business writing, memos and minutes.

7.1.7.2 Kara's language training interest

Kara, an investment analyst expresses a strong interest in improving her spoken English for social interactions at work. She is satisfied with her standard of written English but is less confident about her conversational English during lunches with English-speaking banking professionals. She talks at some length during the interview about her interest in improving her oral English and what kind of course would suit her needs. As noted in Chapter 5, section 5.5.7, Kara has actively tried to improve her English on her own initiative. She signed up for a course at the Chinese University of Hong Kong at her own expense:

(BE7)	Kara:	I have applied for course organised by the Chinese University of Hong Kong outside work, office hour. But that is too easy. Mainly the level is too low, too easy for me. Not what I'm expecting. They are for those Form 5 or secondary level [students]. They don't even know how to introduce themselves. I think it's not practical for me. [...] So I quit it.

In addition, she also attended another course organised by HD Bank's Training Department on practical writing for executives. She tells me why she also found this course unsuitable for her:

(BE7)	Kara:	[...] As I said, I think written English is not that difficult for me.
	I:	So even this was not so suitable for you?
	Kara:	I think the course is good [...] but I've already learned it [referring to business writing skills] in the college and in the schools. Because we also take some courses in English in first year of university.

She gives another reason why the writing course at the bank did not suit her needs:

(BE7)	Kara:	That's very formal English [...] but sometimes when you deal with daily work, you don't stick to that formal English.
	I:	So in your case, you would really like to have training in social English. Can you suggest this to the Training Department?
	Kara:	Not yet. [laughs] Not yet. We have a chance, every time we attend any courses from the training department, they give us an evaluation form and we can make some suggestions or recommendations. But not yet. [laughs] I

think the most important is to put myself in that social group. All of them are talk in English.

She is referring to the group of bankers, many of whom are foreigners, that she meets at seminars and luncheon meetings. But the opportunity for her to practise her oral English with this group is inadequate as she says it is "just for thirty minutes or just even ten minutes talk, so I don't think it's enough". She has been thinking about what kind of English conversation course she would like to have. She tells me:

(BE7) Kara: A course will help if the course really talk on ... er... let's say, how the American would say in this way if we want to express such feelings. I think more focus on that. Sometimes we don't have an idea how to express certain feelings.

I: Can you give an example? Feelings of what? Or what topic?

Kara: What topic? Just social topic, say ...

I: Movies?

Kara: Movies, music. I think if for full year there is, let's say thirty weeks where you can [meet] once a week, or you have sixty hours on the topics. You have different types of topics – formal one, say politics or political issues or social issues in the societies. And some [others] are the social ones, say food, jazz, music, entertainments.

She provides more details about the right kind of course:

(BE7) Kara: Very important is the people who attend [must] really want to talk and really want to participate, so that participants should have the same ideas and so on. [laughs]

I ask her if this English improvement is important for her work, and she says:

(BE7) Kara: Not only for work but for future career or for enrich myself. I think it's very important. Not very urgent but if I find the course very good in this field [if I can find a good course of this type] I would like to attend.

However, she does not think that the Training Department can organise such a course as she says:

(BE7) Kara: That's why I'm not dare [laughs] to suggest. If the people [who] attend or they participate in this course not of the same [attitude] as me, they won't try to participate or they won't talk.

She writes in the questionnaire that she would like an oral English course "especially for daily usage" lasting for one to two years and conducted on a weekly basis for one to two hours. She laughs when I express my surprise at the long duration of the course and says that a three-month course is not enough for her. She says, "The best thing is to put me in the U.S or London to stay with the foreigners" in order to be totally immersed in an English-speaking environment, adding, "We can improve our written English by reading more books, getting the grammatical training from the textbooks (and) from the dictionary, but we don't have the chance to talk (and) to practice our oral English".

7.1.8 BE8-HD2: Cherry Wong

Product Development Officer (Deposits)
Personal Banking Division

7.1.8.1 Cherry's English lessons at university

Cherry says that a course on business writing would have been very useful, but the English course at university was for academic purposes. She says, "For business writing, we don't really have much opportunities to practice in university. So when we come to work in a bank or other companies, it is quite a different style. We need to write it more strictly and directly." I ask her:

(BE8) I: So you think the university course should have focused more on business writing?

Cherry: They can add some more options to students to choose because I think students may not be interested in this business course, but it is very helpful for their job in the future.

She thinks that the university should teach both academic and business writing. During her time, academic English was taught in her first year and then there were no more English courses offered in her second and third years. The university should provide shorter English courses of one or two months to second and third year students as "in their final year, it is more useful for them to take this business writing course when they have to find a job [soon]."

7.1.8.2 Cherry's language training interest

Although Cherry feels some need to improve her written English for the writing of formal documents, it is not a pressing problem. She reports that she has no time to take any English courses because her workload does not permit her to take a day off to attend language training. While she agrees that in the long term it will help to make her more productive, she is content to let it pass for now. She is, however, taking some exams conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers to upgrade her qualifications. She has completed three exams and has to take two more papers before acquiring the associate qualification in banking. She prepares for these examinations by taking courses. She says that the courses are really useful because they are "bank knowledge which we cannot find in our university".

In the questionnaire that she completes, Cherry indicates an interest in taking a course for writing bank documents as well as a course for oral presentation skills. Cherry points out that the training department sometimes runs one or two-day courses but she feels "it takes time for us to learn so the period can be extended to a longer time." She prefers courses of two-hours or those that do not run for more than half a day and thinks that three or four sessions are enough. Her idea is to break up a one or two-day course into several lessons of shorter duration per lesson.

7.1.9 BE9-HD3: Ophelia Yip

Personal Assistant to Head of
Group Human Resources Division

7.1.9.1 Ophelia's English lessons at university

Ophelia remarked that what she learnt at the Chinese University of Hong Kong where she majored in Human Resources in the School of Business was largely theoretical in nature. She says:

(BE9) Ophelia: As you know, study in university is a lot of theory. Some of them are quite strategic and high level and for a fresh graduate, it's difficult to reach that level. [A fresh graduate's first job does not require knowledge of a high level.]

I: But the things you've learned. Can you apply them now? Is it familiar [stuff]?

Ophelia: It's quite familiar. Actually, I've been the summer trainee [while an undergraduate student] of Human Resources Department in another bank.

Her courses in Business Studies were conducted in both Chinese and English, with more English used for lectures and more Chinese used for the tutorials. She also took one semester of English and it was for academic purposes.

7.1.9.2 Ophelia's language training interest

In the questionnaire that she fills out, Ophelia expresses an interest in taking an "effective writing" course as well as an oral communication course to enhance her English skills. She wants a short one- or two-day course. She tells me:

(BE9) Ophelia: I think it's just spend [requires] one or two days to explain the professional business writing skills, the professional business communication skill. That's enough.

I: You think one to two days would be effective? It's so intensive but so short.

Ophelia: Yes, because the practice [would come from] our daily work rather than just sitting in the classroom.

I: Okay. If it is something that is stretched over a longer period of time. Maybe two hours a week over 10 weeks?

Ophelia: I don't think it's effective.

Her attitude is typical of many of the informants who are not keen on taking long courses because they are too busy with their work demands. As for the oral communication course she has put down, she does not state the duration that she thinks would be adequate for her.

7.1.10 BE10-HD4: Fairy Tsang

Corporate Communications Officer

7.1.10.1 Fairy's English lessons at university

At the bank, Fairy writes in English but she seldom speaks in English. She is the only bank employee in this study who majored in English Language and Literature at the Hong Kong Baptist University. She says that she doesn't need an English course at present for work. She feels confident of her ability to handle the work in English and is more comfortable writing in English than in Chinese. The English course she took at university was not really useful to her work because it was not work-oriented. However, she does not think that English at university should be work-oriented. This is what she says about the compulsory English course at university for all students and not just for English majors:

(BE10)	Fairy:	We study general English course, quite similar to matriculation course [Form 6 and Form 7 at secondary school]. Not really useful because it is not work-oriented.
	I:	Do you think the university English course should be work-oriented?
	Fairy:	No, I don't think that is practical. I don't think it should be for work.

7.1.10.2 Fairy's language training interest

In the questionnaire, Fairy indicates an interest in both an English course on presentation skills and a Mandarin course. The bank organises an in-house Mandarin programme so this could be the reason for her interest. The Bank also provides an English writing course of 30 hours over 10 sessions for some of its staff. It hires an external trainer to conduct this course as it does not have any in-house English trainers. Fairy thinks that one hour each week for the duration of three months is sufficient for improving her presentation skills. She says, "It's enough to brush up my spoken English". For Mandarin, however, she would like to study it "continuously through different levels" to achieve proficiency in the language.

Table 7.3 MB Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE11-MB1	Maureen Chow (Female)
BE12-MB2	Herbert Chan (Male)
BE13-MB3	Simon Fung (Male)
BE14-MB4	Jennifer Liu (Female)

7.1.11 BE11-MB1: Maureen Chu

Management Trainee (Credit research)

7.1.11.1 Maureen's language background

Maureen appears to be a competent bilingual in Chinese and English, and I thought it would be useful to investigate what factors in her language learning have aided her in her success. I ask her the reasons for her fluency in English:

(BE11) I: But you are very comfortable with English right?
Maureen: Yeah.
I: Why is that so? Is it from working here? Is it from your time in America? Is it from the schooling that you received here in Hong Kong?
Maureen: Yeah, I guess a mix of everything.

I ask her about her schooling:

(BE11) I: What was your education like?
Maureen: My high school actually, I think, has got a great impact on me.
I: Yeah.
Maureen: I studied in Saint Mary's Canossian College [one of the established government schools in Hong Kong] and they used English as a medium for teaching.
I: [...] And were the teachers mostly local teachers or expat teachers?
Maureen: Some of them are expat teachers, but the local teachers also use English.
I: Good English?
Maureen: Good English. [laughs] I'm not sure right now. [laughs] At my time, they were pretty good. [laughs]

At the Chinese University of Hong Kong, she majored in International Business and many of the courses were taught in English. But the instructors used Chinese for courses like China trade, and import-export business. She thinks that overall, the English-Chinese ratio for university courses was 60:40. She tells me that Chinese University stresses traditional Chinese culture as part of its university ethos and a feature of dormitory life was a weekly class about Confucius and other aspects of Chinese culture conducted in Cantonese. She took a compulsory one-semester course in English for academic purposes. She is also one of the three informants with an overseas university experience as she did her MBA in the U.S. Her exposure to English in the U.S. also significantly improved her English language skills.

Maureen's family background is not typical of most Hong Kong families. Her parents were originally from Shanghai and when she was small, her mother talked to her in Shanghainese and Mandarin. As a result, she is able to speak some Mandarin although she did not receive any formal training in Mandarin. She is also able to understand Shanghainese but cannot speak it. Her younger sister, on the other hand, is much stronger in Chinese and her younger brother is also better in Chinese but his English proficiency improved significantly after he studied in the U.K. Maureen's versatility with several languages including French, which she minored in as an undergraduate at university, thus makes her different from the average Hong Kong person.

7.1.11.2 Maureen's previous work experience

Maureen's first job after graduation was at the Hong Kong Trade Department. Initially it was an English working environment. However, that towards the end of her stay there, because of the impending change of sovereignty in Hong Kong, the organisation became more localised. It promoted the use of Chinese for writing emails and minutes of meetings. Her supervisor started writing in Chinese so they all had to reply in Chinese. Maureen points out the advantage for Hong Kong in having a bilingual workforce. She says:

(BE11) Maureen: I think the competitive edge of Hong Kong is people can speak bilingual and if we are switching [Hong Kong's language policy] or placing too

> much emphasis on either one, I don't think it's good. I think it will be better if we could do both, but if there is no choice, [if] we have to pick one [language to use in the workplace] I'll still pick English.

Her second job experience was very different. It was a French cosmetics company and all the managers were French. Her direct supervisor was a Chinese who spoke good English and all the salesgirls spoke Chinese. It is clear that Maureen's ability to speak some French which she had learnt at university led her to take up this job for a brief period.

7.1.11.3 Maureen's language training interest

The bank conducts a two-day English communication skills training course for all newly-recruited staff. Maureen thinks that this is too long and that the course should be shortened to just one day. She indicates interest in a public speaking course of just one-day duration so that "it [will] not [be] too long".

7.1.12 BE12-MB2: Herbert Chan

Management trainee (analyst)

Among all the 16 interviewees, I find Herbert to be one of the most communicative. He expresses his ideas clearly and confidently. It would therefore be useful to take a closer look at his language background to see if we can detect anything which may account for his success in learning English.

7.1.12.1 Herbert's language learning at secondary school in Hong Kong

Herbert studied at one of the more established secondary schools in Hong Kong. I ask him if the medium of instruction in his secondary school was English but to my surprise he tells me that it was basically Chinese supplemented by English. To facilitate communication, the teachers explained concepts in Chinese but also used English, so it was a mix of both languages. I ask him who taught the English lessons and he said that it was expatriate teachers who taught their mother tongue so that the students could get used to the language better. Herbert rates himself more highly in his reading and writing ability than in his speaking ability. He says, "Usually it's the oral part that troubles me most." He feels he did not get enough practice in speaking English during his schooldays in Hong Kong and he is probably right given what we know about the way English is taught in most of the schools in Hong Kong. When I ask him if he thinks he is proficient in English, he says:

(BE12) Herbert: **At least, I'm not afraid of speaking English** [emphasis added] but I will not say my pronunciation will be, like, that perfect. I still got some accent, I would say.

There are two things to note here. First, we note that the fear factor[33] has a negative impact on a learner's success in second language learning. It has been pointed out in other places in this thesis that Hong Kong students and adults are often reluctant or afraid of speaking in English. In interviews with some Hong Kong Baptist University faculty from the School of Business, at least one of them also refers to students being afraid of using English.[34] Second, we note that it is common to find Hong Kong learners wanting to sound like an English person and speaking without any Hong Kong accent. They express this as a target to aim for. Because of the colonial legacy, a British accent is regarded as the hallmark of good English and learners tend to be intolerant of other accents from English speakers in the outer and expanding circles. I have discussed the issue of different varieties of English and different accents in Chapter 1: *The global spread of English.*

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[33] It was reported by N. Tong in the *South China Morning Post* dated 26 August 2006 that a university professor got into hot soup with the Education and Manpower Bureau for releasing the findings of a survey to investigate the impact of the mother tongue policy on students in Forms One to Five in about one hundred schools between 1998 and 2003. In a conversation with a newspaper journalist, the professor mentioned one of the findings was that **students in Chinese-medium schools are more afraid of learning English** [emphasis added] and less motivated to do so than they were before the introduction of the mother tongue policy in 1998.

[34] As part of the five-university project, I interviewed nine faculty members at the Hong Kong Baptist University School of Business. The data that I collected contributed to the overall picture of English teaching and faculty views in the five universities, but has not been analysed on its own terms and has not been previously published in the report of this project. Here I report what one of my colleagues at HKBU has to say about the Business majors:

Lecturer: Their oral English is not very good. **They are too afraid to speak in English.** In terms of discussion, they are still quite shy to talk in English. So I would say, English is still a hurdle for them.

7.1.12.2 Herbert's language learning at university in the United Kingdom

I ask Herbert whether being at one of the top universities in the UK helped him to greatly improve his English. He replies that there was definitely some improvement but he does not think the improvement was that much. This is what we discussed:

(BE12) I: What about your time at Oxford? Did you find that you improved by leaps and bounds? [Both of us laugh]

Herbert: Not improve by a lot, but definitely there is some improvement. In terms of communication in English, there is **a lot** [his emphasis] of improvement. And also because I studied Economics and Management, I need to write a lot of essays and do a lot of reading, so that helps a lot in terms of reading speed and in terms of vocabulary. [...]

I: But spoken English? You had to use English all the time or were there a lot of Hong Kong students that you used Chinese with?

Herbert: Yeah. I mean, you will get more fluent in terms of spoken English but your vocabulary not be build just by spoken English because usually, people use simple words when they talk with each other. [...] I mean, I can speak English quite fluently but not fast enough to be like locals. So improvement but not improve by a lot.

I: Okay. But your social interaction there at Oxford ... was it mostly with the foreign students and British students or was it with other Hong Kong students?

Herbert: With foreign students but not **necessarily** with locals. There are a lot of international students in Oxford, so I hang out a lot with students from other countries – from Asia, from other European countries. Yeah, but yeah, with some local as well.

He expresses the desire to further improve his oral English.

7.1.12.3 Herbert's language training interest

We have seen in Chapter 5 how Herbert is a firm believer in learning from other people and from experience. I ask him how he views the role of training in providing new employees with the requisite skills in banking:

(BE12) I: Do you think that you would benefit from a little bit more of an input? I mean you talk about learning on the job, learning through practice, through making mistakes and so on. But would you benefit from somebody actually telling what to do either in terms of more of a formal training programme or even you know, taking you out to lunch and telling you, well you know, this is how you do it; watch us.

Herbert: I think, yeah, that would definitely be [of] benefit. But I just wonder how big, how much the benefit will be. Because okay, if you take us out for lunch, right, I can teach you okay, on this occasion, you need to behave like that. But there are so many [other] occasions…

I: Yes, yes.

Herbert: …right [that] I can't teach you for so many lunches and just treat you every time. Then you need to be reactive …

I: Yes, yes.

Herbert: … just react to that occasion on the spot.

He emphasises that someone learning to be a banker needs to be able to learn very quickly and be able to interact with people easily. His view is thus that while "training [is] good of course, […] it may not be that important". Herbert is a thoughtful young man and he tells me he has noticed a disjuncture between classroom learning and learning from daily life or at work:

(BE12) Herbert: […] I always find that what I've learned from school …

I: Hm.

Herbert: … including both secondary school or university education … the only discrepancy between my education and day-to-day work or day-to-day life is not about some formal reports or formal memos. I can handle that quite easily, or without too much difficulty. But it's all about day-to-day work when you hang around with some expatriate colleagues, then you will find little bit difficulty, a little bit difficult because you find all you learned from school is quite formal. [School] teach[es] you formal English whereas it's those like, oral English or more casual way of saying, jargons …

I: [laughs]

Herbert: … those which is very difficult to pick up.

I: Colloquial English.

Herbert: Yeah, local English.

I: Colloquial.

Herbert: Yeah. That you can only pick up, say in my case during the four years of studying in UK, hang a lot around with your friends, then you can pick up these.

As an employee in the Management Training Programme, Herbert is doing his rotations in the different departments and has also taken some courses on banking subjects, presentation skills and negotiation skills. He thinks new recruits need communication skills training particularly in the training of oral skills in both English and Mandarin. He would also like to have more training in presentation and negotiation skills. I ask him for more details on this:

(BE12) I: You had that [i.e. presentation and negotiation skills training] actually. But you think more would be better?

Herbert: More would be better. Yeah. I think more practice definitely will be helpful. So it can be done say, by holding some seminar so each of the participant can have the chance to give a presentation and also hold some discussion. And also more workshops on negotiation skills. It will be best done in a banking context, like you can have workshop, like a [role] play when someone actually act as a banker, someone act as a client and that can be yeah, helpful.

Herbert's views on training differ from those of his colleague, Maureen, who thinks the training she received on presentation skills was too long and not too useful. For the duration of the programme, he suggests two days to begin with. This should be followed one month later with another two day-course to see "what improvement you have got from the previous training." Herbert would also like to see a follow-up several months later.

7.1.13 BE13-MB3: Simon Fung

Programmer analyst (systems integration)

7.1.13.1 Simon's English lessons at university

After completing his bachelor's degree, Simon stayed on to study for his master's degree at the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong. He is able to remember details about his English courses at the university. As an undergraduate student, he was enrolled in two English courses. The first course was a compulsory, non-credit elementary course because of his low standard in English when he first entered university. This is what he says:

(BE13) Simon: One is some elementary English course because my English is not so good when I enter to the university. They require me to take some elementary course. It doesn't count [towards] any credit but very useful to me.

It taught him study and research skills. The second English course lasted for 15 weeks and focused on technical communication and how to make technical presentations. He would have liked continuous training in language as an undergraduate because as a student majoring in computer science, he found that it was easy to forget his writing skills through lack of use and also due to the fact that he was writing mostly computer programmes.

As a graduate student in the Master's programme in Computer Science, he received further training on how to write a master's thesis, and how to write a literature review. The Department also hired two language tutors to help the students revise the drafts of their thesis papers and to help them improve their presentation skills. All this language help was provided free of charge by the Department and he found it all very useful. It can be seen that such language assistance provided to undergraduate and postgraduate students by the university may help them to improve their English language skills to some extent. However, it may also be duplicated, not organised systematically, costly to administer and produce less than satisfactory results. In Simon's view, training in analytical thinking and how to solve problems is very useful and should be given during all five years at university. **He finds the training he received at university useful, but says that what he learnt in terms of content knowledge was already out-of-date by the time he entered the job market. Therefore, now that he is working in computer security, he finds that it is necessary for him to constantly update his technical knowledge because of the fast-changing technology.**

7.1.13.2 Simon's language training interest

I ask him why he left his previous job as Assistant Computer Officer at the university to come and work at the Bank. He says the main reason was that in his previous job, he was working on his own and while he was building up his skills in the field, he lacked the opportunity to interact with other people in the organisation. He wanted more interaction with other people. Although there are times when he feels a little inadequate in using English to communicate with English-speaking people at work, Simon says that he has no language need at present. I ask him whether he would be willing to go on a language training course should it be offered by the Bank, and he replies thus:

(BE13) Simon: Depends on time. If the time is suitable, [and] I'm not so busy in my schedules, I'll take that [course] because it's [for] some personal development, I think. Language is a very important skills when you work [with] the others people [and] try to convey some ideas, try to convince those people your views is correct, your direction is correct.

But it is not something immediate and he does not write down any specific information for language training in the questionnaire.

7.1.14 BE14-MB4: Jennifer Liu

Product Manager

Deposits and Investments, Retail Banking

7.1.14.1 Jennifer's English lessons at university

When I ask Jennifer to tell me about her English lessons at university, she laughs and tells me that it was five years ago. She recalls that she had three years of English at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. English was compulsory for each of the three years of university study. This is considerably more than the English courses offered at the other universities where the subject is limited to one year or even just one semester. Jennifer took courses in English for academic purposes as well as business English on writing business reports, proposals and memos. She tells me this:

(BE14) Jennifer: I can't remember so much. I can only remember we are doing so many research paper because we need to analyse different kind of companies [...] or make an analysis on business, and to make the recommendations. So it's more like a business-related study. I can just only remember we are doing so many exercises of this kind of studies.

She tells me that the English lessons at the university were useful when she started her first job.

7.1.14.2 Jennifer's language training interest

The Bank runs training programmes for its employees but they are not compulsory for Jennifer. She says that her schedule at the Bank is very tight so "it's very sad that we don't have so many time to join the training programme which is organised by the Training Department". She has joined some other courses on creative thinking and marketing because she wants to improve her skills in marketing but she has not joined any English course. Both these courses were conducted in English because "the tutor [was a] foreigner" she tells me. She works from nine to six and all the training takes place after office hours. She says:

(BE14) Jennifer: I've not explore [...] because it may spend quite a long time because [...] it is continuously every week you have to attend a certain hours for the course. So it is quite difficult for us to schedule some extra hours to learn this.

However, she says that she is planning to engage an English tutor to give her individualised lessons:

(BE14) Jennifer: I want to look for a tutor [...] so individual [lesson] because I want to learn the written English and also the oral. The written, the spoken and the listening skill. So I think in a group may not be that useful. But if it's only individual, then will be much more useful.

At the same time, Jennifer says that she also wants to improve her Mandarin "because language skill is very important (to) a marketing person".

At her first and previous job in an American bank, Jennifer received some English training in making sales presentations, which she found very useful. But there is nothing similar in her present bank. When asked to indicate in the questionnaire what kind of language training she would like, she writes down "presentation skill, communicating skill, and reporting skill". By "communicating skill", she means spoken English and by "reporting skill", she means report writing skills. She writes down "half day" for each of these courses. I ask her if this would be enough, and she tells me:

(BE14) Jennifer: Just my opinion. I don't want to spend so much time [if] for every week I have to spend two hours. I don't want.

Later, she agrees that the courses could be conducted for one hour per week for 10 weeks. Jennifer is not keen on investing too much time on English courses, and she emphasises that she wants individualised English lessons as this would be more effective for her.

Table 7.4 AB Bank Employees

Identification Number	Name
BE15-AB1	Doris Ko (Female)
BE16-AB2	Lucy Liu (Female)

7.1.15 BE15-AB1 Doris Ko

Manager

Corporate Communications Department

7.1.15.1 Doris' English lessons at university

Doris did her first degree in science at a university in the U.S. She is one of only two of the entire group of informants who did their first degree at an overseas university, the other person being Herbert Chan (MB2) who studied in the U.K. Doris earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Tennessee which according to the rankings of America's best colleges by the *U.S News and World Report*, is in the 44th position out of the top 50 public national universities (see Chapter 6, section 6.3 for more details). She then completed an MBA in International Business several years later from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She does not talk about her university experience. But her Head of Department, Paul Smith, commented on her English standard and explained her present inadequacies as being the result of her lack of using the language while she was a student in the U.S. For Smith's comments, see 6.4.2.2. In my interview with her, I find that she is generally able to convey ideas, but her speech lacks cohesion and she makes some grammatical errors in for example, tenses and articles.

7.1.15.2 Doris' language training interest

Doris has to use more oral English on a daily basis compared to the average bank employee in a similar position because she reports to a British Head of Department. All departmental meetings are conducted in English. While she takes cares of the work that the Department does in Chinese such as communicating with the Chinese press, external vendors and colleagues from other departments, she also has to write in English on a routine basis. She considers herself average – a rating of 3 out of a 5-point scale – in her English proficiency. She is interested in getting some English training to increase her confidence in English. She would like to take a course on how to write business letters and reports. She is also keen to improve her oral skills and indicates an interest in business conversations, negotiations and meetings. She thinks 20 hours of classes are adequate to improve her English.

7.1.16 BE15-AB2: Lucy Liu

Employee Relations Officer and Assistant Manager

Corporate Communications Department

7.1.16.1 Lucy's English lessons at university

Lucy majored in Social Work at university, and most of the lectures were conducted in Cantonese. She took one year of English but it was not very specific in the first semester and she cannot remember the details. The second semester English course that she took was a little more work-oriented, and it taught her how to write social work proposals and reports. There was not much oral English training.

7.1.16.2 Lucy's language training interest

Lucy generally has such a busy work schedule that she does not have the time to think about improving her language. Her oral communication is in both Cantonese and English. She uses Cantonese for her employee relations and hotline work and she talks in English to her Head of Department and to the Bank's CEO and attends meetings conducted in English by both of them. She is generally comfortable in using oral English but feels a little less adequate about her written English skills. In the questionnaire, Lucy indicates an interest in a short speaking course of one month, and a slightly longer writing course of two months in memo and report writing. The frequency of these courses is once a week for about two hours per session.

7.1.17 Summary of findings on the informants' English lessons at university

From my interviews with the informants, I found that the English courses provided at the various universities in Hong Kong were generally insufficient in terms of their duration and the range of skills taught. Almost all those who studied at local universities had only one semester or one year (two semesters) of English courses. This translates into a range of forty to eighty hours of English lessons. Only one employee (MB4) reports having studied English in all three years of university education. However, from her description of the English courses she took, they may actually be business studies courses requiring her to write analytical and recommendation reports of business cases. Almost all the informants also report having English lessons only in their first year, with no further lessons in their second or third year. Five informants (SD2, SD3, SD4, HD2 and MB3) express the view that English should be taught in all three years of university education because they need more hours of English training. As regards what should be taught, two informants (SD4 and SD5) feel that university English courses should teach only Business English to prepare students for the workplace, and one informant (SD3) would like the university to place greater emphasis on Business English and less emphasis on academic English. In contrast, one informant (HD4) categorically states that English courses at university should not teach workplace English while three informants (SD2, HD2 and MB3) would like the university to teach both academic and business English. Two informants (HD1 and MB2) describe the lack of oral English training, particularly in social and colloquial English, at both the secondary and university levels in Hong Kong. Table 7.5 summarises the findings on the informants' English lessons at university.

Table 7.5 Summary of findings on the informants' English lessons at university

Bank Employee	What they got at university*	What they think should be offered at university
BE1-SD1 Vicky Wong	One-year course on writing academic papers and giving oral presentations	Not stated
BE2-SD2 Fiona Fan	In Year I – Business English course on writing memos, minutes, reports; role plays, job interviews	English in all three years; Year I – academic English Years II & III – Business English
BE3-SD3 Catherine Leung	In Year I – Business English	English in all three years; less emphasis on academic English and more emphasis on Business English
BE4-SD4 Ida Law	One semester course on writing and speaking skills (academic English)	English in all three years; Business English should be taught; Year I – memo writing Year II – writing of longer reports Year III – other skills
BE5-SD5 Rex Ho	Business and memo writing course	English for general purposes, particularly for the workplace
BE6-SD6 Kenneth Kwok	Did not attend a local university. Earned his Bachelor's degree through distance learning from an Australian university. Weak foundation in English at secondary school	Not stated but he is currently taking two different courses on a part-time basis
BE7-HD1 Kara Chan	In Year I – writing course for academic purposes plus writing memos and minutes	More oral English training, including teaching of colloquial English for everyday use
BE8-HD2 Cherry Wong	In Year I – English for academic purposes	Years II and III – one- or two-month courses on business writing to prepare students for work
BE9-HD3 Ophelia Yip	One semester of English for academic proposes	Not stated
BE10-HD4 Fairy Tsang	Majored in English language and literature; compulsory one-semester course in general English for students of all majors	University English course should not be work-oriented, but does not provide details of what should be taught
BE11-MB1 Maureen Chow	Secondary school laid good foundation in English for her. Compulsory one-semester course of English for academic purposes at university in Hong Kong. MBA at U.S. university increased her exposure to English	Not stated

BE12-MB2 Herbert Chan	Fairly good foundation in English at secondary school. Education at Oxford University improved his overall standard of English in reading, writing, listening and speaking	Not explicitly stated but by inference, he wants more oral English including teaching of colloquial and social English in the local school system
BE13-MB3 Simon Fung	At undergraduate level, took elementary English course for university work plus English for technical communication. At graduate level, took English course on writing research papers and got help with thesis revision	Continuous English training in all three years of undergraduate education
BE14-MB4 Jennifer Liu	English in all three years for academic purposes and writing business reports, proposals and memos	Not stated
BE15-AB1 Doris Ko	University education in U.S. provided greater exposure to English. MBA in Chinese University of Hong Kong	Not stated
BE16-AB2 Lucy Liu	One semester of general English plus one semester of English for social work – writing reports and proposals	Not stated

* Secondary school English training is also reported in three cases.

7.1.18 Summary of findings on training interests of the informants

In my interviews with the informants, we discuss training-related issues such as whether the bank provides English language training for its staff, whether they have undergone any English language training at the bank, what kinds of English courses they are interested in, and the duration that they think is needed for such courses. The findings are summarised here.

We shall first look at the informants' answers to the first two questions – does the bank provide English language training and have they undergone any English language training at the bank? SD Bank does not provide English language training and none of the six informants had been sent on any English course. However, in terms of employee interest in English courses, two informants (SD1 and SD3) verbally express a strong interest during the interview to receive English training. Another informant (SD6) is taking a writing course for electronic data processing professionals at his own expense outside of office hours.

On the other hand, HD Bank offers an English course in business writing. However, only one informant (HD1) has taken this course but it was not to her satisfaction as she wants to improve her oral English skills for social interactions. As a result, she did not complete the course. The other three informants (HD2, HD3 and HD4) have not taken the course as it is offered on an optional basis.

The situation in MB Bank is also different. The two management trainees (MB1 and MB2) are required to take a two-day course on making presentations. One of them (MB1) feels that it is too long while the other one (MB2) feels that it is too short. There is also a different English course offered to other employees on an optional basis, but neither of the other two informants (MB3 and MB4) has taken it.

The situation in AB Bank is also different from that in the other three banks. This bank offers an English course to employees without university qualifications, but this is not open to AB1 and AB2 who are both university graduates. I subsequently learnt that the Bank was planning to offer a 24-hour Business English course which would be taught by an external course provider and which would be open to all interested staff. In view of the fact that Hong Kong employers are complaining about the standard of their employees' English, and judging from the standard of the informants' spoken English in the interviews, it may be concluded that the four banks do not provide adequate English training to their employees.

We shall now look at the informants' answers to the other two questions of what kinds of English courses they are interested in, and the duration that they think is needed for these courses. Nine informants (SD2, SD3, SD5, SD6, HD2, HD3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) indicate interest in, broadly speaking, what may be termed **business or workplace writing**. This includes practical writing, effective writing, report writing, memo writing, writing minutes, bank documents, and business letters. On the other hand, 12 informants (SD2, SD4, SD6, HD1, HD2, HD3, HD4, MB1, MB2, MB4, AB1 and AB2) express interest in oral English courses such as giving presentations, public speaking, oral communication, business conversations and English for everyday use. Of these 12 informants, two (MB2 and AB1) are also interested in learning negotiation skills and AB1 is also interested in a course on meetings. In contrast to these informants with an interest in English training, two informants (SD1 and MB3) indicate no training interest of any kind in the questionnaire, although I have earlier pointed out that SD1 verbally expressed her interest in English training during the interview.

I also asked the informants to indicate the length of time they think is needed for the course(s) they are interested in taking. At the two extreme ends of the answers received, one informant (MB4) is willing to spend just half-a-day on presentation skills while another (HD1) is willing to spend one to two years on oral English for daily use. In general, however, it is possible to categorise their answers into different lengths of time: (i) upto 8 hours, (ii) 9 to 16 hours, (iii) 17 to 40 hours, and (iv) 41 to 60 hours. It should be pointed out that some informants fall into more than one time range because they themselves give different lengths of time they are willing to spend on different courses.

(i) Five informants (SD4, HD2, MB1, MB4 and AB2) wish to spend only upto 8 hours on presentation skills, public speaking and business writing.
(ii) Four informants (HD3, HD4, MB4 and AB2) wish to spend between 9 and 16 hours on effective writing, presentation skills, oral communication, speaking and writing skills, report and memo writing.

(iii) Five informants (SD2, SD3, SD6, MB2 and AB1) wish to spend between 17 and 40 hours on practical writing, presentation skills, writing business letters and reports, speaking skills, business conversations, negotiation skills, and how to conduct meetings.

(iv) Three informants (SD5, SD6 and HD1) wish to spend between 41 and 80 hours on report writing, writing skills, and oral English for daily use. We note that HD1 falls into a category of her own with a stated range of 50 to 200 hours. Table 7.6 summarises the findings on the informants' training interests.

Table 7.6 Summary of findings on training interests of the informants

Bank Employee	Is English training provided by the bank?	Employee's Training interest	Duration of English training requested
BE1-SD1 Vicky Wong	No	Not stated	Not stated
BE2-SD2 Fiona Fan	No	Practical writing; Presentation skills	Three months
BE3-SD3 Catherine Leung	No	Writing business letters & reports	Two to three hours weekly for two to three months
BE4-SD4 Ida Law	No	Presentation skills	Two hours weekly for two to four weeks
BE5-SD5 Rex Ho	No	Writing reports and minutes	Two to three hours per session for twenty sessions
BE6-SD6 Kenneth Kwok	No	Writing & speaking	Two to three hours weekly; six months for writing and three months for speaking
BE7-HD1 Kara Chan	Yes, but not suitable for her needs and interests	Oral English for daily usage	One to two hours weekly for one to two years
BE8-HD2 Cherry Wong	Yes, but she has not enrolled in the course	Writing bank documents/business writing; Presentation skills	Two hours per session for three to four sessions
BE9-HD3 Ophelia Yip	Yes, but she has not enrolled in the course	Effective writing; Oral communication	One to two days; Not stated
BE10-HD4 Fairy Tsang	Yes, but she has not enrolled in the course	Presentation skills; Mandarin	One hour weekly for three months; continuously for Mandarin through different levels
BE11-MB1 Maureen Chow	Yes, a two-day course for new management trainees	Public speaking; Presentation skills	One day
BE12-MB2 Herbert Chan	Yes, a two-day course for new management trainees	Presentation skills; Negotiation skills	Two days; one month later, another two days; six months later, evaluation and further training
BE13-MB3 Simon Fung	Yes, but he has not enrolled in the course	Not needed at present	Not stated
BE14-MB4 Jennifer Liu	Yes, but she has not enrolled in the course	Presentation skills; Speaking skills; Writing reports	Half day; One hour weekly for 10 weeks for speaking

			and writing
BE15-AB1 Doris Ko	Yes, but not for her *	Business letters and report writing; Business conversations; Negotiations; Conducting meetings	Twenty hours
BE16-AB2 Lucy Liu	Yes, but not for her *	Speaking; Report and memo writing	Two hours weekly; one month for speaking and two months for writing

* AB Bank subsequently offered all interested staff the chance to enrol in a 24-hour Business English programme. See section 7.2.2 for more details and Appendix 14 for the programme outline.

7.2 Training in the workplace

7.2.1 Some considerations

While considering the question of what training is most useful to these bank employees, we need to look at the changing world of work. There have been unprecedented changes in the way work is done in almost every industry sector in the last fifteen years, with implications for the skill development needs of the workforce such as language, literacy and communication. Workplaces now have to deal with conflicting and interrelated pressures at the economic, industrial and technological levels. The main pressures include:

- competition from local and overseas markets
- reduction in number of employees
- focus on quality
- application of new technologies
- new organisational cultures
- focus on skills

Until recently, in many developed economies, the basic skills required for work were the three r's – reading, writing and arithmetic. However, in recent times, these have been expanded to include other skills, like analysing information, oral communication, problem solving, creative thinking, goal setting, interpersonal skills, teamwork, negotiation, self-learning, using technology, organisational effectiveness and leadership. These key competencies are very similar to those listed in Carnevale *et al* (1990) as those wanted by US employers. Similarly, an extensive survey of employers in the UK in 1993 found that basic skills, particularly oral communication, have become more important for work.[35] The annual costs of limited language and literacy skills to the economy in lost production and efficiencies have been estimated at several billion dollars in Australia to five billion pounds in the UK or US$40 billion in the USA.[36] Analysis of labour market statistics, for example, invariably shows a strong correlation between proficiency in English and labour market success, in terms of being able to firstly obtain a job, and then keep it.[37]

While it is true that there has been increasing recognition of the importance of language, literacy and numeracy competence in the workplace and in vocational education, many obstacles prevent the translation of this recognition into action. These obstacles exist at all levels: at the levels of employers, educators, governments and the learners or workers themselves.

Many vocational reforms have failed because of mismatches between curricula and methodologies on the one hand and learners' skills and workplace needs on the other. Field and Ford (1995) depict the range of approaches to skill development at the workplace as lying along a continuum. At one end, skills development receives little or no attention and learning is haphazard. Towards the mid-point of the continuum, enterprises begin to take quality seriously and begin to formalise their operating procedures and become more explicit about process and product standards. Specific, goal-based learning is formalised through training for routine procedures. At the other end of the continuum, skill

[35] Atkinson, J. and Spilsbury, M. 1993. *Basic skills and jobs*. Institute of Manpower Studies ALBSU, London.
[36] Wickert, R. 1989. *No Single Measure*: A Survey of Australian Adult Literacy. DEET, Canberra. DEET, Training for Productivity 1994, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 1992. ALBSU, 1993. *The Cost to Industry*. London. Hull, G. 1993, "Hearing other voices: a critical assessment of popular views on literacy and work", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 63, No.1, pp.20-49
[37] See, for example, Ackland, R. and Williams, L. 1992, Wooden, M. 1993. Australian National Training Authority, May 1996. *Participation and Attainment of Individual Client Groups within Vocational Education and Training*. Brisbane.

development is regarded as the key to long term survival, and a wide range of formal and informal learning opportunities is recognised and valued.

In general, training activity in the workplace is only supported to the extent that it adds immediate value. It demands time for employees to be away from the workplace and is at odds with the day-to-day work pressures and the strong emphasis on productivity, quality and profit. During my interviews, at least two informants tell me in no uncertain terms that the Bank will only provide training to staff **where it thinks the training will bring about a direct and immediate increase in the bank's profit margins**. SD Bank provides no English training and Vicky Wong (SD1) tells me this:

(BE1) Vicky: So I think the company will not put so much resources into training the marketing people [who are] in commercial banking. [...] Of course, if we are a very profitable team, if we contribute, then we can get more. [...] So our business is quite difficult and thus [laughs] I think the company may not contribute so much training resources into our team.

Another employee, Catherine Leung (SD3) tells me something similar:

(BE3) Catherine: Actually, I think if I really tell to, for example, training officer of our bank, they have to see whether it is cost effective. [...] So maybe they may think in order to increase the profitability of our bank, they have to think, 'Maybe I have to organise some course to improve their selling skills rather than to improve their English.' .

In theory, increased investment in training should lead to increased productivity and a few studies have indicated that higher skill levels translate into greater adaptability, higher individual earnings and higher firm productivity.[38] In the Hong Kong context, it is interesting to note that whereas the financial services

[38] A comparative study of the clothing manufacture industry in Britain and Germany shows that the higher level of vocational training given to the German workforce accounted for the observable differences between the success of the firms in the two countries. See Steedman, H. and Wagner, K. 1989, Productivity, Machinery and Skills: Clothing Manufacture in Britain and Germany. *National Institute of Economics Review*, May pp. 40-57. Similarly, the 1992 OECD study into Adult Illiteracy and Economic Performance cites US research by Denison which indicates that more than half the productivity increases in the US economy during 1929-69 was the result of on the job training and learning. It was twice as important as technology in boosting productivity.

establishments surveyed by the government for its study on manpower needs[39] believed that better educated staff were needed for improving work efficiency and productivity in the financial services sector, only 18 percent out of 6,748 financial services establishments had training plans for their employees, and only 21 percent had a training budget. Most of the medium and small banks do not have trainers or training departments. When training is carried out, it is through the use of external providers.

7.2.2 Exploring the scope and role of workplace education

Despite the differences in perspectives and priorities held by the different parties involved in workplace education, there is also substantial common ground in the expressed aims and objectives. For instance, industry increasingly stresses lifelong learning and views the skills of their employees as their most valuable asset. At the educational level, critical thinking and learner-centered approaches to curriculum are increasingly valued. The new and changing contexts of work, technologies and communication media require a broader repertoire of communication skills, as also the ability to deal with ambiguity and complexity. Policy statements by government outline the importance of language, literacy and numeracy competence in the workforce and these policies are usually supported by some government funding programs.

In Hong Kong, employees can now get government support to improve their English proficiency. They can apply for a 50 percent subsidy of course fees for English language training in order to meet the relevant occupational benchmarks as tested in specified international business English examinations. Since the Hong Kong Workplace English campaign started in January 2000 with an allocated budget of HKD 50 million for the period upto the end of 2003, more than 15, 500 individuals have passed the relevant benchmark tests recognised by the Hong Kong government. This campaign was phased out in 2004 but another campaign, the Continuing Education Fund campaign, was started in June 2002 with a bigger budget of HKD 5 billion. This second Fund has continued to provide subsidies for

[39] The Government of the Hong Kong SAR conducted a study in 2003 called *2001-based Manpower Projection for Financial Services up to 2007* and published a report on its findings.

English training as well as Cantonese and Putonghua training for adults aged 18 to 60 years of age.[40]

How then can educators use this commonality of purpose and limited resources to maximum effect? In order to be successful, workplace education needs to:

- show direct, immediate relevance between course objectives and workplace outcomes
- be closely aligned with organisational goals and strategies
- aim to develop new workplace competencies such as problem-solving and teamwork
- be counted as part of an employee's industry-based qualifications.

For various reasons, traditional classroom-based teaching is becoming less appropriate or even feasible at work. Some of these reasons are pragmatic ones related to cost and difficulties of releasing employees from their normal duties to attend training. Others include employees' unfamiliarity with abstract, theoretical learning and preference for more practical modes. The most successful programmes will be those which are able to address the twin tensions of immediate, visible learning outcomes as well as maximizing the impact of learning in terms of longer term results.

Workplace research studies by Willing (1992) and Scollon and Scollon (1995) have shown that communication difficulties are often due to different cultural values, expectations and patterns of interaction. Cultural values such as deference, the need to preserve harmony and show respect to older people and those in positions of authority, for example, need to be taken into account if appropriate strategies are to be developed to encourage full worker participation in a culturally diverse context.

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[40] This information comes from a report by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) dated 13 January 2004 entitled *SCOLAR Sets New Direction for Workplace English Campaign.*

Educators' effectiveness then is greatly dependent on the extent to which they can work collaboratively and strategically with a number of different others in a role that facilitates learning, rather than delivers teaching. Such a role often involves challenging existing power structures and practices in workplaces, at the same time as working towards attitudinal shifts from key personnel, and inevitable dealing with resistance from others.

This strategic, collaborative competence on the part of the educator needs to be developed partly because it has, until recently, not been recognized in teachers' role descriptions or training programmes. Educators who wish to work with clients in the workplace would do well to remember this advice:

> They need to understand that any vocational training that happens in the workplace needs to be in line with the business goals and the rest will come. Otherwise it will be marginalized and ultimately useless. (Mawer, 1999: 66)

Candlin (1992) argues that if English is a significant factor in determining workers' job retention and promotion prospects, then workplace education providers are 'no longer in a linguistic world but in one which relates to questions of fundamental rights and equities' (p. 114).

What are some of the issues involved in researching workplace needs and drawing up a collaborative, responsive workplace program? The educators' effectiveness is dependent on a range of factors that are much more complex than the design of appropriate teaching materials or learning activities. These factors include:

- the workplace's needs, expectations and readiness for learning
- the ability of the educator to research the needs, see the opportunities inherent in the situation and present a viable action plan
- the educator's negotiation skills and responsiveness to obstacles and opportunities as the training develops
- the resources available.

From the bank's point of view, the following are important considerations:

- how bad is the problem? How long will it take to fix it?
- how can we deal with the language and technical training needs at the same time?
- how much disruption will be caused to work by the proposed training?
- what will the employees be able to do as a result of the training?
- how much is it going to cost? Will it be cost effective?
- is it more viable to fire employees with low levels of skills in favour of more skilled employees or new recruits?

It is also vital for the company (in this case, bank) to believe in training its staff and for key personnel within the company (bank) to be convinced of the need for training; otherwise it is not going to happen. One of the banks in my study, AB Bank, showed itself to be different in terms of its policy and interest in training its staff. The Bank's CEO, Mr A, whom we met in the senior managers' meeting discussed in Chapter 6, is a foreign-born, U.S.-trained person with an interest in training his staff. Unique amongst banks, and perhaps even amongst many other non-financial institutions in Hong Kong, Mr. A initiated a training programme jointly with a university in the U.S. to deliver a Bachelor of Arts degree course to the bank's employees not having a university degree. The employees do this programme on a part-time basis while they are working at the Bank. Another example of Mr. A's belief in training his staff is his setting up of a fitness centre on one of the upper floors of the bank building and the hiring of three people to run the place and train the users.

I learnt subsequently that the Bank was also planning to provide a fully-sponsored Business English Training programme for all interested staff. It would be a 12-evening, 24-hour course with a maximum class size of 20 and would be provided by the Centre for Professional and Business English (CPBE) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University at the Centre's venue. Details of the programme outline are given in Appendix 14. As we have noted in Chapter 6, sections 6.3 and 6.4, Mr A runs his bank somewhat differently from the other banks and leaves a strong imprint of his personality on the policies of the bank, including its training policy.

According to Mawer *et al.* (1999), workplaces are not homogenous entities but rather "a conglomerate of competing values and interest" (p. 79). Different organisations may be using the same rhetoric and labels such as quality, teamwork, customer focus and efficiency, but the implementation of such rhetoric into reality may vary widely at different institutions. So for instance, the four banks in my study may all repeat the same phrases but they may well have different things in mind. There is also little incentive for employees to admit to language needs, for example, if their job security is in doubt.

In carrying out a needs analysis for an organisation, Downs (1988) cautions against the following four pitfalls:

1. not discovering a problem that actually exists, usually as a result of superficial or hurried investigation. For example, some people in the organisation may have vested interests in maintaining the status quo and this makes it difficult to implement any changes. Not discovering such problems can effectively sabotage any intended action.
2. treating all problems as communication problems. For example, the lack of participation at meetings may be due to the way meetings are chaired or run, or the corporate culture of the organisation that is very hierarchical and top down, rather than the lack of language proficiency of the employees.
3. trying to solve the wrong problems. This error stems from the previous one and a wrong analysis of the problem will lead to unsatisfactory outcomes.
4. failing to probe deeply enough to understand the problem. What is stated as company policy in the mission statements and what is actually practiced may be very different, and accepting things at face value can lead to superficial solutions or unrealistic expectations.

There are several ways to go about collecting data in the workplace:

- a work-site tour with someone who has good, general knowledge of the organisation. At this stage, one should note if certain departments or individuals are reluctant to be observed or interviewed, or some information is commercially sensitive.
- collecting samples of written communication. These texts can provide a comprehensive indication of communicative requirements as well as insights into the organisational culture.
- observing and recording employees on the job. This is a very effective way of finding out first hand about communicative requirements as well as observing employee relations.
- observing and recording regular meetings and training sessions. This gives an indication of current issues of concern within the organisation, gives insights into how decisions are made and who some of the key people in the organisation are.
- interviewing employees about their work tasks relating to oral interaction, reading or writing. Such interviews are useful in discovering employees' perceptions of their own communication and training needs, and willingness to participate in training programs.
- interviewing supervisors, managers and trainers to find out their perceptions of communication and training needs in the organisation. Such interviews provide a picture of current and past training activities and their perceived usefulness.

It goes without saying that establishing good relations with key participants is invaluable in the collection of data on workplace discourse and practices. After the data has been collected, the next step is writing up the needs analysis report, making recommendations that would shape the ensuing initiatives. The readership of the report will dictate how it is to be written. For example, lengthy reports are unlikely to be read by busy managers so their contents need to be succinct and to the point. Jargon dealing with grammar, text types or language function will not interest bankers, for example, and should not be included in the body of the report.

The report should be simply written so that it can be understood by non-language experts. Some information will need to be handled sensitively, for instance, identifying the deficits and problems of a particular group of workers or evaluating the effectiveness of current communicative practices. Sometimes educators may need to work for incremental change within the given parameters, rather than recommending more radical albeit pedagogically sound options.

It is also a good idea to present a range of options or tentative recommendations, which allow people to discuss and feel committed to the final proposals. While language teachers offer specialist knowledge and skills, they are often not in a position to prescribe appropriate action plans that fit the particular local conditions. Such plans should be developed in collaboration with the different parties involved – managers, trainers, supervisors and employee representatives.

7.3 What can universities do?

7.3.1 Five-university project *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong*

Five universities in Hong Kong[41] conducted a large scale project to investigate the nature of the requirements in the use of English imposed by the multidisciplinary academic programmes at university made on their undergraduate students studying for the degree of the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA). The project entitled *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong* also evaluates to what extent these requirements are met by the existing courses in English.

I am presenting the findings from this project because it is the **only** study conducted across most of the universities in Hong Kong and it also provides recent data as it was completed in 2000. The project and its recommendations were briefly discussed in Chapter 3. In this section, I will discuss at greater length the role of universities in delivering English courses to undergraduate students to help them become more

[41] The five universities are the Baptist University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the City University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and Lingnan University.

proficient in English. The project focused on six perspectives – student, teacher, curriculum, writing performance, textual and occupational – in order to investigate the complexity of the nature and range of communicative demands that are placed on the students. I shall briefly report on the findings of the project and insert my comments where appropriate.

The textual and academic performance perspectives clearly showed that although there are common features or an academic core found in "business discourse", there are nonetheless distinctive generic characteristics which are reflective of the requirements of the different disciplines in BBA programmes. In general, the writings of Hong Kong students exhibit a number of problems which may be either common or specific to particular disciplinary genres.

The student perspective revealed that students experience a variety of language problems and that these vary across the years from difficultly in following lectures and tutorials particularly in the first year to difficulty with subject discipline demands related to concepts and writing demands in the second and third years of university study.

The teacher perspective revealed that although there are mixed opinions about disciplinary variation and the ability of students to handle this within and across different subjects, there is some agreement that Year I students in particular encounter problems in handling discourses from different disciplines both in their writing and reading tasks. This requires a great deal of skill and it is assumed by teachers that the students will adapt given sufficient time. The teachers also emphasise the value of collaboration between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners and business faculties so that the genuine needs of the students can be identified and addressed in well-designed business communications courses. The concerns expressed by the interviewees justify the offering of business communications courses for first year students and for discipline-specific ESP courses in the second and third years. Five of my 16 informants (31 percent) tell me that they believe English courses offered at university should be offered in all three years of study and should not be restricted to only the first year while seven of them (44 percent) express no opinion on this matter.

The curriculum perspective highlighted the importance of collaboration between the host departments and ESP specialists and tutors. It also revealed some mismatches between the requirements of Business Departments and the English or Business Communication Skills courses provided by Language Centres or Departments of English at the universities. There is significant tension between the nature of input into English language courses and the nature of outcomes expected of such courses. The Business faculty generally viewed academic English skills as the job of their English teaching colleagues although both groups had different perceptions of what constituted academic skills. Another significant factor that has a negative effect on English learning in business education is the lack of emphasis on linguistic skills and knowledge in the assessment of subject disciplines. It is a common practice among the Business faculty to ignore poor or ineffective communicative ability when evaluating students' assignments and to award marks almost solely on content matters. As a result, students interpret this lack of emphasis on communicative effectiveness in assignments and in day-to-day teaching and learning as a disincentive to work harder at improving their English.

The occupational perspective, which was investigated by me, showed that there is broad use of English as the language of international business in Hong Kong. However, members of the public and especially the business community are greatly dissatisfied with the quality of graduates being produced in the local universities and they are voicing their dissatisfaction in terms of the English language (in)competence of these local graduates. In my report for the project, I point out the remarks made by James Tien, Legislative Councillor, Chairman of the Liberal Party, and also a prominent businessman, which appeared in the *South China Morning Post*, 1999:

> My Liberal Party colleagues' business and professional sector constituents have asked for improved teaching to help their employees. I said that the universal language transcended borders and gave us our competitive edge, but standards were being eroded. (27 September)

I also point out some remarks made by a representative from the banking sector, A. Au (1997), then Chief Executive of Hang Seng Bank, as follows:

> Unfortunately, the Hong Kong education system has failed to produce a sufficient number of the quality staff that employers are looking for. In the area of language proficiency, which is the most important tool for effective business communication, I have observed a decline in standards.

As a result of all these complaints from the business sector, the focus of English teaching for the workplace is increasingly moving out of the academy and into the hands of the government and business coalition. There is a general perception, which is echoed by Paul Smith (Chapter 6), that the universities are not delivering quality products.

The five-university project found that one of the main reasons for the mismatch between the communicative demands placed on the students and their ability to meet these demands is the limited time available for English language or communication courses, a finding that is also supported by my present study as well (see section 7.1.2). In the time allocated to English teaching, which in most cases does not go beyond the first year, the focus is likely to be either on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or on English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). In reality, EOP skills are not needed until the students are in their final year. However, these skills frequently appear in the first year at the expense of more important EAP skills. A better plan would be to offer EAP courses early on, for example in the first and second years and leave EOP courses until the third year. The project makes the following recommendations for the English language and communication skills programmes for students in the business faculties in Hong Kong:

1. a well-designed EAP programme for all first year business education students aimed at developing a common core of academic discourse while at the same time highlighting disciplinary and cross-disciplinary variations.

2. a modular genre-based ESP course with each module introducing students to a set of academic business genres, and sensitising them to some of the typical lexico-grammatical realisations and rhetorical features of such genres as well as making them aware of generic conflicts across disciplinary boundaries. Some of these modules can be part of a semester-long course, whereas others can be in the form

of short-term modules (no more than 10 hours each), given on self-access basis supported by Web-mediated materials.

3. a modular genre-based set of EOP electives focusing specifically on individual genres and linked to professionally oriented tasks, introducing students to some of the demands of key post-academic professional workplaces. These modules should be short-term, perhaps of around ten hours each, provided in face-to-face mode, or via self-access and supported by web-mediated materials. These modules should be made available to students in the final year.

7.3.2 My views on what schools and universities can do

From what I have learnt from participating in the five-university project, my interviews with my 16 informants; and my more than 20 years of teaching English, I believe that there are several things that schools and universities can do.

First, schools should lay a strong English foundation for their students. This means that good and effective teaching should start from primary school and progressively continue into secondary school and university. This requires competent teachers, a well-designed curriculum and interesting and effective materials with plenty of opportunities for the students to use the language in different types of situations.

Second, and following the first point above, at the university stage, the students should already be able to undertake studies in English. It is a huge waste of resources to be teaching basic skills in English all over again at the university level. Here I would like to quote Edward Chen, former President of Lingnan University, Hong Kong's smallest and only liberal arts university. Professor Chen was interviewed by the *South China Morning Post* just before he retired after serving as Lingnan's President for 12 years and he makes the same point about the importance of a strong foundation in the early years of schooling, a point that is sometimes forgotten by Education Department officials, the business sector and the public at large. He says:

> It's grossly unfair to blame universities for poor English standards among university students. How could this be the fault of universities? [...] Why do we have to teach the 26 alphabets

again in orientation camps [at university]? Because preschools [have failed to lay a good foundation in language]. (Nora Tong, *SCMP*, 15 August 2007)

As a result of students' poor English standards when they enter university, English courses are often remedial in nature – teaching students elementary grammar all over again and how to use the correct tenses, verb forms, and other parts of speech in simple and clear sentences. As Chen puts it, why do universities have to teach the alphabet all over again? It is also not feasible in terms of the competing demands of their major subjects and the limited time allocated to English courses. At the university level, the English language skills of the students should be further developed for more demanding academic requirements in writing, listening and speaking. Some time should also be allocated for developing their listening and communicative skills in non-academic settings, and to expose them to intercultural communicative strategies. This would allow them to function reasonably well outside the classroom. In their final year at university, students should also take a course in English for the workplace to enable them to start thinking about the language demands at work.

Another well known Hong Kong social commentator, Regina Ip Lau Suk-yee, Hong Kong's former Security Chief, who now runs a policy think-tank, and has political ambitions for the future, puts it this way:

> Think of it like this: our students have gone through 11 years of education in English (at the end of Form 5 when they sit for the English language paper in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination), yet 30 percent cannot make the grade even when assessed against lower standards. The only conclusion one can draw is that something has gone terribly wrong with our English-language instruction. What went wrong? (Regina Ip, *SCMP*, 27 August 2007)

Hence, all the wrongs imbibed by the students over their 13 years of primary and secondary education (15 or more years if one also included kindergarten and pre-primary education), cannot be expected to be set right in one or two semesters (or even one or two years) of university remedial English courses.

Third, in addition to all the compulsory English courses at university mentioned above, there should be other non-credit bearing supplementary courses on various skills in English, which should be taught in modules of different levels of attainment for those who wish to further advance their English skills. There should also be self-access language learning laboratories and facilities and students should be strongly encouraged to make use of all these resources for their own independent learning.

Fourth, I think that apart from the English teachers, the *learners themselves* have to be full of initiative and have the motivation to learn. I shall let a student make this case herself by quoting the letter that was very recently published in the *South China Morning Post.* It does an admirable job of stating what I think is needed on the part of the learners themselves:

> I am writing to express my views on students' English proficiency. Frankly, I think the English proficiency of Hong Kong students is poor, even though I am one of these students. I don't make any excuses for my poor proficiency as I know what the reasons and problems are. The fact that students throw away the opportunities to practise may be one of them. [...] It is really a problem of attitude and initiative. There are already enough resources and opportunities provided to help students improve their English and boost their standards. The key step that students have to take is to use the opportunities. (*SCMP*, 15 September 2007)
>
> Martina Ngai
>
> Tseng Kwan O

And finally, other aspects of student learning at university including academic and extracurricular programmes, faculty members and administrative staff should also be supportive of the stated policy to improve the English of Hong Kong university students.

7.4 What bank employers can do: lessons from the interviews

In my interviews with the 16 informants, many of them say that they are very busy and do not have the time to pursue language training. But it is also true that the banks fail to provide adequate language training despite the general opinion by business decision makers and by extension, employers that graduate employees are not sufficiently proficient in English. A public opinion survey on education conducted by the *South China Morning Post* and TNS in November 2006 found that business decision makers/opinion leaders in Hong Kong responded unfavourably to a question on local university graduates' English ability.

The question asked was "How confident are you that Hong Kong's university graduates possess sufficient and relevant skills for meeting the needs of society in the following areas?" For the item on English, only 11 percent of the respondents were confident and zero percent were extremely confident while 44 percent were not confident and not confident at all; the same percentage of 44 percent were fairly confident. Full details of this survey are given in Appendix 15.

In the summary of findings from my study in section 7.1.3, it has been shown that the four banks do the following things: provide no English training at all to their staff (the case of SD Bank); provide a limited range of English training for their staff which is given on an optional basis (the case of HD Bank); provide mandatory English training of very short duration to some staff (the case of MB Bank); provide limited English training on an optional basis to other staff (the case of MB Bank); and provide some form of English training to designated staff (the case of AB Bank). In the case of AB Bank, it was subsequently revealed that proposals were under way to offer a short course in Business English to all interested staff. Therefore, in these four banks, those employees who feel they do have a need for language training and who would like to have it, **do not get it**. Two such employees, SD6 and HD1, are taking or have taken their own initiatives. The former is taking a writing course outside office hours while the latter tried to take an oral English course outside but dropped out of it because she says the course was too basic for her needs.

It is my view that the value of workplace language training programmes can contribute directly to a positive economic impact in the workplace, both for the employees who have improved their English language abilities, job satisfaction and career potential, as well as for employers through productivity improvements, cost reduction or increased revenues. These four banks should provide more systematic English training on a mandatory basis for all the staff who have been identified as needing it. The training should be made mandatory because if it is left as something optional, few members of staff are likely to sign up given the heavy work schedules that most bank employees in Hong Kong face. The small and medium-sized banks that do not run their own training programmes should adopt a more proactive attitude towards sending their employees to outside course providers who can play a key role by utilising approaches that will ensure delivery of quality workplace programmes. It signifies a very short-term approach if banks and other organisations complain endlessly about the poor language skills of their staff, yet take no steps towards rectifying this problem. Only through the willingness and commitment of business organisations and employers to invest in the upgrading of the English skills of their employees, and acting in concert with the government and educational institutions in Hong Kong, will the present less than satisfactory English standards of university graduates be gradually improved.

At the same time, I would also like to propose that banks offer a course in Cantonese or Putonghua to foreign, non-Chinese speaking employees. This view is supported by a survey carried out by Bolton and Luke (1999), which shows the attitudes of Hong Kong people towards foreigners. The percentage of those who agreed and strongly agreed that "all foreigners living in Hong Kong should learn Chinese" was almost 63 percent. (p.172). When asked to respond to the question, "All foreigners living in Hong Kong should learn about Chinese culture and the Chinese way of life," those who agreed and strongly agreed were almost 74 percent. (p. 173)

These interesting findings demonstrate that it would greatly improve intercultural understanding and appreciation of other people's cultures if the learning of languages were not just one-way but two-way. To quote the former President of Lingnan University again, he said that his students had asked him why they had to learn good English while foreigners living in Hong Kong did not have to acquire Chinese skills. The Professor's answer to his students was that it is because English is an international language and economic success depends on Hong Kong's role as an intermediary between China and the rest of the world. It is not about "being a slave to foreigners or patriotism" (Nora Tong, *SCMP,* 15 August 2007). While the Professor gave the right answer to his students, I believe that organisations that employ both local as well as expatriate staff should seriously consider the above approach proposed by me, which I believe would be welcome by both Hong Kong **and** foreign employees in the Hong Kong workplace.

7.5 Summary

This chapter began with a discussion, first, of the 16 informants' views about the English language courses they attended at university and, then, of their English training at the bank – whether it is provided, and what interest they have in such training. My findings in these two areas are summarised at the end of all the interviews.

Then, after putting forward some considerations on training in the workplace, given the unprecedented changes in the workplace in recent years, I briefly touched upon such important issues as the importance of language, literacy, numeracy, skill development and vocational reform and perceptions of training in general. I then discussed the scope and role workplace education, the Hong Kong government's policies and programmes and the possible methods or approaches for workplace education and training in various sectors. I also discussed briefly the contributions of other researchers who have dealt with these topics hitherto.

I then considered, in some detail, the five-university project on *Teaching English to Meet the Needs of Business Education in Hong Kong.* Finally, I presented my own views: first, on what universities can do to improve English standards and, secondly, what banks themselves (in their capacity as employers) can (and should) do in the matter of improving the English skills of their employees.

In the next and final chapter, I present the overall conclusions of my study.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 The aims of the study

This, the final chapter, presents the overall conclusions of my study. I shall begin by restating the primary aim of this study. It is to explore the use of English in four banks in Hong Kong by examining how new graduate employees use English to carry out their work. It investigates which communicative tasks are carried out in English by these employees and which tasks are carried out in Cantonese. It further analyses the types of difficulties they have in using English and the solutions they adopt to overcome them. The study also investigates the differences in proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees and the extent to which these differences in language use are a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures. Two illustrations drawn from one bank – a senior mangers' meeting and the discourses of a British Head of Department on English at the bank – explore how banks have a specific type of corporate culture and banking Discourse. The study further examines what type of English language training these employees received at university and their views on them. In the area of English training in the workplace, the study aims to find out whether banks provide English training to their employees, whether employees are interested in receiving such training and other details related to such training.

8.2 The research questions

The five research questions in this study are:

1) What communicative tasks do the employees perform in English and what communicative tasks do they perform in Chinese?

2) What difficulties do the employees encounter in carrying out these tasks in English and what solutions do they adopt for overcoming these difficulties?

3) What differences are there in the proficiency and use of a range of English by different levels of employees in the four banks, and to what extent are these differences in language use a result of the different types of banks and their corporate cultures?

4) What types of English language courses did the employees take at university and what are their views on improving the effectiveness of university English courses?

5) Are the employees getting English language training at the bank, what type of English training are they interested in and what is the duration that they think is needed for such training?

8.3 Summary of the main findings of the study

Here, I shall sum up the findings from my study as they have been presented in the previous three chapters of this thesis. The informants perform numerous and varied tasks in their respective positions. Classifying them broadly, four informants are in marketing or selling retail banking products and services, three are in corporate communication, four are in the area of computer and information technology and Management Information Systems, two are in credit research and one each in secretarial support, investment analysis and human resources.

The findings on research question #1 show that:

1a) There is an interesting and diverse use of English at work. Seven (SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, HD3 and HD4) of the 16 employees use English primarily for reading and writing while one (HD2) uses English only for writing. However, eight (SD6, HD1, MB1, MB2, MB3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) use English in all the four linguistic areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Further analysis of the use of English for speaking and listening by the eight staff members reveals the following insights: SD6 provides IT support and uses English for oral communication with vendors from Australia and the USA about twice a year. HD1 is an investment analyst and uses English for discussions with English-speaking counter parties from other investment houses and for business lunches where social English is used. All the four employees of MB Bank, and in particular, MB1 and MB2, are required to speak English because the bank is a branch of a multinational bank and it has many international members of staff, particularly at the more senior positions. Both AB1 and AB2 work in the Corporate Communications Department and they report to a British Head of Department. In addition, AB2 reports directly to the Bank's CEO who is a non-Chinese. Thus, in all the eight cases where English is used for oral communication, it is with English-speaking colleagues and associates.

1b) As regards the use of Chinese at work, all 16 informants without exception use it for their speaking and listening tasks, but only one (HD4) uses it in all the four linguistic areas. Seven informants' (SD2, SD3, SD4, SD5, SD6, HD1, and MB3) use of Chinese is only restricted to speaking and listening tasks, they and do not read or write in Chinese. However, seven informants (SD1, HD3, HD4, MB1, MB4, AB1, and AB2) also read in Chinese, with most of them reading Chinese newspapers for work. Five informants (HD2, HD4, MB2, AB1 and AB2) also do some writing in Chinese while six (HD2, HD3, HD4, MB1, AB1 and AB2) do translations from English to Chinese or vice versa. Basically, the significant fact that emerges from the data is that almost all oral communication is in Chinese – except when communicating with non-Chinese people – and all written communication, both internal and external, is in English.

The findings on research question #2 reveal that:

2a) In the matter of difficulties stemming from **language demands,** five informants (SD1, SD4, SD5, HD3 and HD4) report that they have no English language difficulty, while another (SD2) reports having had initial difficulty in writing but states that this is no longer the case. Further analysis reveals that some informants do not express any difficulty because they can either pass their writing on to their supervisors to be checked for errors and corrected (as in the case of HD3 and HD4), or they have a standard format or template that they use (as in the case of SD5).

2b) Of the remaining 10 informants who report, or are identified as, having some difficulty stemming from the English language demand, six (SD3, SD6, HD2, MB4, AB1 and AB2) have difficulty in writing memos, proposals or reports and taking notes, while the other four (HD1, MB1, MB2 and MB3) have difficulty in oral communication. Three from this latter group (HD1, MB2 and MB3) report not being familiar with social English. The need to give quick and accurate verbal responses in English is also cited as a difficulty by two of them (MB1 and MB2), who are actually the most competent users of English among the 16 informants in this study. The most common solution for their writing difficulties is to pass their writing to their supervisors for correction (as is done by SD3, HD2, AB1 and AB2). One such supervisor (that of HD4), in turn passes it on to an external copywriter for further correction and improvement of the language. Only two informants (SD6 and HD1) try to solve their language difficulty by taking a course after office hours – a writing course for SD6 and a speaking course for HD1. But HD1 discontinued taking the course because it was too basic to be helpful to her. The remaining eight informants (SD3, HD2, MB1, MB2, MB3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) are not doing anything about it.

The findings on research question #3 reveal that:

3a) The four banks represent different types of banks with different corporate cultures. SD Bank and HD Bank are representative of the small and medium local banks. They recruit largely from the local universities. Their employees largely deal with local customers and service their banking needs. All the 10 informants report to a Chinese supervisor and almost all the oral communication is carried out in Cantonese. The one exception is HD1 who does investment analysis and has some opportunities to speak in English to foreign counter parties and investment analysts from global investment houses. This need to use social English in addition to financial English causes some difficulty for her. The other informants generally do not have any need to use English beyond some routine and predictable patterns of usage in written form, and therefore do not feel unduly challenged by their average proficiency (as rated by themselves and as evident in their interview transcripts) in English.

3b) In contrast, MB Bank is a subsidiary of an American bank and its recruitment practices reflect a bank with multinational operations. The two management trainees (MB1 and MB2) interviewed are university graduates from the US and the UK respectively. They are both being trained to perform the more sophisticated international operations of banking and finance. They deal with both local and international colleagues and report to English-speaking supervisors. They operate in an English-speaking environment a great deal of the time at work, and interact with both local and international colleagues. Both of them report to English-speaking supervisors. Both of them are required to carry out research, write analytical reports and make presentations in English at a much higher level of skill than that required for routine form filling. The other two employees (MB3 and MB4) work in the back office and are graduates from local universities. Both of them express that the speaking demands present some challenge to them because they need to be able to perform quickly and spontaneously in an appropriate manner. The other two informants (MB3 and MB4) work in the back office and are graduates of local universities. The one (MB3) who works in computer security also reports to an English-speaking supervisor but the language is mostly technical, while the fourth informant (MB4) works in the marketing of retail products with Chinese colleagues and reports to a Chinese supervisor.

3c) AB Bank is an unusual hybrid comprising both the "local" and "international" streams in banking in Hong Kong. Its branch network is confined to Hong Kong but it is foreign-owned, has a foreign CEO and an international management team. The two informants (AB1 and AB2) have both local and foreign degrees. They report to a British Head of Department. Both of them use Chinese when dealing with local colleagues and English when communicating with the Head of Department – and with the Bank's CEO, as in the case of AB2. Their written work in English is checked and edited by their Head of Department. The two illustrations drawn from AB Bank further demonstrate the impact of corporate culture on discourse practices at two levels of bank management. We observe how this bank uses English to conduct its meetings at the senior management level, and the role played by a British Head of Department in solving some of the English language difficulties in such a hybrid bank.

The findings on research question #4 reveal that:

4) The English courses provided at the various universities in Hong Kong were generally insufficient in terms of their duration and the range of skills taught. Almost all those who studied at local universities had only one semester or one year (two semesters) of English courses. This translates into a range of forty to eighty hours of English lessons. Only one employee (MB4) reports having English in all three years of university education. However, from her description of the English courses she took, they may actually be business studies courses requiring her to write analytical and recommendation reports of business cases. Almost all the informants also report having English lessons only in their first year, with no further lessons in their second or third years. Five informants (SD2, SD3, SD4, HD2 and MB3) express the view that English should be taught in all three years of university education because they need more hours of English training. In terms of what should be taught, two informants (SD4 and SD5) feel that university English courses should teach only Business English to prepare students for the workplace, and one informant (SD3) would like the university to place greater emphasis on Business English and less emphasis on academic English. In contrast, one informant (HD4) categorically states that English courses at university should not teach workplace English while three informants (SD2, HD2 and MB3) would like the university to teach both academic and business English. Two informants (HD1 and MB2) describe the lack of oral English training, particularly in social and colloquial English, at both the secondary and university levels in Hong Kong.

The findings on research question #5 reveal that:

5a) The four banks do not provide adequate English training to their employees. SD Bank does not provide English language training and none of the six informants had been sent on any English course. However, in terms of employee interest in English courses, two of the informants (SD1 and SD3) verbally express a strong interest during the interview to receive English training. Another informant (SD6) is taking a writing course for electronic data processing professionals at his own expense outside of office hours. On the other hand, HD Bank offers an English course in business writing. However, only one informant (HD1) has taken this course but it was not to her satisfaction as she wants to improve her oral English skills for social interactions. As a result, she did not complete the course. The other three informants (HD2, HD3 and HD4) have not taken the course as it is offered on an optional basis. The situation in MB Bank shows that the two management trainees (MB1 and MB2) are required to take a two-day course on making presentations. One of them (MB1) feels that it is too long while the other one (MB2) feels that it is too short. There is also a different English course offered to other employees on an optional basis, but both the other two informants (MB3 and MB4) have not taken it. The situation in AB Bank is also different from that of the other three banks. In AB Bank, there is an English course offered to employees without university qualifications, but this is not open to AB1 and AB2 who are both university graduates. I subsequently learnt that the Bank was planning to offer a 24-hour Business English course which would be taught by an external course provider and which would be open to all interested staff.

5b) The questions on what kinds of English courses they are interested in, and the duration that they think is needed for these courses drew a varied response from the informants. Nine of the informants (SD2, SD3, SD5, SD6, HD2, HD3, MB4, AB1 and AB2) indicate interest in, broadly speaking, what may be termed *business or workplace writing*. This includes practical writing, effective writing, report writing, memo writing, writing minutes, bank documents, and business letters. This means that in all, nine or 56 percent of the informants are interested in improving their English writing skills. On the other hand, 12 informants (SD2, SD4, SD6, HD1, HD2, HD3, HD4, MB1, MB2, MB4, AB1 and AB2) express interest in oral English courses such as giving presentations, public speaking, oral communication, business conversations and English for everyday use. Of these 12 informants, two (MB2 and AB1) are also interested in learning negotiation skills and AB1 is also interested in a course on meetings. In total, therefore, 12 informants (75 percent) express interest in taking oral English courses of one type or another although many of them also want to improve their writing skills as indicated above. In contrast to these informants with an interest in English training, two informants (SD1 and MB3) indicate no training interest of any kind in the questionnaire, although I have earlier pointed out that SD1 verbally expressed her interest in English training during the interview.

5c) The informants are also asked to indicate the length of time they think is needed for the course(s) they are interested in taking. At the two extreme ends of the answers received, one informant (MB4) is willing to spend just half-a-day on presentation skills while another (HD1) is willing to spend one to two years on oral English for daily use. In general, however, it is possible to categorise their answers into different lengths of time: (i) upto 8 hours, (ii) 9 to 16 hours, (iii) 17 to 40 hours, and (iv) 41 to 60 hours. It should be pointed out that some informants fall into more than one time range because they themselves give different lengths of time they are willing to spend on different courses.

(i) Five informants (SD4, HD2, MB1, MB4 and AB2) wish to spend only up to 8 hours on presentation skills, public speaking and business writing.

(ii) Four informants (HD3, HD4, MB4 and AB2) wish to spend between 9 and 16 hours on effective writing, presentation skills, oral communication, speaking and writing skills, report and memo writing.

(iii) Five informants (SD2, SD3, SD6, MB2 and AB1) wish to spend between 17 and 40 hours on practical writing, presentation skills, writing business letters and reports, speaking skills, business conversations, negotiation skills, and how to conduct meetings.

(iv) Three informants (SD5, SD6 and HD1) wish to spend between 41 and 80 hours on report writing, writing skills, and oral English for daily use. We note that HD1 falls into a category of her own with a stated range of 50 to 200 hours.

8.4 A critique of the study and its methods

8.4.1 Minuses ...

This study remains a modest one because of the limited access to the sites of investigation, which I have detailed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6. I had originally intended to first get a more general picture of the work that the informants do in the bank to better understand the difficulties they experience in using English to carry out their tasks. For this purpose, I would have liked to study the products of their writing in the workplace, as well as observe the way they use oral English to derive more specific ideas about their English language needs. I would then have seen what kind of training was currently being provided to these employees, and whether this training matched their needs.

I had supposed that during my interaction with and observation of the informants and through an examination of their written products, I might be able to develop specific ideas on English courses for banking employees. In order to achieve this, however, I needed to make more visits to the banks, not just one interview with these employees. Furthermore, I needed to be given access to some of their documents. I had also intended to focus on the one bank which initially provided freer access to me, and to use the Corporate Communications Department in this bank to record, describe, interpret and explain its members' discourse as a means of opening a window on their professional assumptions and work practices. But these plans remained on the drawing board because further entry into the banks was denied. If the banks had understood that they had something to gain in the long run from this study, more might perhaps have been achieved for both the researcher and the research subjects.

However, I only managed to get one foot inside the banks. As a result, I am not able to come up with a specific plan for the English training of banking personnel. With the understanding gained from this study, I am able to put forward some ideas for training at the macro-level, but not at the micro-level. In the final analysis, however, I do not believe that any solution to the problem of poor English skills of bank employees – or employees in any other sector too, for that matter – can be offered in a piecemeal fashion or at the micro-level. The complex nature of the problem demands that the solution be found essentially at the macro-level, entailing contributions and inputs from not just English courses but also from the various stages of schooling, educational institutions and employers. It is only when this multi-pronged approach is in place that there would be, I believe, a bigger role for researchers and language practitioners to play and offer solutions at the micro-level.

8.4.2 ... and pluses (or the significance of this study)

However, I have been able to make maximum use of my interviews with the 16 employees in these four banks and with the Head of Department in one bank for detailed analysis. I believe I have presented the interview data very clearly and systematically, so that a rich, interesting and valuable canvas has been painted of the work of my informants. Through my informants' narratives, they have told me how they carry out their daily work. Because these are "stories" of their work routines, they may be considered as long-term narratives with significance beyond this study. I believe that as a result of this study, researchers and other outsiders would gain a better understanding of the nature of the work performed by bank employees in different departments of different sized banks with different corporate cultures.

Furthermore, the interview transcripts constitute real and living language spoken by my bank informants. Given the difficulty of acquiring spoken English language data in naturally occurring contexts from Hong Kong subjects who do not normally speak in English, this data is also valuable as a means of putting on record the actual use of oral English by Hong Kong graduate bank employees and as a demonstration of their oral English standards.

It is hoped that my study, despite its limitations, will make a contribution to providing a new perspective from which to approach existing research on language and social interaction and its application to education and policy making. It is also hoped that this study would be a precursor of other future studies by other researchers who would be given freer access to banks so that an even greater understanding of their work is gained and effective corrective measures are implemented for the benefit of the banking industry, and ultimately, for Hong Kong.

8.5 Implications for practice and further research

Future practice capable of achieving better results for Hong Kong's workforce can only take place with further studies of language use in the workplace. As such, I believe that there is a need for greater collaboration between researchers from the academy and employers, practitioners and trainers in the workplace, what may be termed as partnership research, with gains for all parties concerned. Here I would like to **extend** the notion of partnership research as put forward by Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2001) to include not just researchers from multidisciplinary backgrounds working together and using a variety of methodological approaches in their study, but more significantly, to a **wider alliance and a truly collaborative effort** of such researchers from the academy, in partnership with employers, practitioners and language trainers from the workplace.

Given that this study and other past studies (Evans and Green, 2001) have tended to show a broad sweep of the use of English and Chinese for communication in the Hong Kong workplace, I feel that there is a need for more studies in the future to focus more specifically on individuals and their language use at work in a much more specific and detailed way. This kind of in-depth or intensive study, rather than an extensive one with broad-brush strokes, may yield much valuable data, which may offer researchers, educators and the business community a better insight into the language needs of Hong Kong's workforce. For a start, studies could be carried out with access given to documents which are not confidential. These could be for example, the banks' annual reports, press releases, promotional and marketing materials, and published research reports by certain departments in the banks. Such studies would be along the lines of the study carried out by Swales and Rogers (1995) of corporate mission statements. After a period of collaborative research, it is hoped that banks would be more willing to allow greater access to other areas of work that they do, and allow observation of certain activities and work practices in departments such as the corporate communications department or the training department, so that a study of banking discourses (in both the big "D" and the small "d" ways) could be conducted. With a greater understanding of banking discourses, it would be possible for researchers, educators and language trainers to design appropriate training programmes to help employees reach higher levels of performance in language or in other aspects of their work. With a greater understanding of banking discourses, it would also be possible at a higher level, to direct the company's senior management towards practices that are more productive or cost-effective, for example.

As Sarangi and Roberts (1999) put it:

> ... we, as analysts, need to immerse ourselves in specific workplace contexts. And shedding light on specific and local practice is equally important if we want to go beyond understanding and explaining to contributing to change. We believe that discourse analytic and sociolinguistic studies of workplace communication should be grounded in an ethics of practical relevance. (p. 2)

It remains to be seen whether banks and other employers in the Hong Kong workplace are farsighted enough to allow such change to take place in the years and decades to come.

Appendix 1

Table 2.2: Hong Kong school enrolment at the secondary level (by medium of instruction), 1958-1983

	ACSS*		CMS*				
					Total	Total	%
Year	School	Student	School	Student	school	student	(CMS)
1958	74	25,863	89	21,210	163	47,073	**45**
1960	112	55,510	95	27,778	207	83,288	33
1961	107	53,000	91	31,000	198	84,000	37
1962	125	66,600	102	37,500	227	104,100	36
1963	147	81,163	106	41,079	253	122,242	34
1964	148	94,625	105	44,349	253	138,974	32
1965	169	109,123	107	45,334	276	154,457	29
1966	188	124,449	117	48,501	305	172,950	28
1967	187	134,347	117	46,295	304	180,642	26
1968	223	149,921	123	50,596	346	200,517	25
1969	230	157,881	120	50,638	350	208,519	24
1970	229	172,569	114	48,484	343	221,053	22
1971	233	184,651	108	51,142	341	235,793	22
1972	232	208,118	102	55,027	334	263,145	21
1973	239	223,254	96	57,321	335	280,575	20
1974	250	253,000	101	63,449	351	316,449	20
1975	263	273,418	102	64,119	365	337,537	19
1976	283	303,413	104	65,774	387	369,187	18
1977	302	331,036	103	63,485	405	394,521	16
1978	330	375,470	104	58,548	434	434,018	14
1979	333	378,570	97	52,396	430	430,966	12
1980	321	386,531	87	48,105	408	434,636	11
1981	326	385,543	78	43,587	404	429,130	10
1982	346	383,900	72	40,742	418	424,642	10
1983	351	380,203	68	38,671	419	418,874	**9**

(So, 1987, p. 250)

**ACSS – Anglo-Chinese secondary schools*

CMS – Chinese middle schools

Appendix 2

Table 2.4: 2004 HKALE Performance of candidates in Use of English (AS level)

	Day School Candidates							
Subject (Level)	**No. sat**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**UNCL**
Use of English (AS level)	**Total (27 392)**	214	882	3 141	7 893	9 670	3 817	1 775
	%	0.8	3.2	11.5	28.8	35.3	13.9	6.5

* Figures calculated from HKEAA statistics

Appendix 3

South China Morning Post 16 July 2005

Level of English at CUHK 'is very worrying'

Students entering university with a vocabulary of less than 3,000 words – other institutions expected to be just as bad

Katherine Forestier

Chinese University students know fewer than 3,000 English words, which is "woefully inadequate" for academic study, according to a report.

The results of the survey of 155 first-year undergraduates' English vocabulary were revealed at the *South China Morning Post's* Teachers' Forum last Saturday.

Research supervisor Arthur McNeill, director of CUHK's English Language Teaching Unit, said the results were "very worrying" and cited international research, including a 1989 study by Professor Batia Laufer of the Department of English Language at the University of Haifa in Israel, that indicated about 5,000 English words were required to guarantee comprehension of university reading material.

"I am alarmed to find that students are entering university knowing fewer than 5,000 words," he said. He expected similar results in other universities as CUHK students had comparatively high use of English scores in Form Seven.

"This is a sad result and woefully inadequate. The vocabulary goals need to be much higher," he said, adding that the average native English-speaking student was conservatively estimated to know at least 20,000 words.

With fewer than 3,000 words, students would have difficulty using English for academic study. While they could still get their degrees by developing coping strategies for the words they did not know, their limited vocabulary would hinder more fundamental understanding of their subject.

To read fluently, students needed to know 95 per cent of the words used in a text, Dr McNeill said.

He urged teachers to help students learn more vocabulary. He estimated that Hong Kong students learned an average of just 300 new words a year – one tenth of the number learned by native English speaking students.

Teachers should be bolder in the texts they used. "Texts are like nutrition: the food of language learning. If you give students pizza every day they might be happy but they know it isn't a balanced diet," Dr McNeill said.

Students' lack of spoken English was also a problem when they entered university. "They are not understanding familiar words when they hear them. They need an enormous expansion of vocabulary, and more sentence-level grammar," he said.

The survey, conducted by Amy Chui Sze-yan using Nation's (2001) Levels Test, found while most students knew most of the words at the 2,000 most-frequently-used-words level, on average they knew fewer than half at the 3,000 level and fewer than a third at 5,000.

"Their performance at the 10,000 level was particularly disappointing, with typical average scores of 8 per cent," Dr McNeill said.

"Students who know fewer than 3,000 words can be expected to find many of their academic texts difficult to understand. At any rate, their reading speed is bound to be curtailed if they encounter many unfamiliar words," he said.

Students in the Early Admission Scheme did better. They knew almost half the words at the 5,000 level. Dr McNeill said this was probably due to their extensive reading.

Chris Wardlaw, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, who attended the forum, said the study confirmed the need for "higher expectations, better teaching and learning and more assessment of progress".

GOOD NEWS FOR TEACHERS' TRAINING

Teachers are to get training in how to use newspaper texts to enhance their students' English skills in a new project funded by the Quality Education Fund.

Chinese University of Hong Kong's English Language Teaching Unit is to launch a web-based language-awareness learning package for English teachers, accessible from next month to teachers on the *South China Morning Post* and Hong Kong Education City websites.

Using a range of articles from the *SCMP*, the package will explain the different strategies teachers can employ using the texts, provide examples for them to explore, and challenge them to use articles for their own lessons.

A pilot group of teachers will be set up in the early stages of the one-year $440,000 project to give feedback. Later on, researchers will monitor the progress of another group using newspaper texts.

Jose Lai Chan Sau-hing, lead investigator, unveiled the project at last week's *SCMP* teachers' forum.

She said: "The main goal is to enhance teachers' language awareness and nurture their skills and competence in developing similar activities for their students.

"Newspapers offer a whole range of texts and are current. In terms of motivation they engage learners."
Katherine Forestier

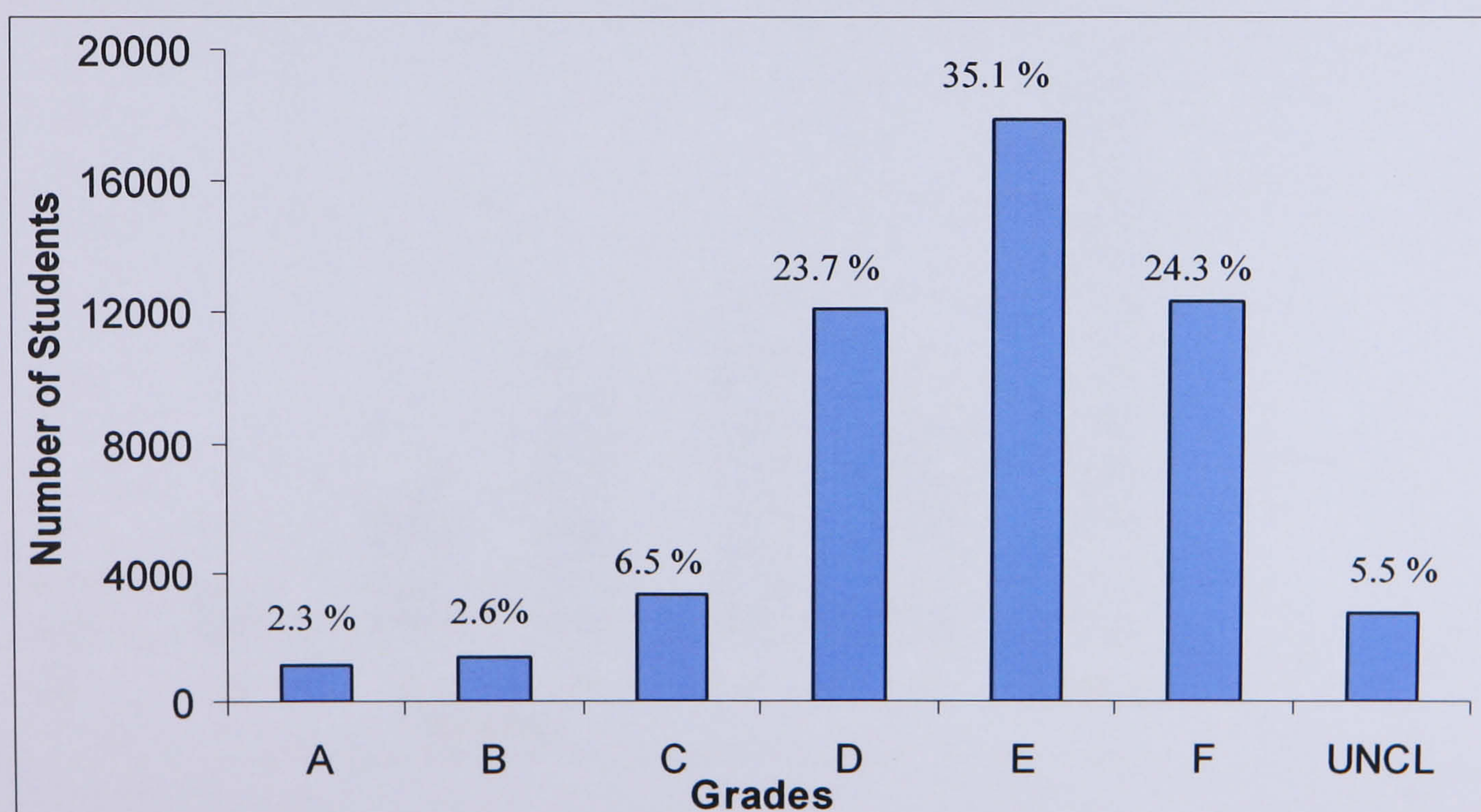
Appendix 4

Table 2.7: 2004 HKCEE performance of candidates in English language (Syllabus B)

Day School Candidates								
Subject (Level)	**No. sat**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**UNCL**
English Language (Syllabus B)	**Total (50 978)**	1 154	1 346	3 323	12 091	17 896	12 383	2 785
	%	2.3	2.6	6.5	23.7	35.1	24.3	5.5

Figures calculated from HKEAA statistics

Figure 2.2: 2004 HKCEE Performance of Day school candidates in English language (Syllabus B)



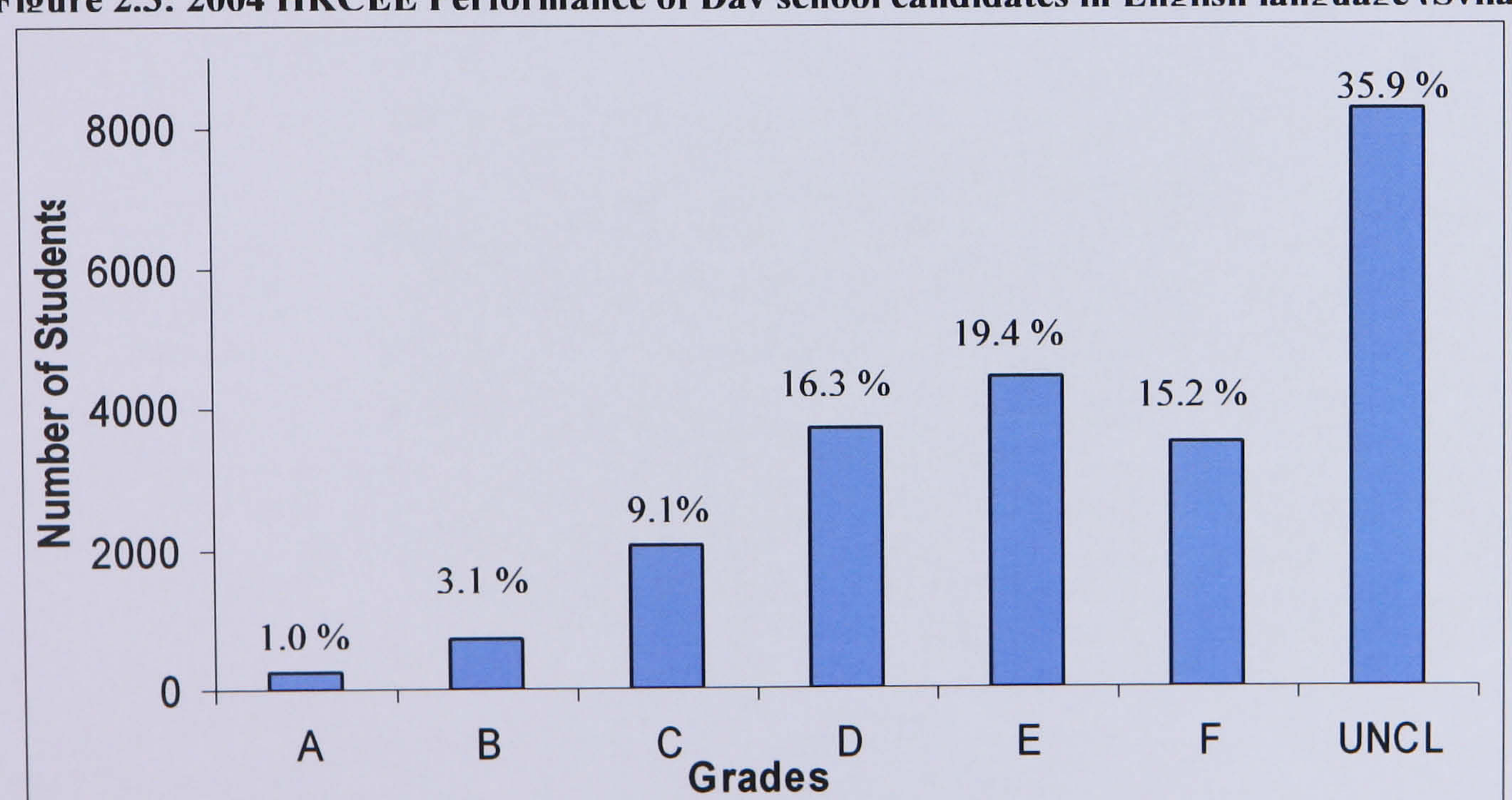
Appendix 5

Table 2.8: 2004 HKCEE performance of candidates in English language (Syllabus A)

	Day School Candidates							
Subject (Level)	**No. sat**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**UNCL**
English Language (Syllabus A)	**Total (22 933)**	240	705	2 073	3 740	4 453	3 496	8 226
	%	1	3.1	9.1	16.3	19.4	15.2	35.9

Figures calculated from HKEAA statistics

Figure 2.3: 2004 HKCEE Performance of Day school candidates in English language (Syllabus A)



Appendix 6

South China Morning Post 14 February 2005

Hong Kong needs bilingual system for schools

I refer to the consultation paper on the medium of instruction for secondary schools detailing the proposed mechanism for them to switch between English (EMI) and Chinese (CMI). Has this proposal become the latest policy blunder of the Tung administration?

Besides, does this classification exercise fit the global trend in the 21st century?

Many "international" Hongkongers would agree that the government has been moving towards "political correctness" since the handover. It might intend to introduce the second round of "language reunification" after the one six years ago, just as a railwayman switches points. I am not saying mother-tongue education is wrong because it is "politically correct". Instead, I am asking whether a strict dividing line between two mediums of instruction is an up-to-date education policy for Hong Kong, which aspires to be a world-class city.

Hong Kong is no longer a colony, but English still shares 50 per cent of the cake here, not to mention intensified globalisation. For Hong Kong people, using English today is not a symbol of loyalty to Her Majesty, but a sign of being a global citizen.

Regarding the chief executive's aspiration to put Hong Kong atop the list of cosmopolitan cities, would we be committing suicide by tightening the present policy? Our advanced English standard or bilingual ability to a large extent explains why Hong Kong can be Asia's hub. Given complaints about the deteriorating English of the younger generations and a constantly decreasing English pass rate since the mandatory introduction of mother-tongue teaching in hundreds of secondary schools, another switch is likely to be more detrimental to Hong Kong's international status, tertiary education and even socially in the long term. Hong Kong would risk becoming just another city in China. By then, "Who needs Hong Kong?" will be a good question.

True, the government promised sufficient support for the teaching of English in CMI schools. Do we see any positive effects in the past couple of years on students in CMI schools other than their performing a bit better in Chinese subjects? What we may lose is our ability to communicate academically with the international community. On the other hand, it is definitely not a simple task replacing the traditional prestigious EMI schools with the newly nurtured CMI schools. This would further divide schools. And would the government be shamefaced if it became known that some mainland schools are developing EMI education?

To foster a pool of intellectuals for the 21st century, the government is urged to abolish this obsolete classification exercise and formulate a policy of bilingual education. An up-to-date policy for Hong Kong is BMI (bilingual medium of instruction), with more flexibility granted to individual schools according to students' and parents' desires. I suggest all schools teach every subject bilingually and all textbooks and public exam papers present bilingual text on the same page. To achieve this "50-English 50-Chinese" policy, students may be required to answer half of exam questions in English and half in Chinese. This is a win-win game for all in this globalising century.
K. M. MAK, Junk Bay

Appendix 7

June 14, 1999

Mr....
Human Resources Manager
Bank XXX
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

I am Senior English Language Instructor in the Language Centre, Hong Kong Baptist University. I am carrying out a research project funded by my University to find out what employers in the financial sector of Hong Kong think about the English language skills of recent university graduates.

The study will concentrate on banks, where English language skills are very important, and the primary aim of the study is to get feedback from important senior managers such as yourself about how new graduate employees are coping with the English language demands in the workplace.

Your views will be incorporated into my study and will eventually lead to changes in the way that students are taught English in universities in Hong Kong.

I will conduct the study along with one student assistant visiting your offices for two days to "observe" (using detached observation as a research methodology) the way your staff uses English.

The next stage of the study will involve getting your staff to fill out a questionnaire to find out what kinds of English language skills are used frequently on the job; to what extent their English course at university is helping them in their present day-to-day work; and your staff's views on how a different English programme at university might have better prepared them for the English language demands in the workplace.

I would also like to interview the Human Resources Manager and the Training Officer at each bank to find out what English language skills are expected of new graduate entrants, what deficiencies have been found, and what kind of training is given to the new entrants to overcome these deficiencies.

My study aims to cover at least 12 banks in Hong Kong. I know that you are personally strongly committed to developing good English language skills among your members of staff. I would really appreciate it if you were to extend your co-operation to this study, which would **help your bank as well as the banking sector of Hong Kong.**

I would be very happy to sign a letter of confidentiality if necessary to reassure you that the findings of this study will not be made public without your prior permission.

I attach a draft copy of the questionnaire that will be given out to the bank employees. As you can see from this questionnaire, the study focuses on investigating their English language needs in their day-to-day tasks.

If you have any queries on this matter, I would be very happy to answer them. I may be contacted by telephone at: **2339-7040** or by fax at: 2339-7590. In case you need it, my e-mail is: **kschew@hkbu.edu.hk.**

I will be calling you to find out whether you are kind enough to co-operate with this worthwhile study which will help your bank as well as Hong Kong.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Chew Kheng Suan (Ms)
Senior Language Instructor
Language Centre
Hong Kong Baptist University
Hong Kong

Appendix 8

HongkongBank

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited
Area Management Office Hong Kong, Human Resources Department:
21/F Tower 1, The Gateway, 25 Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Ref:

Ms Chew Kheng Suan
Senior Language Instructor
Language Centre
Hong Kong Baptist University
224 Waterloo Road
Kowloon

17 June 1999

Dear Ms Chew

Re: **Study of Bank Employees English Language Needs**

Thank you for your letter to our Head of Human Resources, Mr K C Koo, dated 15 June 1999. We appreciate your interest in HongkongBank.

Over the years, we have cherished the opportunities to help people get to know us better. Recently, however, the requests to learn more about the Bank have increased dramatically. We wish that we could accommodate each group, but -- in view of limited resources -- we have had to review our strategy.

In an attempt to be fair to all those who would like to interview us, we have implemented -reluctantly, 1 might add -- a "quota" system. In this system, each request is categorized, unfortunately for your type of organisation, the quota for this period already has been reached. As a result, we have to decline your request.

As 1 have mentioned, we value the opportunities to help people get to know us better. I apologise that we are unable to provide an opportunity for you at this time. We wish you every success in your project.

Yours sincerely

Ignatius Lee
Manager Human Resources & Quality Management
Human Resources Department
Area Management Office Hong Kong

GPO Box 64, Hong Kong
Telephone: 2629 7171 Telex: 73205 HSBC iix Telegrams: Hongbank Hongkong
Facsimile: (852) 2956 2157
Member HSBC Group

Appendix 9

THE BANK OF EAST ASIA, LIMITED

314-324 Hennessy Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong Telephone: 2835 3200

22nd June, 1999

Ms. Chew Kheng Suan (M.E.D.)
Senior Language Instructor,
Language Centre,
Hong Kong Baptist University,
224 Waterloo Road,
Kowloon,
Hong Kong.

Dear Ms. Chew,

Thank you for your facsimile and letter of 15th June, 1999 regarding the study of bank employees English language needs.

It is thoughtful of you to invite The Bank of East Asia to participate in this worthwhile project. However, we regret that it will not be possible for us to accept your kind invitation as our resources are currently tied up with other business commitments. We are sorry not to be able to provide a more positive response, but we trust you will understand.

May we take this opportunity to wish you and all concerned every success with the study.

Yours sincerely,
For and on behalf of
THE BANK OF EAST ASIA, LTD.

H.Y. Wu (Ms.)
General Manager
Head of Human Resources

HYW/kl

Appendix 10

<u>Personel Department, 03:43 AM 6/16/99, Study of Bank Employees English</u>

Reply-To: "Personel Department" <hwlb019@ibm.net>
X-PH: V4.4@power42t
From: "Personel Department" <wlpersol@winglungbank.com. hk>
To: <kschew@hkbu.edu.hk>
Subject: Study of Bank Employees English Language Needs
Date: Wed, 16 Jun 1999 03:43:55 +0800
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook Express 4.72.3110.5
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V4.72.3110.3

16 June 1999

Ms Chew Kheng Suan
Senior Language Instructor
Language Centre
Hong Kong Baptist University

Dear Ms Chew,

Regarding your research project about studying of bank employees' English language needs, we are regret to inform you that we are not going to participate in your study due to our bank's policy.

We wish you a fruitful project.

Yours faithfully,

Personnel Department
Wing Lung Bank Ltd.

Printed for Chew Kheng Suan <kschew@hkbu.edu.hk>

Appendix 11

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me how long you've been with XX Bank?

2. What is your position here, and what work do you do?

3. Several other questions to find out the details of the work that the informant does.

4. Do you use English or Chinese for this work? What do you use English for? What do you use Chinese for?

5. Several other questions to determine the language used by the informant for various jobs.

6. Do you have any difficulties in using English to do XX work?

7. How do you solve these difficulties?

8. Does your supervisor check your work and correct/edit your work? Do you get any help from someone?

9. Do you think English language training would help you do XX job better?

10. Can you tell me about the English course(s) you took at university?

11. Several other questions to find out the details of informant's university English course(s).

12. How and what do you think the university English course(s) should be?

13. Does the Bank provide any kind of training for its employees?

14. Have you gone for any English training at this bank?

15. What kind of English language training do you think would be useful for you?

16. Several other questions to get the details about the informant's interest in English training.

17. Can we now go over the questionnaire, and I'll answer any questions you may have, plus we'll see what you have written down in the questionnaire?

18. Several other questions to seek the details and clarifications as may be necessary, for informant's responses in the questionnaire.

The above questions are modified as and when necessary in the individual interviews and may not be asked strictly in the order given above.

Appendix 12

An investigation of the English language needs of graduate bank employees

This study seeks to investigate the English language needs of banking employees in Hong Kong. Your responses to this questionnaire will help establish a set of key competencies, both in spoken and written communication, appropriate to specific levels within the profession. They will also help the project investigator to recommend professional development measures in response to communication training needs.

Questionnaire

SECTION ONE: Personal

1. Name (if you wish to remain anonymous, leave blank):

2. Sex: Male Female

3. Age: 21 – 29 30 – 39 40 – 49 Over 50

SECTION TWO: Education Qualifications

Qualification	Subject/Discipline	Institution	Year of Award
4. BA or any other undergraduate degree:			
5. Any other professional qualification			
6. Any other (please specify):			

SECTION THREE: Professional Qualifications and/or Training

9. Have you acquired any other professional training prior to taking up employment in the banking industry?

   Yes No

   If **yes**, then please give details below: ______________________________

   ____

10. What is the name of the firm where you had this training?

____

11. What was the period and focus of the training programme?

Period : ____

Focus : ____

____

SECTION FOUR: Previous Employment

12. Name of the firm(s) / organisation(s): ______________________

____

13. Brief description of position: ______________________

____

14. Period of employment: ______________________

____

SECTION FIVE: Current Employment

15. Name of the firm: ______________________

16. Brief description of position: ______________________

____

17. Level within the firm: ______________________

18. Range of professional duties: ______________________

19. Who do you need to interact with at work?

i. subordinates peers superiors

ii. clients

iii. professional colleagues from other companies, firms or organizations

iv. any others (please specify): ______________________

20. Do you have a supervisor/superior to whom you report?

Yes No

If **yes**, what is his/her position?

____

If **no**, do you have different people to report to depending on the task?

Yes No

21. How long have you been working in your present position?

____

SECTION SIX: (A) Frequency of languages used

22. To what extent do you use English/Chinese with the following people at work?

With whom?		Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever	Never
Peers	English					
	Chinese					
Supervisors	English					
	Chinese					
Subordinates	English					
	Chinese					
Clients	English					
	Chinese					

SECTION SIX: (B) Frequency of languages used

23. To what extent do you use the following skills in **English** at work?

Skill	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever	Never
Listening					
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					
Translating from Chinese into English					

SECTION SIX: (C) Reading in English

24. To what extent are you required to **read** the following texts in **English**?

Text-types	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever	Never
In-house correspondence: memos, briefs, etc.					
Incoming post from clients					
Incoming post from other bank professionals					
Reviews/update of clients files					
Instructions received					
Reference books					
Agreements & Contracts					
Periodicals and Journals					
Any other (please specify):					

SECTION SIX: (D) Writing in English

25. To what extent are you required to perform the following writing tasks in **English**?

Text-types	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever	Never
Writing In-house correspondence, memos, briefs, etc.					
Writing letters to clients					
Writing letters to other bank professionals					
Making file/attendance notes					
Writing instructions to junior bank staff					
Drafting agreements/contracts					
Reviewing/updating clients' files					
Drafting promotional materials					
Requesting instructions from clients					
Requesting reports from third parties					
Writing briefs and reports					
(Re)writing documents in plain English					
Rewriting rules and regulations for non-specialists					
Preparing speeches					
Making presentations					
Writing from form-books available on computer					
Any other (please specify):					

SECTION SEVEN: Task Difficulty

Please indicate to what extent you find the following tasks at work **challenging**.

Rate the tasks on the following scale of challenge by **ticking the appropriate number from 1-5.**

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Please also indicate:

- Which language(s) you use for the task (tick both, if you use Chinese and English);
- To what extent (%) you use the language(s);
- Whether the challenge is because of difficult financial content or specialist language demands, or both.

26. Consultation with clients

Spoken Language

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English	Cantonese	Mandarin	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

Written Language

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

27. **Writing notes on cases and/or client information**

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

28. Analysing banking problems

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

29. **Writing opinion letters or letters of advice**

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

30. **(Re)writing banking documents in plain language**

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

Also, please list the kind of documents you generally need to (re)write in plain English.

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________
4. ______________________________
5. ______________________________

31. Any other (please specify)

____

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

32. Any other (please specify)

____

least challenging		moderately challenging		most challenging
1	2	3	4	5

Language Used			Source of difficulty		
English		Chinese	Financial Content		Language Demand
☐	and/or	☐	☐	and/or	☐

33. Any other: please specify.

____

Communicative Stages	Language used	Participants	Typical outcome	Language of outcome

SECTION EIGHT: Personal Language Profile

34. How did you acquire your language skills?

Spoken

	Mandarin	**Cantonese**	**English**
Mother Tongue			
At school			
At university			
Other (Please specify)			

Written

	English	**Chinese**
Mother Tongue		
At school		
At university		
Other (Please specify)		

35. How would you rate your language skills on the following 1 to 5 scale? **Please circle the appropriate number**. (on the scale below, **1** indicates **Poor, 3** indicates **Average** and **5** indicates **Excellent**).

English			**Skill**	**Chinese**		
Poor	Average	Excellent		Poor	Average	Excellent
1 2	3	4 5	Reading	1 2	3	4 5
1 2	3	4 5	Writing	1 2	3	4 5
1 2	3	4 5	Mandarin Speaking Cantonese	1 2	3	4 5
1 2	3	4 5	Mandarin Listening Cantonese	1 2	3	4 5
1 2	3	4 5	Translation	1 2	3	4 5

SECTION NINE: Professional Development (Communication Skills)

36. I) Do you think trainee and newly qualified banking professionals need communication skills training for their professional development?

No ☐ Yes ☐

If **Yes**,

IN WRITING

English ☐ and/or Chinese ☐ → Simplified characters ☐ / Complicated characters ☐

IN SPEECH

English ☐ and/or Cantonese ☐d/or Mandarin ☐

ii) Please indicate the areas of knowledge and skill you would like to see focussed on in such a communication skills training programme. The questions in previous sections of this questionnaire (especially Questions 24-30) may offer some useful suggestions in completing this section.

Focus of programme	Duration of programme

We would like to thank you for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire.

Appendix 13

Interview with Kara Chan, Investment analyst at HD Bank on 15/7/1999

Speaker	Transcript
I	Ok so shall we begin by er..a little bit of background information? How long have you been at HD?
Kara	Er…actually I joined HD Bank right after my graduation from the University of Hong Kong.
I	I see. Oh, so you are the same as the other person that I met, Cherry.
Kara	Er..Cherry, yeah. And so I have been here for four-and-a half year. Let me see, more em…. than four years. I graduated from the University of Hong Kong er…in 1995…August of 95 and em.. but because we are the trainee of the HD Bank, my first posting in here is er… the Human Resources for one-and-a-half year and em…and then the other one-and-a-half year I stay in Private Banking. And afterwards I choose to stay with er..the Private Banking for my future career. So I decided to have the permanent position in this division and well the job nature is very difference from the Human Resources of what I'm working right now. In Human Resources I actually touched more on the em … correspondence, documents and let's say some er..more correspondence will be between different departments so I have to use more English. Both on English and Chinese communication er…with other colleagues within the bank group. But now I'm er..working in the Private Banking specialising in the investment unit er..where I have to get -- quote the prices from the outside counter parties on certain investment products everyday and prepare the termsheets and em..some products features for my colleagues, say sales and marketing persons. And then em..they will sell to their clients. Our clients are not the retail one er..more on the high networth people or with … minimum requirement on the account opening. So now I …
I	So what is the minimum requirement for the account opening?
Kara	Er..say…half million US dollars. So I have little chance on the paper works because er..we always call the prices and give the prices to the clients over the phone. So I can say now I have to use more on the oral English instead of written English.
I	I see. But do you use English or Chinese?
Kara	Er… Both more er..on the Chinese or Cantonese. But since our counter parties are worldwide, say Morgan Stanley, Jardine Fleming. They are, most of the staff are foreigners so I have to use English sometimes.
I	Your clients are …?
Kara	Well, actually I don't have to deal with clients. I deal with the counter parties.
I	Oh.
Kara	I don't have to deal with clients. My job is to quote the products and the prices and then I prepare a good termsheet and then I fax to my colleagues or through e-mail. My colleagues will send to their clients. They er..take care of their own accounts.
I	I see. You are saying you are using more Cantonese. To whom? And more English to people like Morgan Stanley, Jardine Fleming.
Kara	Em..actually I deal with the counter parties so er…most of the time I use Cantonese. But sometimes I have to use English to er..those foreign banks say Morgan Stanley and Jardine Fleming.
I	I see. What do you mean by counterparties?
Kara	Counterparties are like those er… people from foreign banks, investment banks. They quote the prices for us and we buy the product from them.
I	Yeah. So that that would be in English but the Cantonese would be for?
Kara	Also for quoting prices. Sometimes they have Chinese staff and when we talk to them, we use Cantonese.
I	Ok but they are not your clients?
Kara	No, no.
I	They are not the clients with deposits and all that?
Kara	No, I seldom talk with clients.
I	Seldom talk with clients. Alright. So would you say it is what? 20% in English and 80% in Chinese?

Kara	Yeah, something like that.
I	Something like that. 20% English and about 80% Chinese. All spoken right? Yeah, so that's not much written communication.
Kara	Er..more or less more on the figures.
I	Ok.
Kara	We have the e-mail and the fax on communications with the counter parties. They also fax to me the term sheets.
I	So e-mail and faxes.
Kara	Maybe a little bit on written, say the term sheets, the confirmation and er...product features. They are all in English. Written English.
I	What do you mean by product feature?
Kara	Product features, say em.... I deal with the investment products like em..bonds, the fixed income securities, equity link products, derivatives. All are investment products and er..because the products are vary from one to the other so they have to prepare the product features on certain papers and they fax to me.
I	And these things are in English?
Kara	Yes, all in English.
I	All of these term sheets.
Kara	**All the written materials are in English**. [her emphasis]
I	All written materials in English. Ok do you have to prepare or just basically to read?
Kara	Er..both read and prepare. Because I have to adjust some terms or to reorganise the features and then send to my colleagues.
I	Ok, alright. So I mean em..do you find that it is something that you can handle very well or you feel that perhaps the training before joining er..HD could have helped you better in terms of language? Or it's something that you have to learn on the job?
Kara	Er..in terms of the technical trainings, of course would be better if I did have some technical trainings on the investment fields. But in terms of the language I think em..more on the oral English would be better because I think maybe, being a local student, I think the oral training is not enough.
I	In school, you mean, and university?
Kara	In school, in college and even in the university. On the written I think is probably already gained enough because in Hong Kong, is more concentrate or focus on training the student how to read and write starting with kindergarten. And the grammatical er...how can I say? The grammatical training is strong enough, I think, to graduates or even to undergraduates.
I	Enough.
Kara	I mean enough for er....their work to read or write. But the point is for our daily conversation with foreigners, especially those native foreigners, they er..they have certain languages that we cannot. Sometimes we cannot express ourselves in a very fluent .... To me I think of myself is not good enough to communicate with the foreigners to express freely to them some of the feelings. Also we have to em..well sometimes we have to go out for lunch to er..a lunch with the the counter parties, the staff. We many say the daily conversation or the practical usage are not enough to express. Even have a dinner, sometimes how how to order for the meal or er..we have the fairly catch especially I can say colloquial English expression em...is not enough for local graduates, I think. So when you compare with the local students to the foreign students.
I	Overseas ...
Kara	Students. From overseas universities, they have more chance to deal with the foreigners, the native speakers, English speakers. So they have more, how can I say?
I	More fluent
Kara	More fluent and er..they have more expressions.
I	More fluent in oral English. Do they have many overseas graduates here in HD?
Kara	HD -- not many.
I	Not many.
Kara	Not many. I think it's because it's a local bank.
I	But you are just comparing
Kara	Comparing with one or two
I	In other banks that you know.

Kara	Other yeah.
I	You feel that they are more fluent. So you are thinking that in your role, your need for spoken English would be more social English is that right?
Kara	Yes.
I	In your role, lunches or dinners. But does that take place very often? Not very often?
Kara	**Very often**. [her emphasis]
I	Very often?
Kara	Yeap. The lunches, the seminars and presentations. Some of the time we have to attend the presentation introducing the products. In that time most of the time we talk in English. I think er..the listening skill I've no problem in listening but the talking or the oral English is not that good.
I	Do you have to make these presentations?
Kara	No, I just go to attend but we have round table luncheon, we have to socialise.
I	Oh I see. So you are saying, following your seminar and presentations, then you have a lunch and then you need to converse in English. Is it business talk or social talk?
Kara	Both.
I	Both? So round table luncheon -- both business talk and social talk but er…this happens what, on a weekly basis? Do you have to do it?
Kara	Em…I or 2 maybe average.
I	1 or 2 months?
Kara	We can say er…1 for 2 weeks [once in two weeks] on the average.
I	I see. So how do you prepare yourself for that?
Kara	[laughs] I have attend I have applied for course organised by the Chinese University of Hong Kong outside work, office hour. But that is too easy. Mainly the level is too low, too easy for me. Not what I'm expecting. They are for those Form 5 or secondary level, they don't even know how to introduce themselves. I think it's not practical for me.
I	Oh, you actually attended it and found it was too low level. So you are not continuing?
Kara	So I quit it.
I	Do you pay for it or the company pay for it?
Kara	I pay for it of course [laughs] but in fact I've attended another course organised by HD Bank by the Training Department er..which is a practical English writing for executives. As I said, I think written English is not that difficult for me.
I	So even this was not so suitable for you?
Kara	I think the course is good. They not only taught about er..the expressions in the written materials, say letters, correspondence with others, the minutes …
I	Faxes, memos …
Kara	Faxes… professional English writing. That's good but I've already learned it in the college and er..in the schools. Because we also take some courses in English in first year of university.
I	But was it this kind of practical writing or was it…
Kara	It's also …
I	Academic writing?
Kara	It also taught on the practical writing.
I	At Hong Kong U, first year?
Kara	Yeap. Hong Kong U. Both on academic and practical. Even in the secondary levels at the A level Form 6 and Form 7 years we were taught about the practical English. We have a subject to examine you know. It's a practical English isn't?
I	Yeah. Also they touch on memos and reports, minutes and all these things?
Kara	Yes, but that's very formal English. I think em..most of them is useful here, but not all because sometimes when you deal with daily work, we don't stick to that formal English.
I	So in your case you would really like to have training in social English. Can you suggest this to the Training Department?
Kara	Not yet, [laughs] not yet. We have a chance every time we attend any courses from the Training Department, they give us an evaluation form and we can make some suggestions or recommendations. But not yet. [laughs] I think the most important is to put myself in that social group. All of them are talk in English. I think this would be…

I	Are they all foreigners or some local?
Kara	But I think if I have a chance to be put in a group of maybe 8 ...
I	Are they foreigners? Is a mix of Hong Kong Chinese and foreigners?
Kara	Yes. Would be better.
I	If you have a chance to be put in that group. But you do right? You say you meet them once every two weeks? Is that the same group of people?
Kara	No, not the same group. But just for 30 minutes or just even 10 minutes talk, so I don't think it's enough.
I	What do you think would be enough then?
Kara	[laughs] Er...maybe I think training I can't say how long or how the duration. Maybe 1 year full year more content or comprehensive one, say once a week for 2 hours talking, just talking and we're just discussing on some ...
I	Banking topics you mean? Would it have to be ...
Kara	Mainly...
I	Work related?
Kara	[laughs] Because for formal English I think we have chance on presentation or talking about the banking products but lack on the social usage.
I	Can a course help you with that or you suggested earlier just doing it more often. That will help, is that right?
Kara	Hm ...
I	What do you think? You think just more practice with this group of people will help you or are you thinking that a course will actually help you?
Kara	Er...a course will help if the course really talk on it er... let's say, how the American would say in this way if we want to express such feelings. I think more focus on that. Sometimes we don't have an idea how to how to express certain feelings.
I	Can you give an example? Feelings of what?
Kara	Em...feelings of
I	Or what topic?
Kara	What topic? Just social topic, say ...
I	Movies?
Kara	Movies, music. I think if for full year there there is er..let's say 30 weeks where you can once a week or you have 60 hours on the topics. You have different different types of topics -- formal one say politics or political issues or social issues in the societies. And some are the social ones, say food, jazz, music, entertainments.
I	Lifestyle, travel all these things.
Kara	Uhm, uhm.
I	But who would be the participants you are thinking of? People from this HD group or? Would there be others who have the same need as you?
Kara	I think is er ...
I	Yes?
Kara	Very important is the people who attend really want to talk and really want to participate, so the participants should have the same ideas and so on [laughs]
I	Do you think there are enough of these people here in this bank? Your colleagues would be interested?
Kara	So I'm not sure.
I	You are not sure because if there is enough, there could be a course that is perhaps run for people who have similar interest and need right? But if there is not enough, then I guess you would be thinking of joining something outside right?
I	Yeah just say for a example, I really like a programme, TV programme ... is talking about English travelling by Lau Ka Kit. You know?
I	I don't know. Is it a Chinese presenter?
Kara	Er...yes but he is very strong in English both in writing and reading and talking. I like that programme very much. That was 30 minutes only but that ...
I	Is it every week now?
Kara	Yes but for 10 weeks only. I think it's already finished.

I	It's finished already. What is the English programme? What is his name?
Kara	Lau Ka Kit. I don't know his English name.
I	It's a travel programme on English? Travel programme on English? Is the programme in English or Chinese?
Kara	Er..both and also the other actress is Joyce Lee.
I	I don't know of her.
Kara	Oh you don't know?
I	It's a local actress?
Kara	Yes both of them are. Joyce Lee is native speaker I think, but er..she is a ABC. We call it American born Chinese…she is very good in speaking English and in the programme she will ask some questions to Mr.Lau and Mr.Lau will teach her which word we are using is wrong. Using it wrongly. Which word we should be pronounce in this way and er..sometimes there is her turn. These words used by English, these words are used by Americans. I think it's very interesting.
I	I see.
Kara	You can know more about the culture of the other ….
I	Yes. So they are actually, the presenters are actually local presenters. Is that what you like about it or you like the content of it?
Kara	The content of it and er…
I	Which TV channel was this?
Kara	Both on … ATV and TVB, I think. Actually, I think it's…
I	Jade, TVB Jade.
Kara	Jade yeah, …I think is run by Hong Kong RTV.
I	RTHK?
Kara	RTHK yeah so er..the programme can be put in both TVB and ATV.
I	Oh it's a RTHK production. When was this? How long ago was this? Do you watch the TV?
Kara	Just a few weeks ago. Because I don't have the time to watch every week.
I	In the evening?
Kara	Evening for ATV is er….on Sunday night 7 to 7.30. Just a 30 minutes programme. I 'm not sure whether for TVB is on Wednesday. Also 7 to 7.30. It's more or less the same.
I	Oh, ok I try and check up and see what kind of programme that you are talking about. Ok, so you think you need social English. But right now, you don't have that right? Are you thinking of taking a course or you think it's not that urgent?
Kara	Er…
I	Is it an important thing for your work?
Kara	Not only for work but for future career or for enrich myself. I think is very important. Not very urgent but if I find the course very good in this field [if I can find a good course of this nature] I would like to attend.
I	Yeah. Maybe you can give this feedback to your Training Department.
Kara	Hm [does not sound enthusiastic]
I	You think it's possible that something can be done? You're not very sure if they can do something like this?
Kara	Em…I haven't tried to do. Well, maybe I can suggest on this [spoken without conviction].
I	But do you think this is a typical need that er..people here feel or you are unusual?
Kara	Yeah, that's why I'm not dare [laughs] to suggest. If the people attend or they participate in this course not of the same as me they won't try to participate or they won't talk.
I	Won't be so interested in talking.
Kara	I think it would be better if yourself being put in the group of English speakers there. They are all very fluent in English, you can really try to talk and you can practise good and you can learn more. But if you are put in a group of people and all of them are not that good …
I	Not that good in English at all
Kara	I think that …
I	Not all at the same level, you think you cannot?
Kara	The effectiveness is not good.

I	Maybe you can suggest. From what you say it's like an English lunch table. [laughs] English lunch table with some of your English-speaking staff.
Kara	But here we don't have that.
I	Senior people [both of us laugh] You can suggest. Maybe they might like it. They get to meet middle and lower level staff who are interested.
Kara	I mean [laughs] I have to prepare and …to have a more fluent English first before I can see them all.
I	But not too many foreigners here, right?
Kara	No.
I	Even senior level? No?
Kara	I think it's only 3 or 4 persons. Not that many.
I	Mr. XX is the executive director. Who is above him?
Kara	Mr. YY.
I	Chief executive?
Kara	Yeah, CEO.
I	Actually in this kind of situation, as I say, maybe just the company itself having an English table, you know, at lunch, once in 2 weeks or something. Then the staff can chat….
Kara	But we have 3000 staff here. I think it's quite difficult to …
I	And not that many English speaking expatriates, is that right?
Kara	Uhum. And I think it would be better if I can search maybe find other foreigners from the counter parties or my friends from overseas to practise. [laughs] Would be more free. I can talk freely. You know when the staff are facing the senior management, I think we are only at the lunch and then bye bye.
I	[laughs] Yeah. But you can talk not about work issues but unrelated things, like you say, movies, travel, things that don't relate to your work so you don't feel so ( )
Kara	No, [as for] myself, I don't have that courage. [laughs]
I	Yeah but I think this is the basically the situation that in many institutions, in schools in commercial institutions, there is you know a few people who want to use social English and there's not enough of a pool.
Kara	Uhum.
I	So they never get the chance to practise right?
Kara	Uhum.
I	So you can practise through like you say either you organize your own with outsiders or watching TV, more TV and so on yeah.
Kara	Hm, hm.
I	Even courses sometimes they may not be exactly to your need.
Kara	Hm, hm.
I	Not exactly suitable. Much more formal, or low level, just introductions and things like that. Yeah, 'cos you are at a certain level, you see, where you can progress very fast given the right conditions, I think.
Kara	Yeah, I hope so. [both of us laugh]
I	Yeah ok at the workplace. I've found out something about what you do and what you feel you would like to do, which is more social English. Now did you have some time to look at the questionnaire?
Kara	Hm, hm.
I	And er…do you have some questions or feelings that maybe certain things were not suitable? [we both look at the questionnaire she has completed.] Social sciences, so not banking or anything.
Kara	Economics.
I	Economics, ok. Training? No, you came immediately here right? Did you take any other kinds of courses?
Kara	Er…I think…
I	Banking courses?
Kara	Now?
I	Yes, now or previously.

Kara	Not prior to now.
I	Now and previously.
Kara	In er..past 4 years because being a trainee we have the chance to participate in....many courses in bank about banking by the Training Department. Besides, I take the examinations from outside organization which is CFA -- Chartered Financial Analyst. And I'm now taking the second level. I've just taken the second level and prepare for the 3rd level.
I	Is this all on your own or through the Training Department?
Kara	On my own. That's on my own but those on Training Department er...we have the chance to participate er...because we are the trainee we are chosen, we are selected to take course.
I	When you first joined? When I spoke to KC Wong, he said that many of the staff here are actually long-serving staff from lower ranks rising up, is that right? And graduate staff are newer and fewer.
Kara	Uhum.
I	So is the bank recruiting more and more graduate staff like yourself, and Cherry or are you a very small group of people?
Kara	If we compare with the whole pool of the staff here, we are the small group but I think bank is also trying to recruit more and more fresh graduates say, because I was the 1st batch.
I	Of graduates?
Kara	More graduate programme in the bank. Because before me there were also some trainees but er..they didn't get a very formal training. But starting from my batch, we have more formal training on...
I	University you mean?
Kara	No, I mean in the bank. I mean before me there were also many trainees here.
I	Yes.
Kara	But they didn't have formal training by the Training Department.
I	So 1st batch of the formal ... what do they call it? Management ...?
Kara	Management trainee programme
I	Management trainee programme. Is that only for graduates?
Kara	Yes. More the fresh graduates em...couldn't be graduates for longer than one year.
I	I see. Ok so the idea is to teach you all different different things and move you around is that right? Move you around?
Kara	To train all-rounded banking professionals.
I	Uhuh. To train all rounded ...
Kara	Starting from my year they recruited about 10 to 20 graduates trainees.
I	That was 19 ...?
Kara	From 1995. They recruited 10 to 20 trainees each year.
I	Graduates?
Kara	Yeap.
I	So the last 4 years they have been getting graduates every year. 10 to 20 of them.
Kara	Except last year because the economy is not that good.
I	So what happened?
Kara	They stop recruiting for 1 year.
I	Oh? Last year they stop recruiting for 1 year. No new staff at all?
Kara	No new trainees only.
I	Last year. You mean 1998?
Kara	Yes.
I	Stop recruiting ...
Kara	But just for 1 year.
I	Yes, stopped recruiting trainees you mean. Meaning graduates?
Kara	Graduates.
I	So they recruited lower level [of staff]?
Kara	Yeah or not only lower level but the experienced staff. Not the fresh graduates from the school.
I	I see. Recruited either experienced or lower level staff, I see. But this is 1999 already. That's 1 year right? When are the recruitments normally? At anytime of the year or just one period in the year?

Kara	Er…normally in June, July. June to July when the fresh graduates are leaving the school, leaving the university.
I	Normally June, July. I see. Ok. So this year June July -- this is the time?
Kara	I think so, but I'm not that familiar with…..
I	If they are recruiting they would be doing it now, right? This time. Ok right let's go back to this form. Analyse investment, products, introduce to relationship manager to the clients. What do you mean by "to relationship manager"?
Kara	Introduce to relationship manager, introduce the investment products to our relationship managers are our marketing staff. They take care of the clients' account.
I	They are called the relationship managers? They are marketing staff. I see ok. Investment analysis. Who do you need to interact with at work? Peers and superiors? Not lower level staff?
Kara	Er..for the time here I don't have lower level staff.
I	Clients? No?
Kara	Not that much.
I	Ok professional yes? These are the people you named counter parties and all that right? You called them counter parties? People who gave you information about the … Do you have a superior? Yes. Investment advisor. That is his title? Formal title?
Kara	Yes, his title.
I	How many people are there in your department?
Kara	Er..for whole Private Banking Department, there are over 50 I think. But for my team there is only 5 persons.
I	Ok. All doing the same kind of work?
Kara	Yes, on different products and markets.
I	I see. Ok frequency of languages used.
Kara	Yeah, I write down 2 ½ year for my present position.
I	Yes. But with the bank you have been longer. Em…Chinese? Always with peers. English? Some of the time. Supervisors? Chinese ok. So your immediate supervisors are all er…Chinese also. Subordinates? Not really in your job. Clients? No. Ok. But actually you have missed something out. You have these outside people, right? What would you call them?
Kara	Er…
I	Counter parties?
Kara	Counter parties. People from other companies.
I	That is external?
Kara	Yep.
I	And this one would be which language?
Kara	Er..most of the time Chinese or always Chinese and also some of the time English
I	English some of the time with the foreigners. Do you use the following skills? Listening, speaking? Some of the time. Reading in English all written documents are in English?
Kara	Uhum.
I	Writing, translating into Chinese. Writing always in English?
Kara	In English, yeah.
I	Translating from Chinese into English? Some of the time. What is this that you have to translate from Chinese to English? Information?
Kara	Yeah. Information and some brochure -- the product features.
I	Brochures and…
Kara	And information, let's say from the newspaper.
I	Do you read English papers too?
Kara	Yes, I do.
I	Reading in English? To what extent are you able to read the following texts? All these things? Incoming post -- hardly ever?
Kara	Because we er..
I	You don't deal with them
Kara	We don't have clients on mail.
I	So it'snNot applicable. N/A actually. So incoming post from other professionals? Most of the time. Clients, this is actually not applicable also, right? Instruction, ok. Are there other things that you have to read which are not on this list?

Kara	Read er…em (… …) it is very general term so I think it already include all the stuff and to (… …)
I	Writing in English? Ok it's the same thing. You say you don't do that much writing right, in your present post? Yeah ok so your job is actually very specific right? Very specific. What would be the future development?
Kara	To be er…
I	Investment advisor?
Kara	In both banking or investment house especially in the investment field, say bonds, foreign exchange and equities. In fact there are many but most of them are foreign organisations. [laughs]
I	Ok So it will be similar to the things you do now? Would it be similar? Very similar? What would be the difference?
Kara	For future?
I	Yeah, future.
Kara	Maybe if I really going to be investment advisor er…more on the analysis of the market, let's say give recommendation, to analyse the product on the market trend, more on the analysis. But now what I'm working is on the operation now. I get the information and put it er….
I	Summarise.
Kara	Yeah summarise it and give to the clients and also I'll take the order. I'll place the orders for them.
I	Now you summarise the information. Do you have to write it?
Kara	Yes.
I	How do you summarise it?
Kara	Rewrite……
I	Rewrite.
Kara	Rewrite….extract the most important points and give them e-mail.
I	So you do write notes. You write summaries of analysis right? And this is in English?
Kara	Yes, all in English.
I	Is it stated here somewhere? Do you have that stated down because I think that it's an important part of your job, right? The writing in English?
Kara	Writing in English.
I	You actually have to write, you have to summarise information and you put this down for?
Kara	For marketing staff.
I	Now this one you said you put it in e-mail.
Kara	I'll put it ….
I	Only in e-mail form?
Kara	No, also in paper.
I	Reports? You call them reports?
Kara	Termsheets.
I	You call them termsheets. Is this changing daily?
Kara	Yes.
I	It's daily, not weekly?
Kara	Daily, daily.
I	Only daily.
Kara	Even intra day. We have to may new information and put it faster in ….
I	How much do you have to write? 1 page? 1 paragraph? How much?
Kara	Er…..for the information we'll put in the first thing say is 3…
I	Point form? Is it just point form?
Kara	3 to 4 sentences. But er..for that I seldom have the chance to write as whole paragraph or 1 whole letter.
I	So it's mostly point form is that right? Mostly in point form but it is in English.
Kara	Hm. It's simple.
I	Ok because you are saying that in the future this will be the development right? If you ever er..for development of your career, this is going to become bigger, this analysis. And the analysis is mostly done in English. It's like research isn't it? It's research so it would be mostly … is it pages of writing?

Kara	My supervisor is now doing that. But I don't need to do it for the time being for the research....
I	Yeah but that is pages of writing? Right?
Kara	**Yes, of course.** [her emphasis]
I	Yeah I mean I'm saying that if if you see your growth in the future it will take you in this direction so you have to do the writing. I mean if that's your career path? It will take you in this direction right?
Kara	I think so.
I	I mean social English is still very important but then you also have to be doing a lot of the writing. Do you think that that is something that you would like training in at this stage or you don't think that is needed?
Kara	I don't think so because the research er...we we are now doing the research and I take the post now. How to say that? Our team has 5 persons and each of them have to prepare for their market research and I consolidate them into booklet for quarterly basis.
I	You do that?
Kara	I do that. I can even edit their English or their written you know. I don't think is difficult for me.
I	Oh ok so you are doing that already you are able to *do* that.
Kara	But but of course the material is not from myself.
I	Yeah, it's from other people. You pull together, you consolidate into you say what quarterly?
Kara	Quarterly outlook we call. Quarterly investment or market outlook
I	Investment or market outlook means every er....3 months.
Kara	Every 3 months.
I	How many pages are there?
Kara	20, over 20 pages.
I	More than 20 pages. Ok so this you are doing this and this goes to whom? This?
Kara	To clients.
I	Goes to clients. Ok so you prepare this. Maybe at another stage I will look at this product you produce. The kinds of writing that you have to do because obviously they have written in note form or incomplete sentences and you have to put them together right? Is it also in incomplete sentences and points or you have to write the whole thing?
Kara	Most of the time they prepare that part er...in sentences but I edit some of them. Maybe I shorten them, summarise them.
I	Yeah so your role is the editing role right? Plus you do 1 page which is yours isn't it?
Kara	No, I don't have to do for the time being. But maybe for futures I do have.
I	I see so yeah so this is the writing part which you you have to do every 3 months. It's quite big, isn't it? 20 pages. Does it take a long time to do this?
Kara	No because they all type in er..
I	Word process.
Kara	Already in the software. They e-mail their files to me and I just put them together.
I	Yeah ok
Kara	So it's not
I	There's not much change to it.
Kara	Em....not much change.
I	Not much change. But after you, does it go to anyone else or it's just released?
Kara	Er..goes to my boss. Our boss, the general manager.
I	Does he do more editing?
Kara	Some of the time he will do, but not much.
I	Oh, so it goes to your boss who is the investment advisor you call him?
Kara	No er...general manager. Of course after I edited them I will circulate to my colleagues first. When they think there is no problem, I'll send it to our general manager.
I	Ok goes to the general manager and the general manager is er..general manager of what?
Kara	Our division. The Private Banking Division.

I	Private banking division. I see alright. Then after that it goes to clients and ok. So yeah this is actually something that you have to do which is written English and er..as I say at some later stage I would like to look at it yeah. Look at this, because this is a product that you actually end up, right?
Kara	Hm, hm. Because the idea of the investment advisor and they often don't like people to, you know, to correct or to change their wordings to a different idea, so I would keep it as em..original as possible.
I	They don't like you to change but that means they have to be good in English.
Kara	Yes but er..sometimes they will use not the layman …
I	Technical.
Kara	Yeah, they will they will do it very technically. Sometimes the research er..using the English not that professional or formal. They would simply using this because they talk with the counter parties in their field. They just usually use them they don't think it is a problem for for the people who are in the field. So I will keep it.
I	You will keep it. It's that the final form. The general manager looks at it. Does he keep that? He changes it?
Kara	Er…..sometimes he will change it but not that much.
I	I mean if it's technical, but if it's not meant to be technical somebody has to change it right? I don't know depending on who the readers are. The readers understand the technical terms?
Kara	I think to certain level, they can. Say for example we'll say FED have the rate cut. It a very simple sentence we do think people understand.
I	Yeah in your field yes. In your field they will understand yes.
Kara	FED has a rate cut so we'll keep it.
I	Fine that's fine yeah that is understandable and it's clear.
Kara	So clear.
I	Ok so task difficulty this one? Consultation? You say you don't know much of this right? [laughs] So not really applicable. Written language? Now the source of difficulty, is it the financial content or is it language? It's more financial? Not the language? In terms of written yeah. What is difficult for you?
Kara	Not really financial.
I	Ok. Writing notes to clients, client information ok. Analysing banking problems. This is your analysis? Is that what you mean?
Kara	I would interpret it as analyse the investment product. Market trend
I	And market trend ok .
Kara	So it's more Chinese.
I	The kinds of document you need to write….. Daily commentary. What is this? This is the one you are talking about?
Kara	Er…but is more or less the same but is er..do it daily basis. It's a brief notes on er..the market trend.
I	Ok brief notes. This one is the…consolidation right?
Kara	For this one I even would not change any words. I just put it and send it out.
I	That is commentary.
Kara	I won't go through the each sentence you know to edit them. I don't do it because it's very urgent for each morning.
I	No editing at all because of urgency.
Kara	Uhum, uhum.
I	No time to do it. It's that right? Quarterly outlook yeah. Do you confirmation ok this is short pieces of writing is it? Product fact sheet. This one?
Kara	That is what I call.
I	Your termsheets.
Kara	Termsheets
I	These are your termsheets ok. Mostly figures isn't it?
Kara	Er..no we do have words to outline the products. Let's say this a kind of products to sell, for which kinds of clients. We do that you know
I	So in your case you find that all this is easy to handle? You don't have difficulty with this?
Kara	In English. Written English.

I	Yeah yeah in your case ok
Kara	Yes
I	But some of your team members may not have the same experience is that right? Can they all handle this sort of thing? They all doing these too?
Kara	No they don't. My colleagues, do you mean in my team or in?
I	In your investment, in your investment team.
Kara	For investment team we have 5 colleagues em…3 of them are investment advisors and the other one is senior investment analyst and I am the most junior. So they all give their ideas and I just put it together and give it to clients so some of that because are er..specialize in different markets. Some of them don't need to prepare the fact sheet but they do the other things. They give the research on certain companies. And some of them maybe er.. er er don't don't need to to to do confirmation.
I	Oh ok. So you are saying they are more experienced than you. They don't do some of these things. But the things they do you find that they are very clearly written and all that? Since they are doing bigger pieces of writing right?
Kara	Er…I think they are they are good enough to ..
I	Good enough?
Kara	Complete the task
I	Are they all university graduates?
Kara	Yes.
I	All with many years of experience?
Kara	Yes.
I	Working here?
Kara	Not working here. From other company.
I	Some from local universities and some from overseas universities?
Kara	Yes.
I	Combination?
Kara	Yes. I think in the investment field it's very different from other branches or departments in the bank. Most of …er..the minimum requirement is er..you do have a degree, so er..it's very different from …
I	Ok alright. Ok this one you didn't know, yeah.
Kara	I'm not sure.
I	This is basically your outcome. Would be some of the things you have to do here.
Kara	Oh.
I	These are the things that you end up with. The language of the outcome is in English. The participants would be for your daily commentary would be you, I guess.
Kara	Colleagues from investment.
I	Colleagues but is it orally or you are getting from newspapers?
Kara	Em … e-mail. They e-mail to me. Not oral, from newspaper and the e-mail.
I	So colleagues plus newspapers, e-mail. So this is what I mean and then outcome would be this daily commentary and the language is English right?
Kara	Uhum.
	Er..the in the first stage of it, the language used. Did you use Chinese?
Kara	No, English.
I	All English and the this would be actually the communicative task I think is more is clearer the task so the task would be the daily commentary writing, right? Would be writing or producing the daily commentary. So it's the same thing each of this, you see? But whether they are others now these are all your written things maybe you have other task which are more spoken
Kara	Hm. Let's say from quoting prices from other counter parties.
I	Yeah so what would that be quoting.
Kara	Maybe to get information.
I	Not quoting prices.
Kara	Including quoting prices, getting market information, quoting prices and all these doing the same time.
I	Getting market information, quoting prices all these things. Language used would be?
Kara	Both Cantonese and English. 20% English

I	Alright 20% English, 80% Cantonese. Participants would be again all these colleagues or outside people?
Kara	Er...both colleagues and outside people.
I	So external parties, right? Your counter parties, is that right?
Kara	But we do get information from er..the colleagues of other departments within the bank group.
I	Colleagues of other departments ok alright. Typical outcome is? What do you produce here?
Kara	Produce er..termsheets
I	Your termsheets -- language is?
Kara	Or price list, you can call it.
I	Price list. Is the language in English?
Kara	Yeah, because all are written.
I	Ok so this is what? Some of it would be here and anything else that is not er..in your ...
Kara	These 2 are already include.
I	Ok so is basically for all of them is the same procedure is the same procedure for everything ok. But you have your seminars you said and presentations. Now that would be
Kara	I just go to attend [laughs] I don't need to prepare for them.
I	But yeah but you still have to listen and all that so ok if it's a seminar and presentation, then the language used is English? All the time?
Kara	Most of the time.
I	80% English, 20% the reverse.
Kara	Even 90%.
I	90%
Kara	English.
I	Ok so Chinese maybe 10% ok. Participants would be ?
Kara	The investment professionals.
I	Investment professionals. Typical outcome? What is the result of your seminars and presentations?
Kara	Get the information of certain products.
I	Ok. Language? English?
Kara	If written down I'll use English [laughs] if I tell my colleagues I'll use Cantonese [laughs]
I	If it is spoken. But from the seminars what you get from them would be all in English, right?
I	Yeah that means you are translating it, isn't it? That would be a translation, right? To colleagues, right?
Kara	Yeah.
I	Ok that is the kind of thing, you see. So then from here you get an idea of your work. The various things. Are there other things? (... ...) Actually you said there is lunch, isn't it?
Kara	Er..yes
I	Following seminars and presentations? So it would be lunch. Is it dinners too?
Kara	Not much.
I	Not much?
Kara	Not much.
I	Lunch
Kara	But I think is the outcome is more or less the same, isn't it?
I	Yeah. But this is lunch. Language you used you say in lunch it is mostly English? It is mostly English. Participants they are the same, right? Same as above. Typical outcome would be outcome would be more just social right? Just social...
Kara	Social. Relationship building.
I	Relationships yeah just social relationship building and all that . And the language is English. So this is another part of the work.
Kara	Or you can raise one more -- place order. Execution of the clients' order.
I	Execution of clients' order. They want you to buy or sell, is that right? Ok language all Chinese?
Kara	I think is more less the same as this one. Cantonese and ....
I	English 20% ok. Participants would be...clients?
Kara	No, I think is here. Because the clients place the order to our marketing staff and they place or you can put once one more is the marketing staff.

I	Counter parties, colleagues of other departments are marketing staff?
Kara	Er..No. Colleagues of other departments they also give us prices and we also place order to them like say, Treasury.
I	Ok colleagues of other departments and marketing staff alright. Typical outcome you are selling it for them. What is the outcome?
Kara	The order is executed.
I	Order is executed. Language?
Kara	This is the same.
I	Is it verbal mostly?
Kara	Verbal.
I	It's mostly verbal right? So it will be the same. Written is what? Just your confirmation right? Confirmation is in English? Hmh...ok. So this er..covers most of the things you do right? Ok Language skill would be speaking Chinese.....in office. Foreign colleagues. But how many foreign colleagues are there?
Kara	In office. Personal profile er...not many. Let me see is three to four. Three persons. One from Taiwan and one from Malaysia and one from Manila.
I	Three to four.
Kara	Yeap. We talk over the phone.
I	In the other departments?
Kara	No, within my department.
I	Oh. So this is actually what? Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines. All these I think is alright yeah......Programme in oral English you said. Yeah, ok. Oh! [surprise] One to two years.
Kara	[laughs]
I	That's very long.
Kara	Because I think if you er..really want em...want to get a certain level 1 er... 3 months courses is not enough to me. So of course em...the best the best thing is to put me in the US or to London to stay ...
I	Immersion.
Kara	With the foreigners.
I	One to two years but you are thinking of course just like 1 hour is it or 2 hours a week or something? Weekly basis one or two hours?
Kara	Just like you're learning Japanese. If you don't spend most of the time to get comprehensive training I don't think you can ...
I	Yes, the usage is very important and I think this is what is lacking for many Hong Kong learners of English. They just don't use it.
Kara	Hm.
I	So they cannot advance. Yeah.
Kara	Because we can we can improve our written English by reading more books on er..getting the grammatical training from the text books em..from the dictionary. But we don't have the chance to talk to practise our oral English.
I	Ok, alright, yeah, thanks very much. I think you've been very helpful. I think your job nature is quite different from the others right? So you don't have a card? Maybe you can er...
Kara	Ok I can pass it down.
I	Pass it down to them so that I can have a look.
Kara	Yeah.
I	And then I will come back again but I hope to be able to talk to you some more and to find out a little bit more. Ok because this is giving me an idea.
Kara	So I can practise my oral English [laughs]
I	This is just to get an idea of the things you do and I think I have gotten an idea which is very different as I say from, it looks like, from other departments.
Kara	Uhuh, uhuh.
I	Yeah.
Kara	So how many how many interviews you will .....
I	Today? Four, so you are the second one.
Kara	For the total.
I	You are the second one.
Kara	For the total, for the totally ...

I	Oh, you see I'm just getting an idea because you said Private Banking but when you said Private Banking, the other term is investment ...
Kara	Investment unit.
I	Investment unit.
Kara	No, the private banking. Of course we do have other units for loans and deposits that are more similar to other departments but I am I in the first specialised unit in the investment. So you can see my job is quite different from...
I	So I would say what, investment unit? Oh I see, investment unit.
Kara	Just one team of the department, one of the teams.
I	Oh, alright. Yeah, so it looks like it is different but it's interesting because I'm sure this a very er...you know, vital part of the bank. Although it's a small unit, right? It's a small unit yeah and er..maybe at later stage I can find out more about how ... your work actually you know where it goes after your department. Since I'm not a banking person myself, it takes time to find out what different people are doing to see what is needed yeah. So thanks very much for your time. Yeah, thank you.
Kara	You are welcome.
I	Yeah, bye bye. I hope to see you again sometime.
Kara	Alright.

Appendix 14

BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINING
Program Outline

OBJECTIVES : Upon completion of the course, participants should be able to : -

- Carry out a range of job-related tasks in English with a high standard of accuracy, fluency and appropriateness of tone;
- Recognize some of the weaknesses in their use of the language;
- Be better equipped to continue their self-development

CONTENTS :

- *Writing*
  - Principles of business writing correspondence :
    : Letters
    : E-mail
    : Memos
- *Speaking*
  - Greeting visitors
  - Answering enquiries
  - Discussing the company issues
  - Selling Products and Services
  - Telephone skills

DESIGNED FOR : All Staff

ELIGIBILITY : Potential participants will be screened by CPBE for the level

MEDIUM : English

LEARNING METHODS : Classroom presentation and practice; group, pair and individual activities

LEARNING AID : Handouts, flipcharts and transparencies

FACILITATOR(S) : Instructor from the Centre for Professional & Business English (CPBE), Hong Kong Polytechnic University

CLASS SIZE : 20 (maximum)

DURATION : 12 evenings – total 24 hours
(2 hours per session / twice a week)

VENUE : Hong Kong Polytechnic University Campus
(Classroom to be advised)

BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINING

Program Outline

SCHEDULE : 1830 - 2030 hours

Tuesdays	Thursdays
Oct 5, 99	Oct 7, 99
Oct 12	Oct 14
Oct 19	Oct 21
Oct 26	Oct 28
Nov 2	Nov 4
Nov 9	Nov 11

REMARKS :

- Nominees will receive a level assessment conducted by the instructor from CPBE for the appropriateness to the need and the course level before they are admitted to the course

- The course fee for each participant including the course materials is HK$1,500.00. All staff will be fully sponsored except the following: -

  - Withdrawal within 1 week before the commencement date of the program
  - Participant's class attendance is less than 80% of the course
  - Course assignments are not fully completed as required

- To encourage full participation of the program, a Letter of Understanding on the course refund requirement will be signed by the participant

- A Certificate of Attendance will be issued by the Centre for Professional & Business English (CPBE), Hong Kong Polytechnic University for those attending at least 80% of the course, together with a profile of individual performance

Appendix 15

SCMP Public Opinion Survey
Education

November 2nd , 2006

tns

Agenda

Research Background
and
Objectives

Research Background and Objectives

- The SCMP/TNS Opinion Leader Surveys are designed to reflect the perception of Hong Kong people towards key socio-economic and public policy issues.
- In October, TNS conducted an opinion poll on **education**.

Overview of Methodology

Overview of Methodology

Interviewing approach	Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing via TNS 6th dimension Access Panel
Fieldwork period	October 13-22, 2006
Geographic coverage	Hong Kong
Average interview length	15 minutes
Total sample size	n=698*
Target respondents	Opinion leaders and business decision-makers aged 25+ with household income HKD40,000 or above.

Maximum Sampling Error: ±3.7% at 95% confidence level

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Overview of Methodology (Cont'd)

Sample Composition				Total Sample
Gender	Male	370	53%	698*
	Female	328	47%	
Age	25-34	238	34%	
	35-44	265	38%	
	45+	195	28%	
SCMP Readership	Yesterday	223	32%	
Business Executives	BDM	315	45%	
	Opinion Leaders	670	96%	

*Data have been weighted based on gender, age, and SCMP readership.

Business Decision Makers / Opinion Leaders

- The sample is comprised of respondents who are:
  - Strategic business decision makers with purchase decision making responsibility on behalf of their company, or
  - Opinion leaders who have engaged in one or more of the following:
    - Addressed a conference or public meeting
    - Formulated a strategic business plan
    - Taken executive decisions which affect own organisation's operations in other countries
    - Had an article or paper published
    - Worked on international business strategies
    - Lobbied or advised members of national or local government
    - Sat on an industrial / professional committee
    - Been interviewed on TV, radio, or by the press

Key Findings

Key Findings

- Hong Kong's opinion leaders are pessimistic about the quality of local graduates. With the exception of "Numeric skills", less than one in five are confident that Hong Kong's university graduates possess sufficient and relevant skills.
- Graduates of European (63%) and North American universities (60%) are considered by a majority to be "much better" or "slightly better" than local graduates. The largest gaps are in terms of "English", "Creativity", and "International understanding".
- While there is perceived to be less of an overall quality gap between local graduates and those from mainland China and elsewhere in Asia, the latter are nonetheless seen to be outperforming local graduates in terms of Putonghua and numeric skills.
- International and English School Foundation (ESF) schools in Hong Kong are widely perceived to outperform local ones (including private, Direct Subsidy Scheme and fully-subsidised local schools) in all dimensions except for Putonghua teaching.
- There is a widespread belief among Hong Kong's opinion leaders that local students face greater pressure today compared with five years ago - especially at the primary and secondary levels.

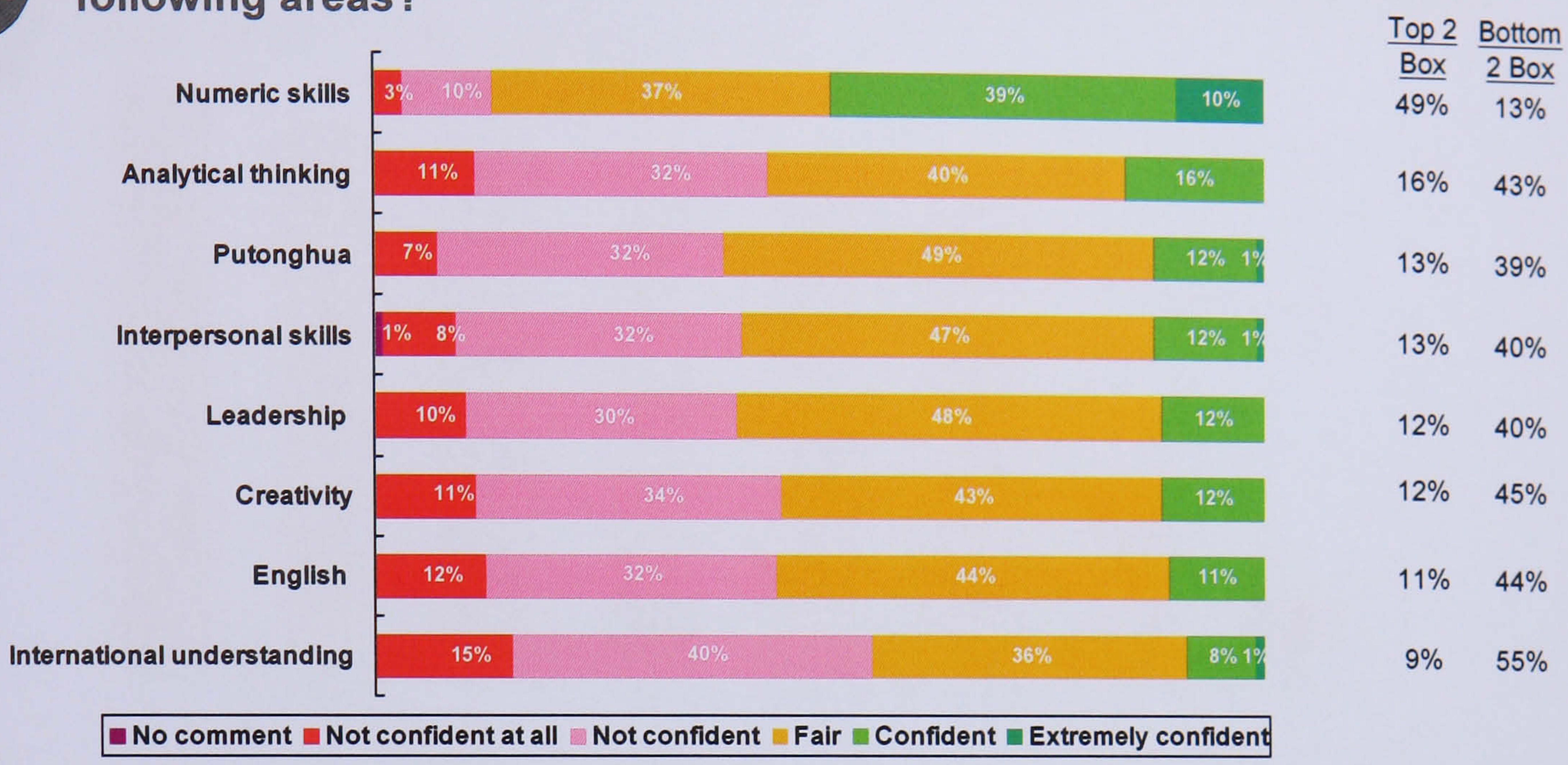
Key Findings (II)

- The government is considered by the majority of opinion leaders to have primary responsibility for education (ahead of schools and parents).
- The "3+3+4" academic structure and the creation of new Direct Subsidy Scheme schools are considered the most successful of the education-reform initiatives introduced by the government in recent years; while the implementation of Chinese as the instruction medium is considered least successful.
- Proposed additional measures that receive the greatest support include improving the teacher-student ratio, increasing the time allocated to reading and investing in teacher training.
- There is comparatively less support for providing more Chinese-medium schools. Also, despite the strong performance ratings given to international and ESF schools, many opinion leaders are neutral to the idea of adding more international and private schools, or continuing the ESF subsidy.
- According to the view of the opinion leaders, promoting Hong Kong as an education hub will be best accomplished by offering support to foreign educational institutions to set up local branches, as well as relaxing the quota for overseas students.

Student Quality and School Performance

Sufficient and relevant skills

How confident are you that Hong Kong's university graduates possess sufficient and relevant skills for meeting the needs of society in the following areas?



Base: All respondents (n=698)

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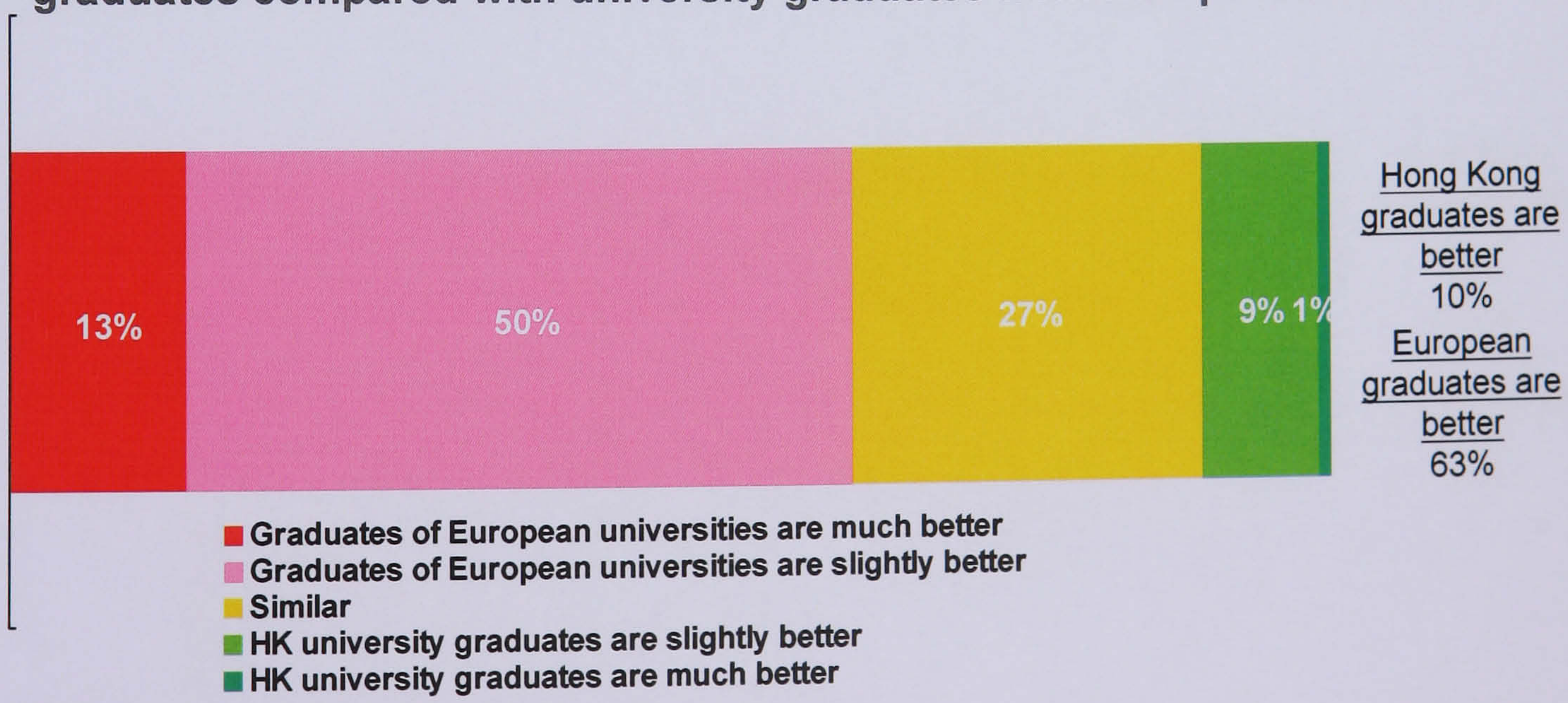
Hong Kong university graduates compared to *Europe*

How do you rate the overall performance of Hong Kong's university graduates compared with university graduates from Europe?

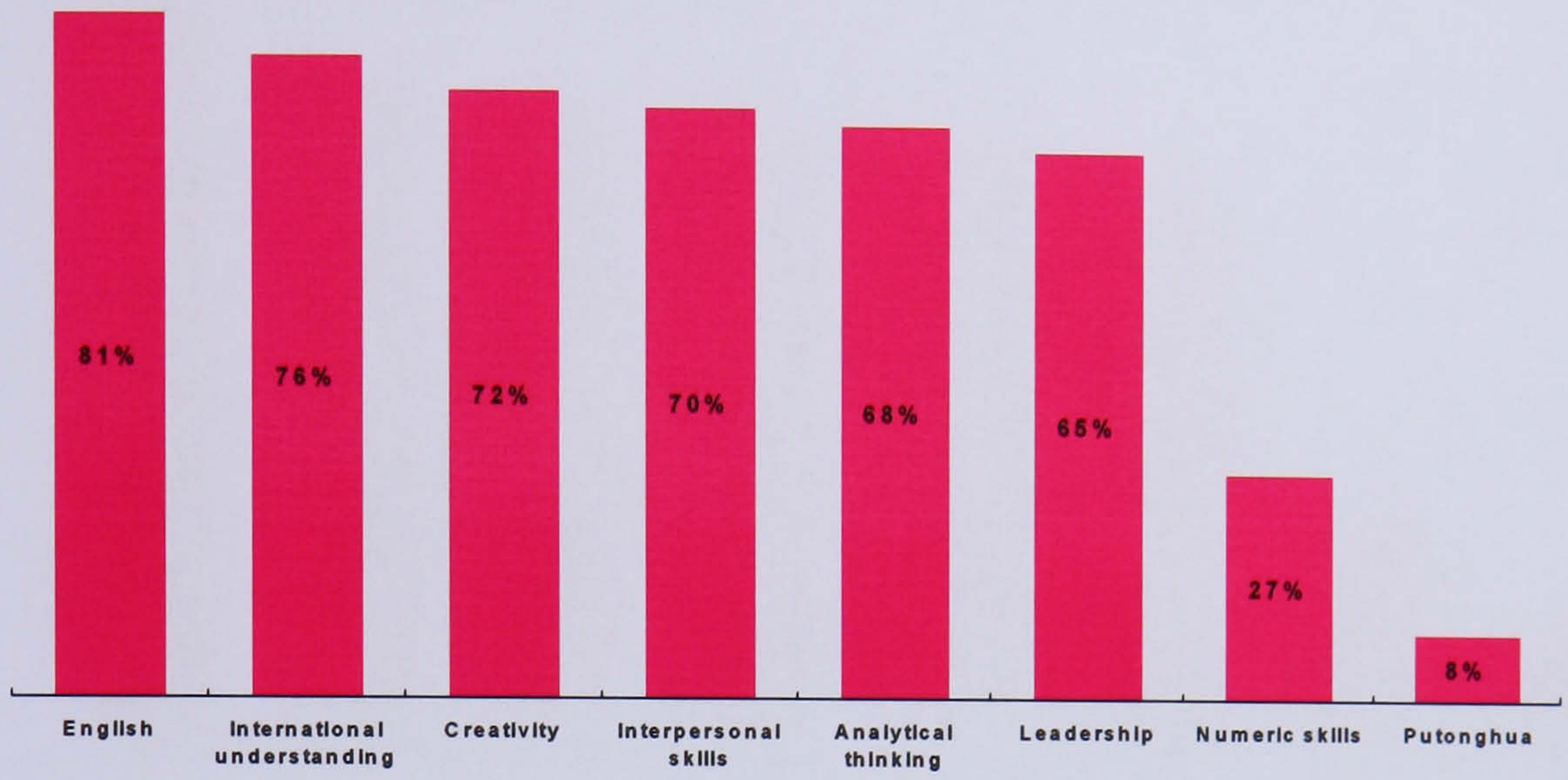


Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 14

Areas of better performance
Europe

In what areas do you think European university graduates are better than HK university graduates?



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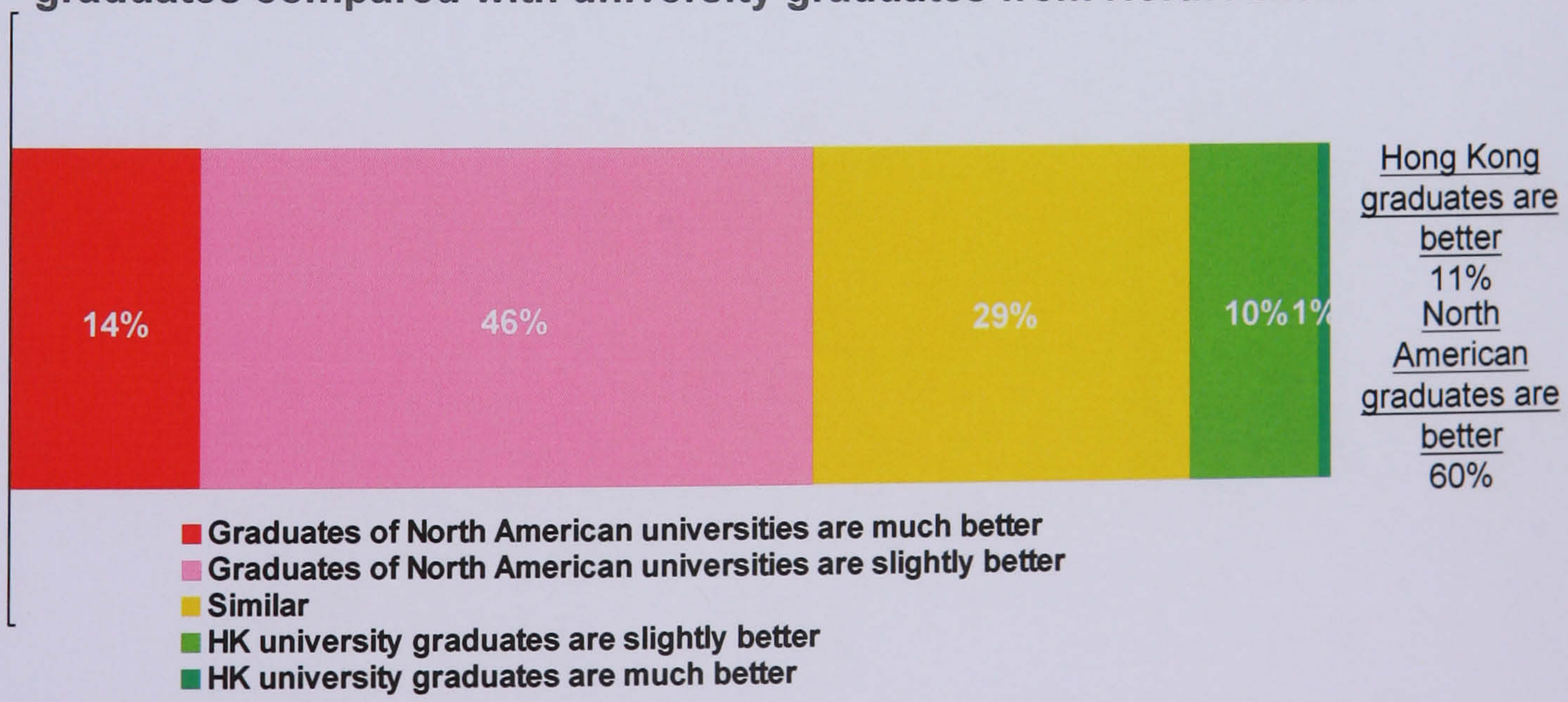
Base: Those respondents reported that European university graduates are better (n=446)

Page 15

Hong Kong university graduates compared to
North America

How do you rate the overall performance of Hong Kong's university graduates compared with university graduates from North America?



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Base: All respondents (n=698)

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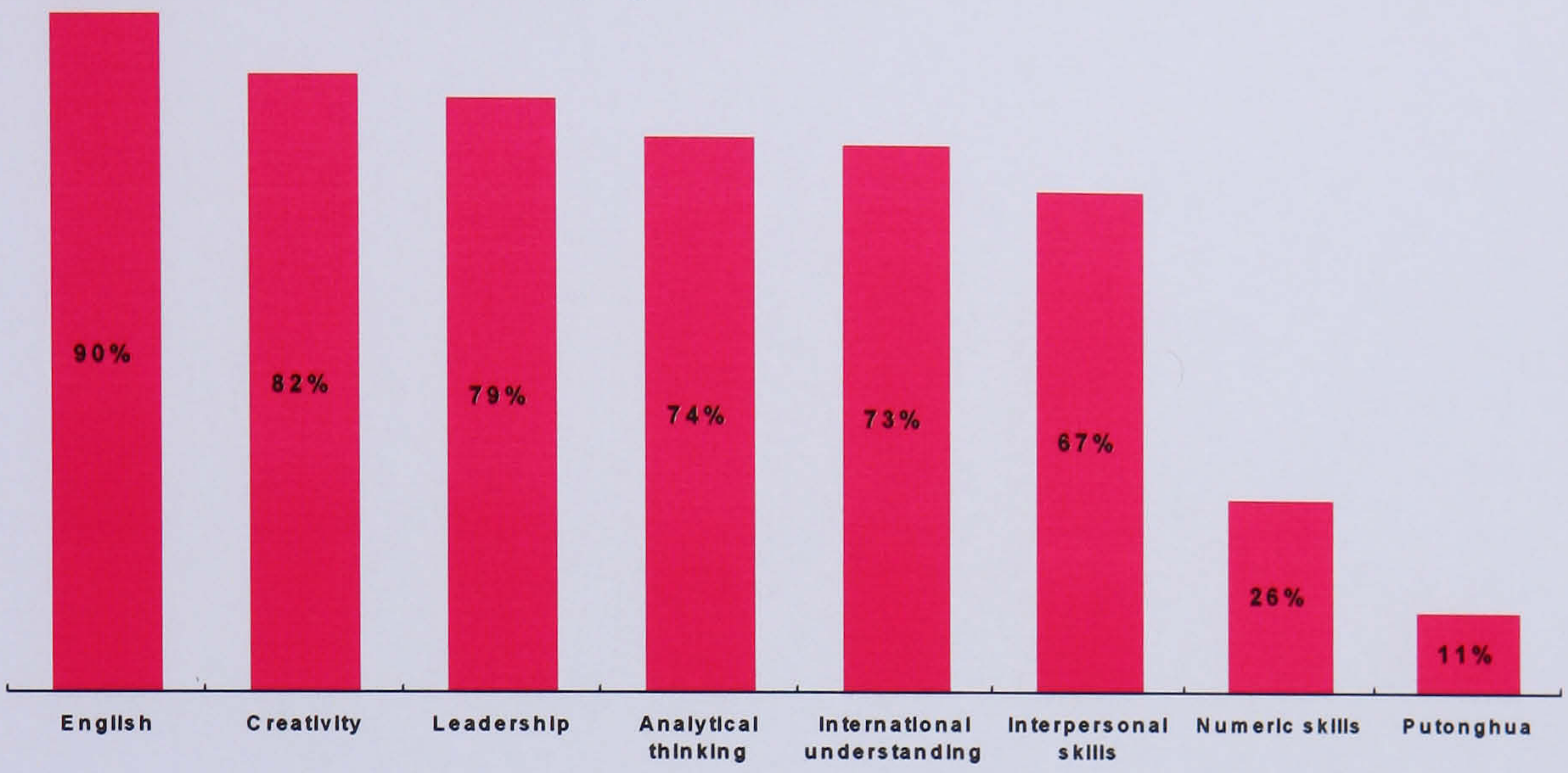
Areas of better performance
North America

In what areas do you think North American university graduates are better than HK university graduates?

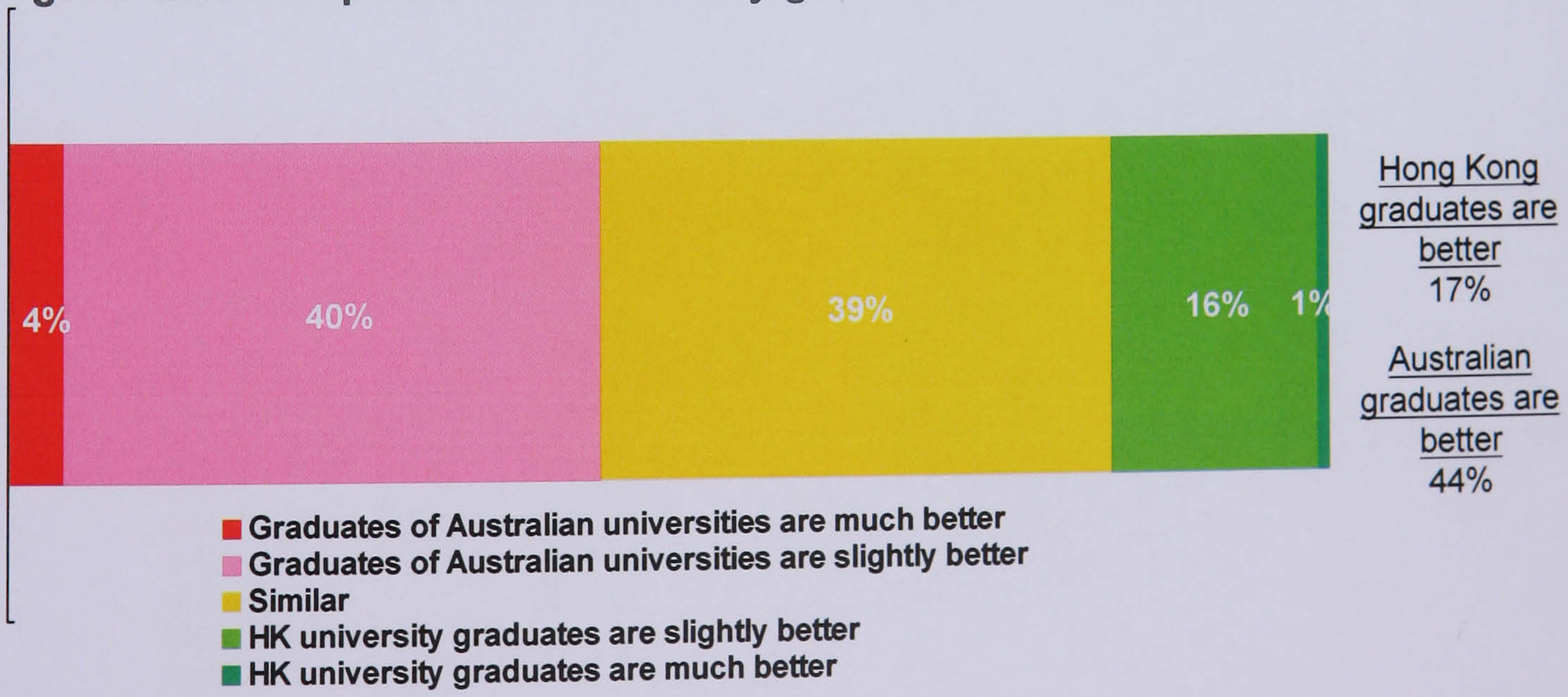


Base: Those respondents reported that North American university graduates are better (n=422)

Page 17

Hong Kong university graduates compared to *Australia*

How do you rate the overall performance of Hong Kong's university graduates compared with university graduates from Australia?

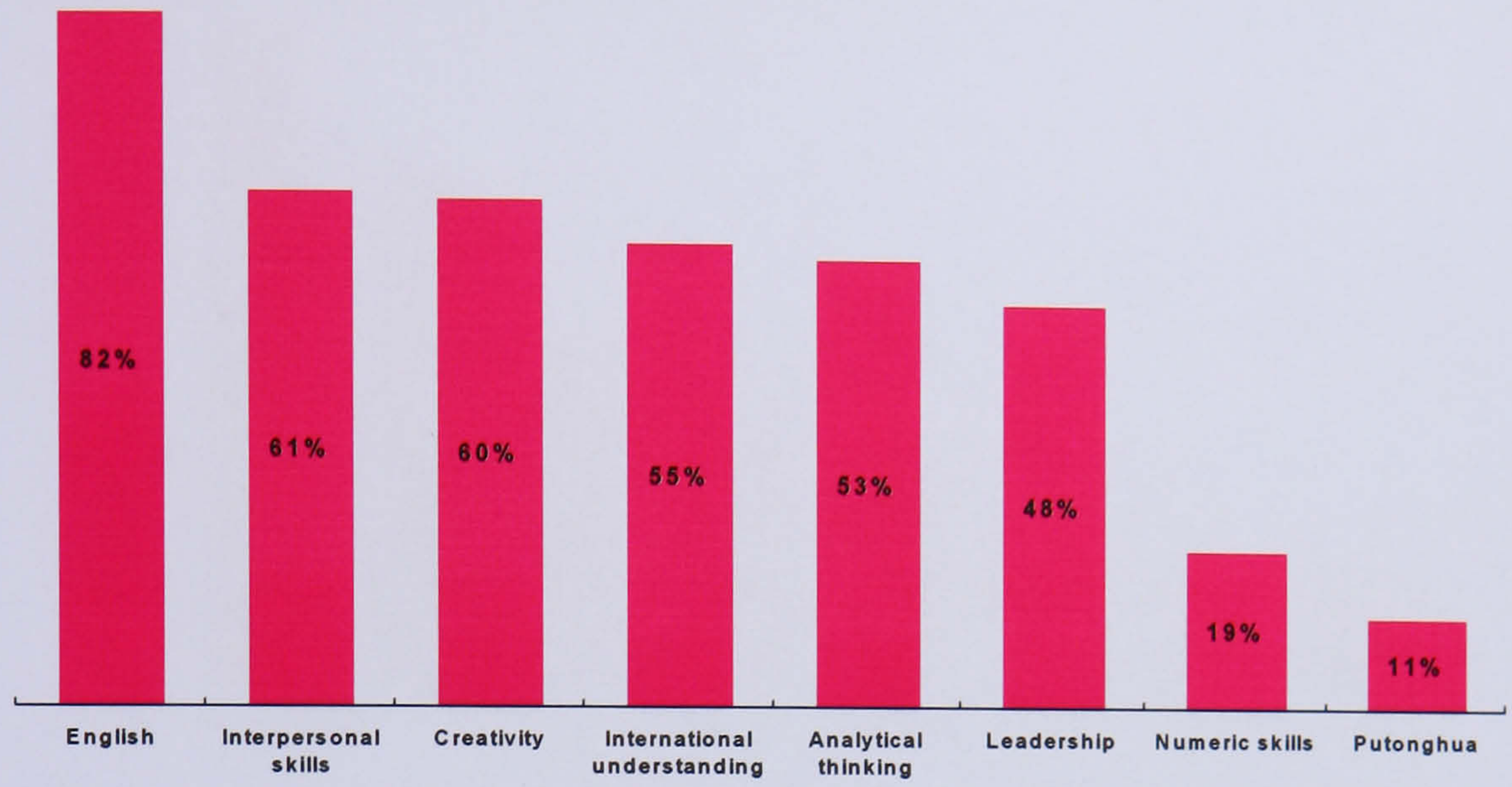


Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 18

Areas of better performance
Australia

Q **In what areas do you think Australian university graduates are better than HK university graduates?**



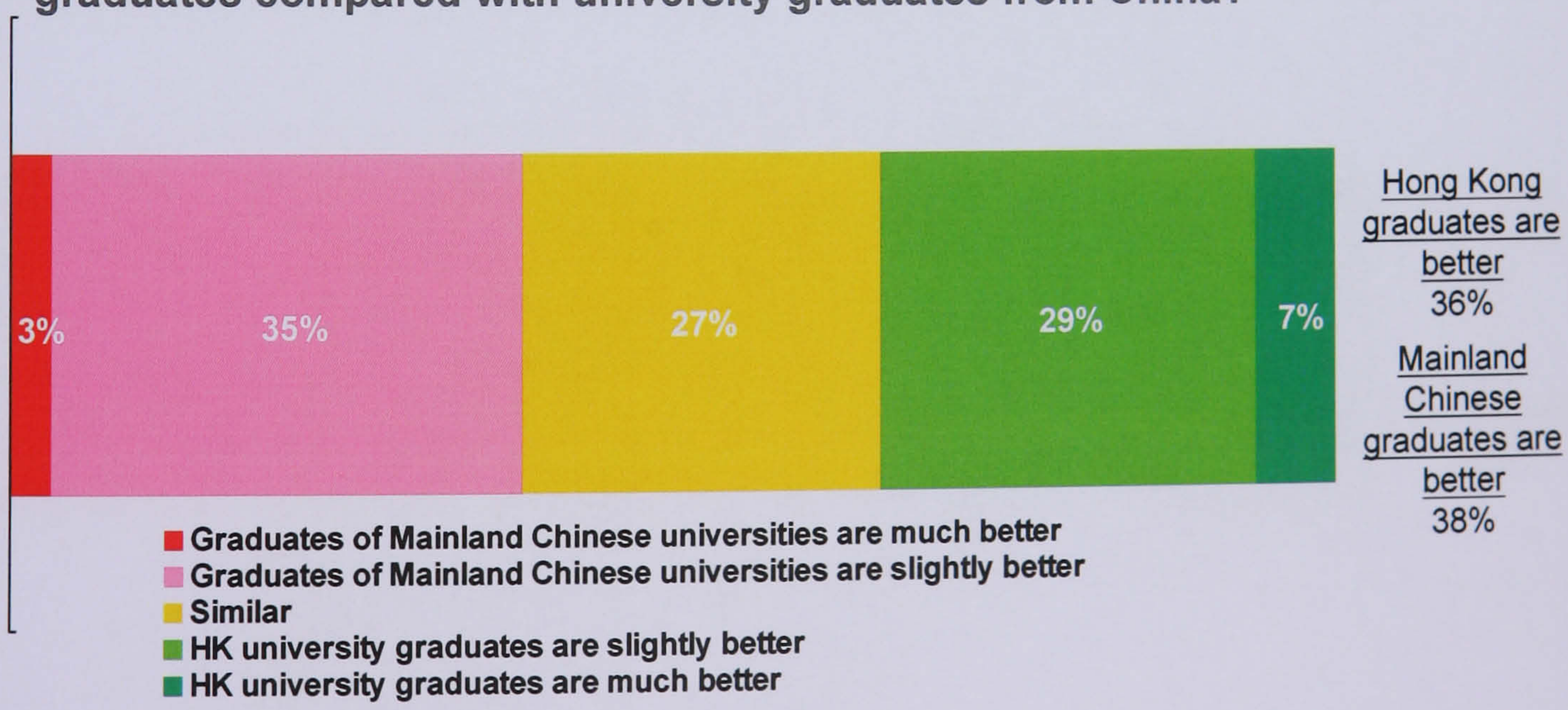
tns

Base: Those respondents reported that Australia university graduates are better (n=310)

Page 19

Hong Kong university graduates compared to *Mainland China*

Q **How do you rate the overall performance of Hong Kong's university graduates compared with university graduates from China?**



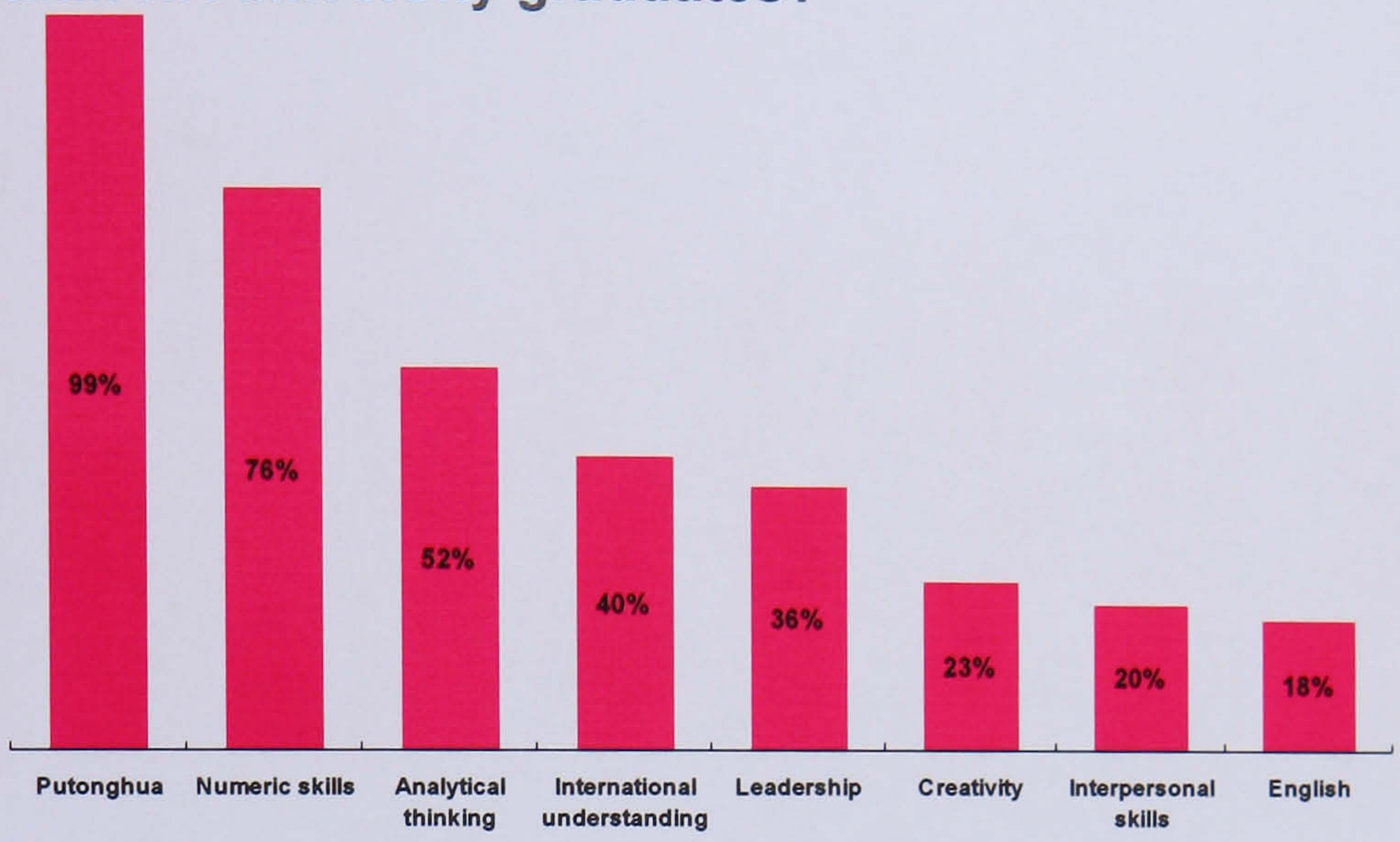
tns

Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 20

Areas of better performance
Mainland China

In what areas do you think Mainland Chinese university graduates are better than HK university graduates?



tns

Base: Those respondents reported that Mainland Chinese university graduates are better (n=264)

Hong Kong university graduates compared to
Asia

How do you rate the overall performance of Hong Kong's university graduates compared with university graduates from Asia?

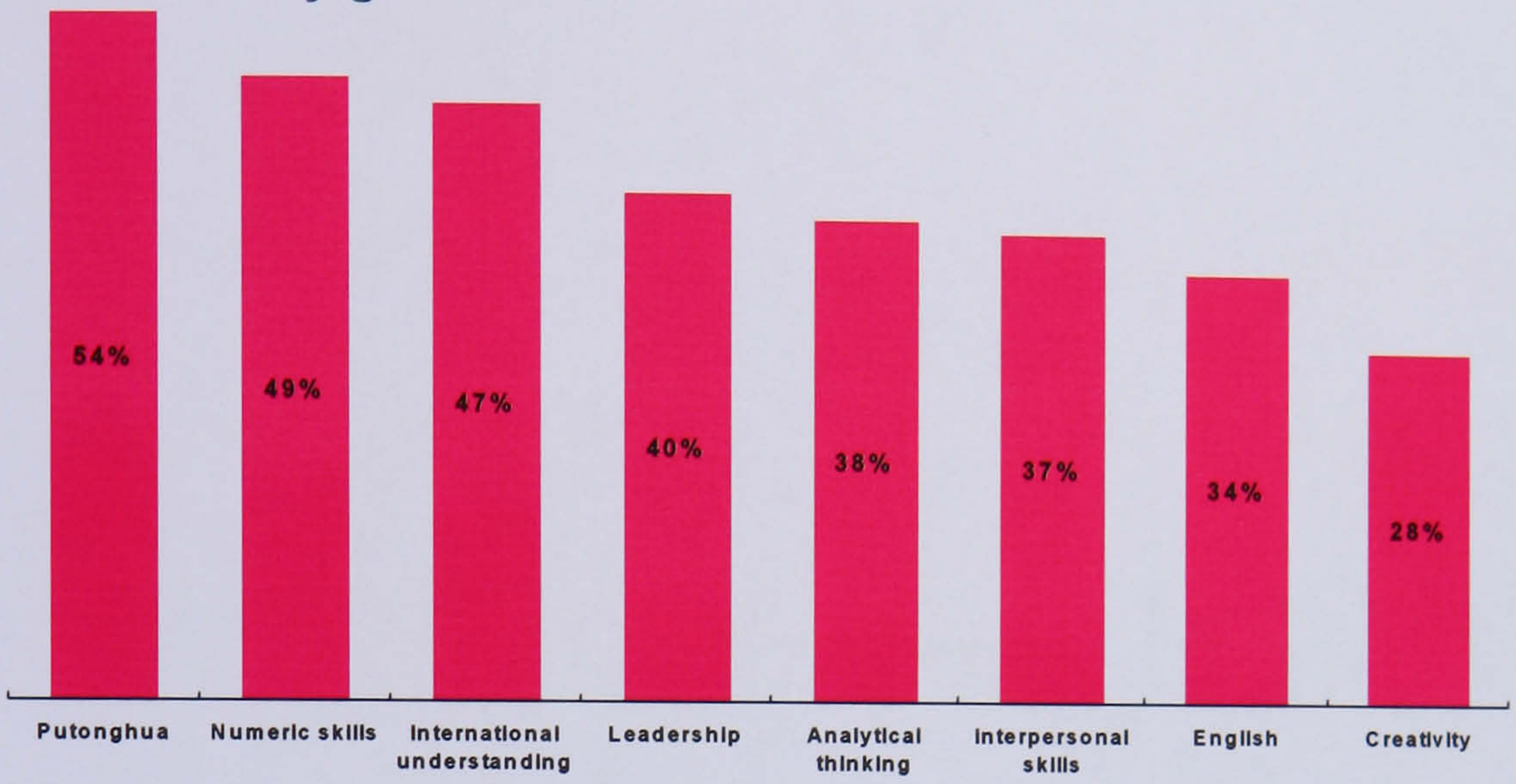
tns

Base: All respondents (n=698)

Areas of better performance

Asia

Q **In what areas do you think Asian university graduates are better than HK university graduates?**

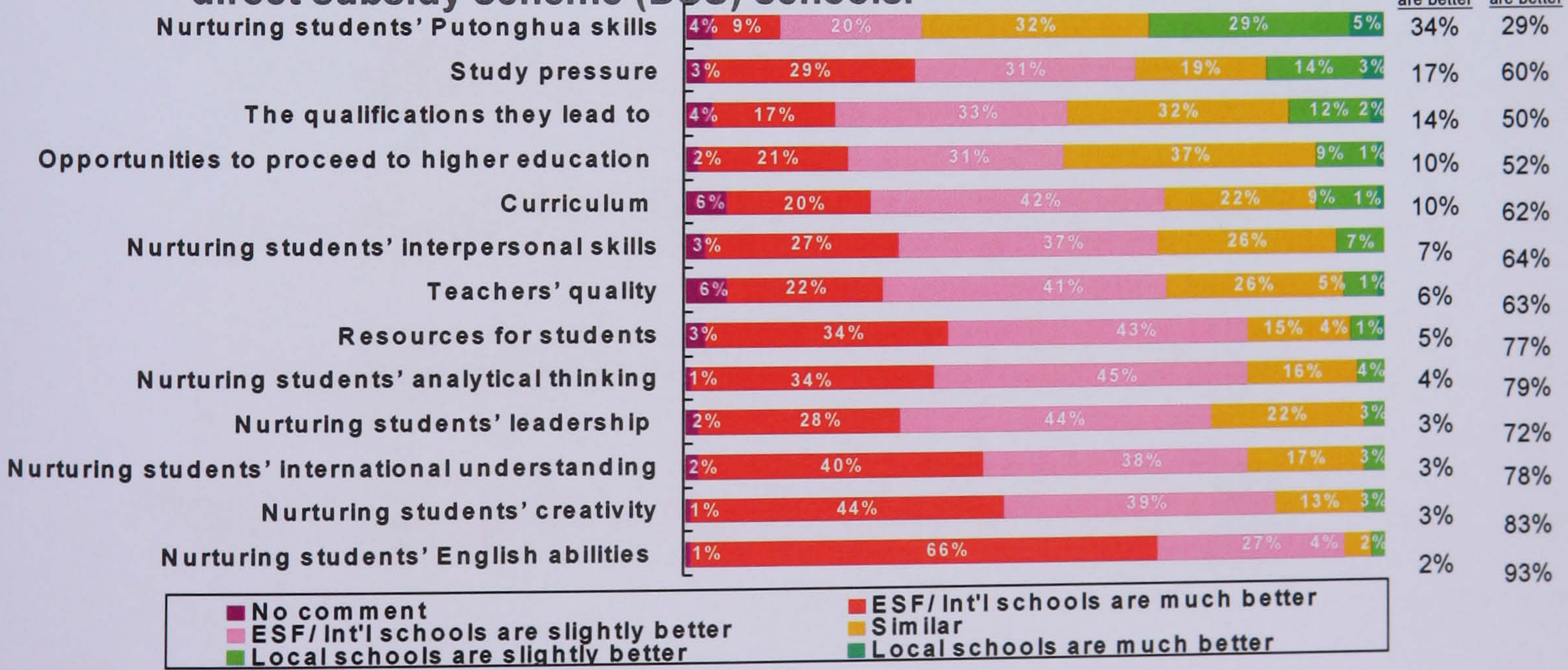


tns Base: Those respondents reported that Asian university graduates are better (n=143)

Page 23

Performance of local schools

Q **How do you rate the performance of local schools, compared with international and English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools, in the following areas? Local schools include fully-subsidised, private and direct subsidy scheme (DSS) schools.**

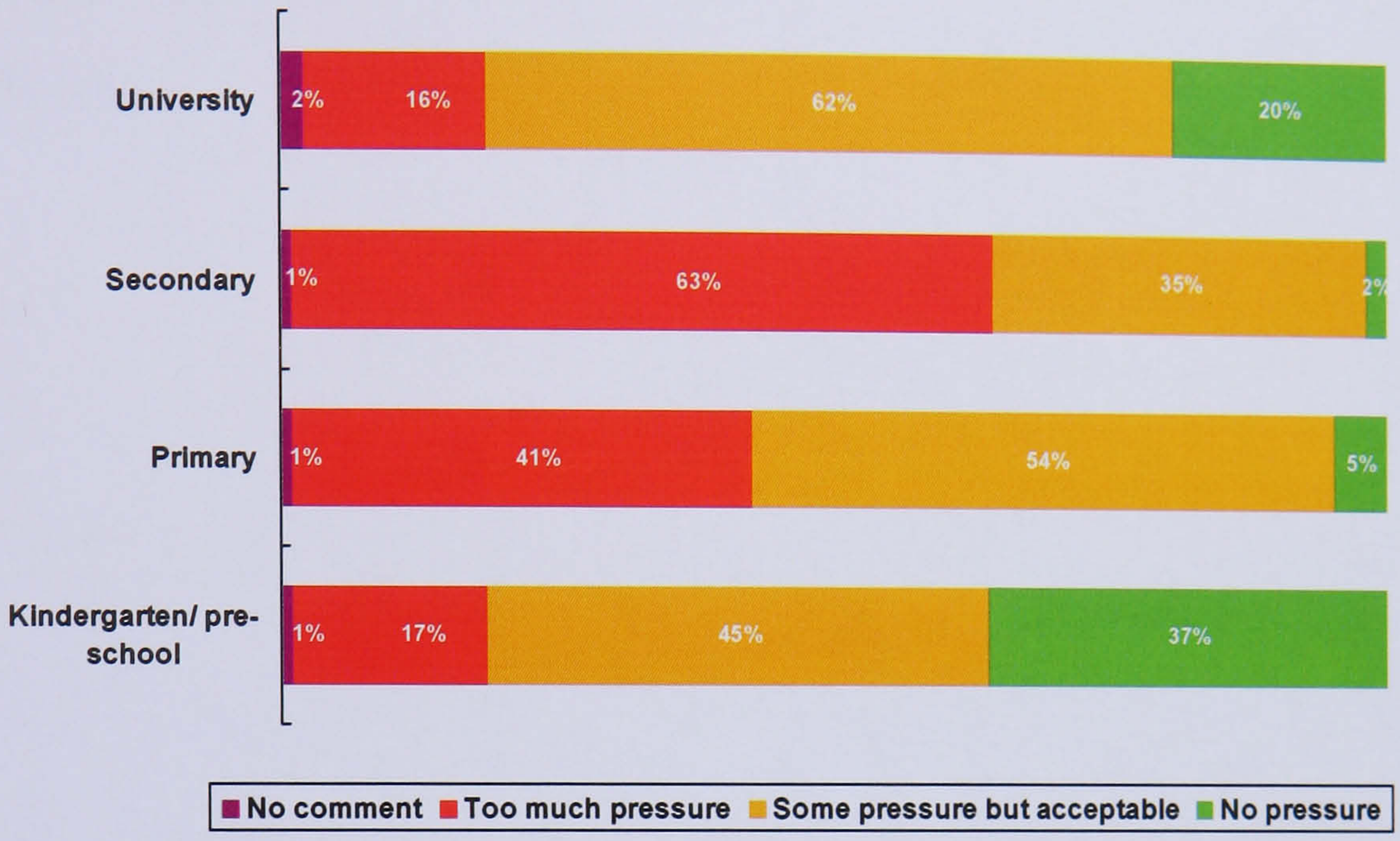


tns Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 24

Student pressure today

Q **Under the current education system, how do you rate the pressure facing students at different levels?**



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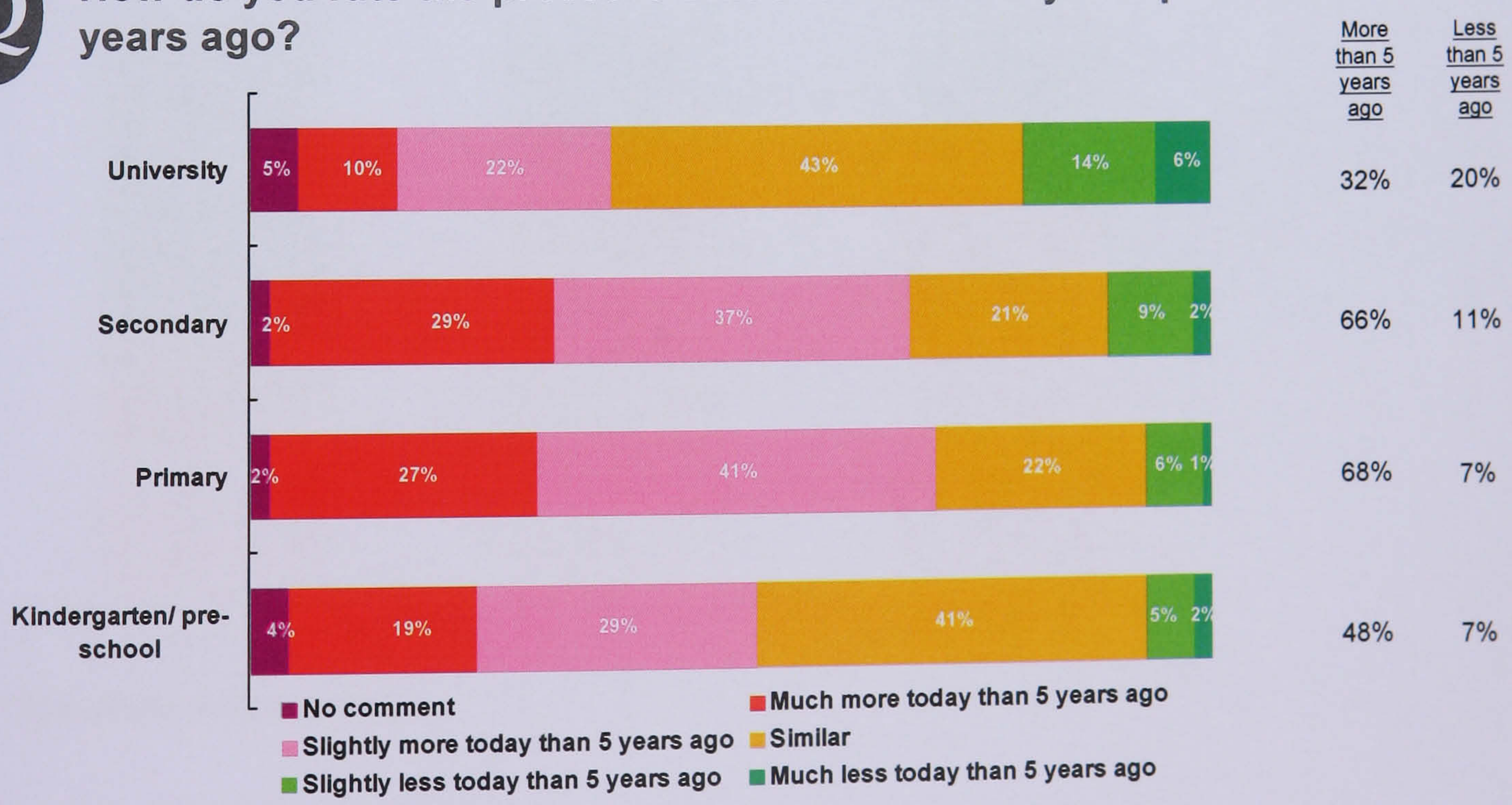
Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 25

Student pressure compared with 5 years ago

Q **How do you rate the pressure students face today compared with 5 years ago?**



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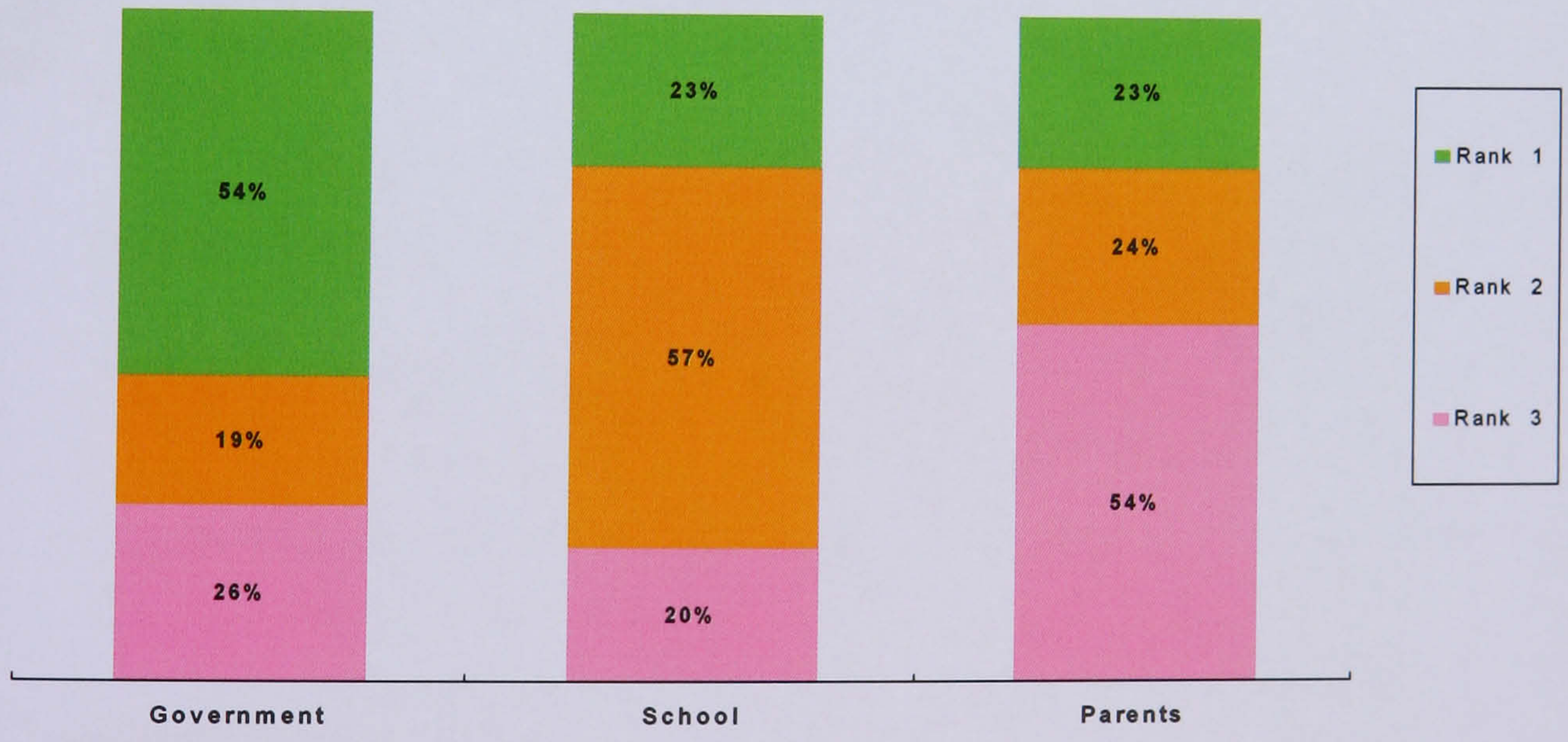
Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 26

Proposed Reform Initiatives

Responsibility for Hong Kong education

Q Who do you think should take the most responsibility for ensuring the quality of education in Hong Kong? Please rank from 1 to 3.



Base: All respondents (n=698)

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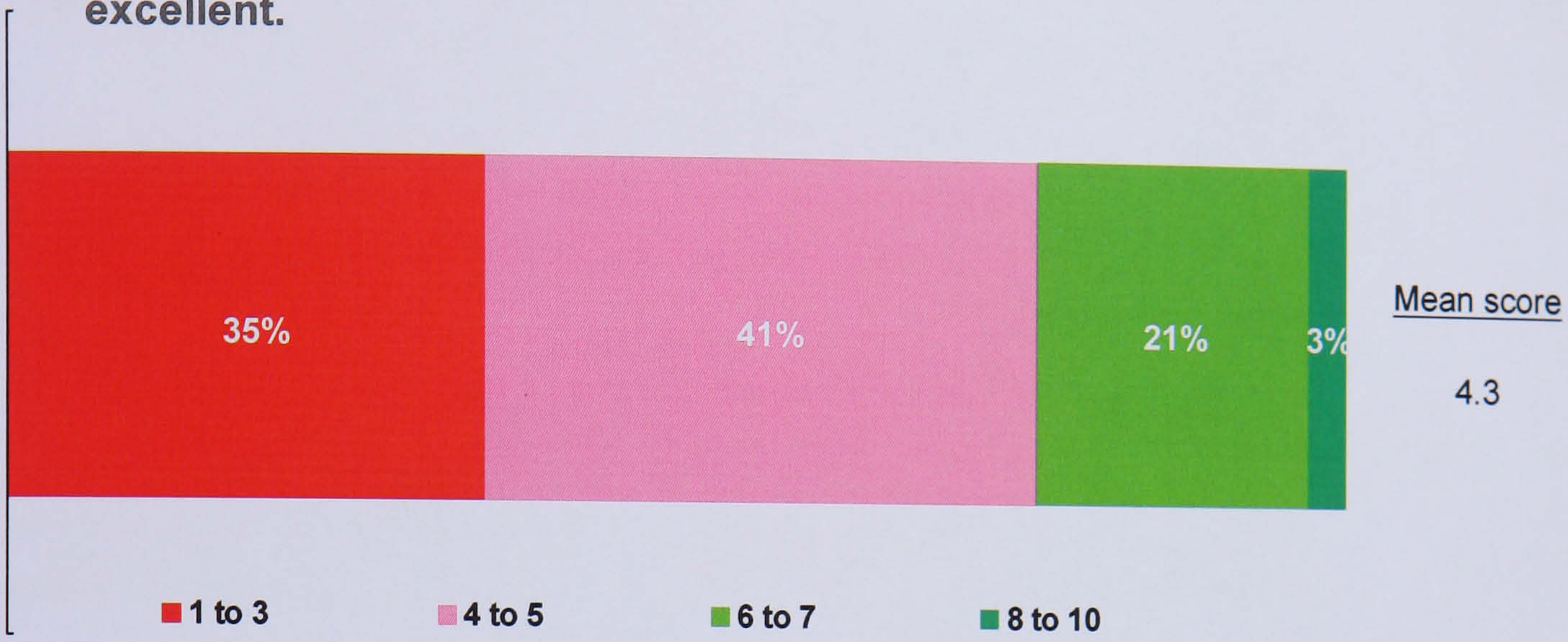
Overall performance

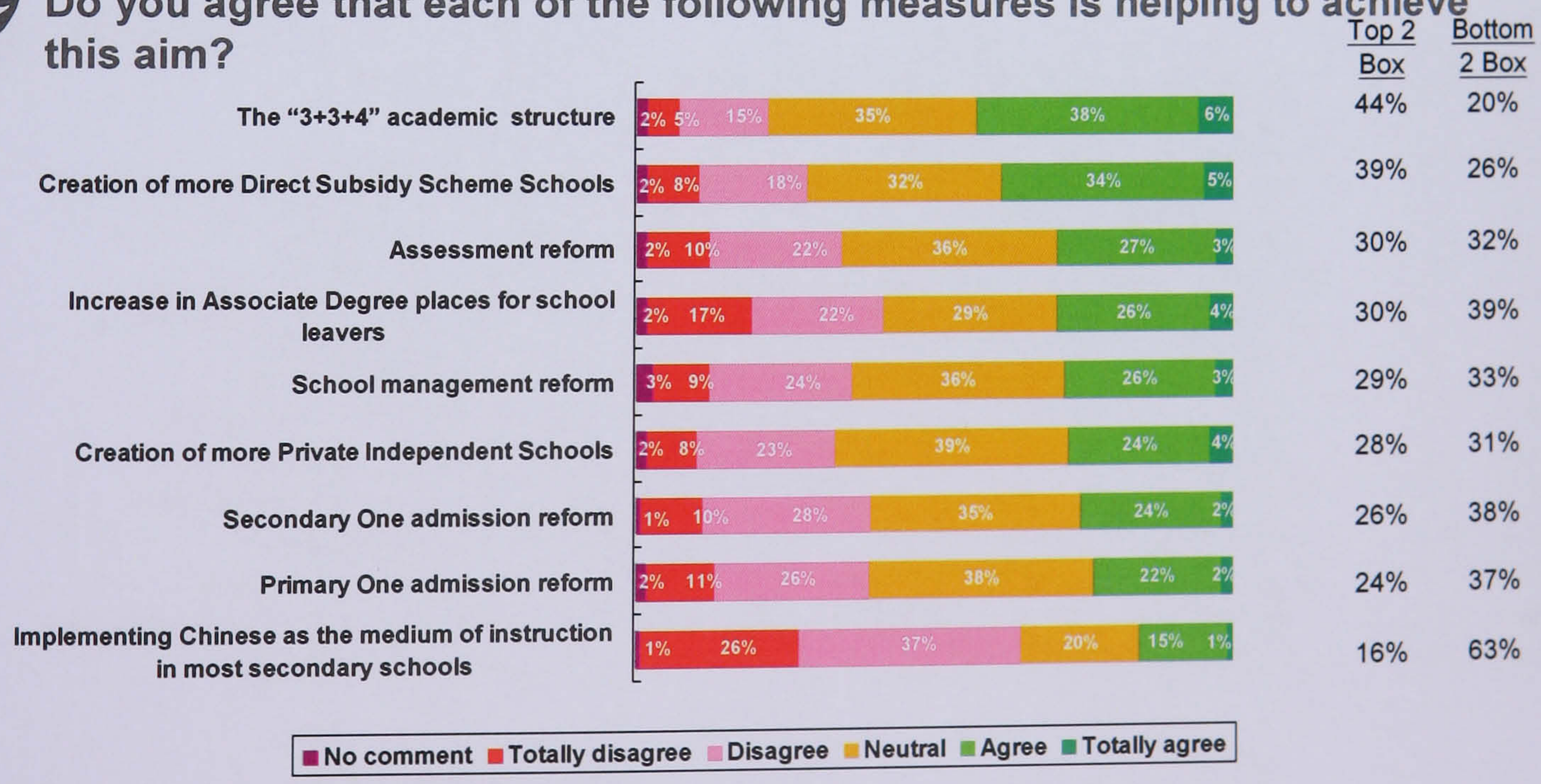
Q What is your rating of the HKSAR government's performance in providing quality education in Hong Kong today? Please rate using a 10-point scale, where 1 represents very poor and 10 represents excellent.



Base: All respondents (n=698)

Effectiveness of measures

Q HK education has been under reform since 2000, with the government implementing a series of measures to improve the quality of education. Do you agree that each of the following measures is helping to achieve this aim?

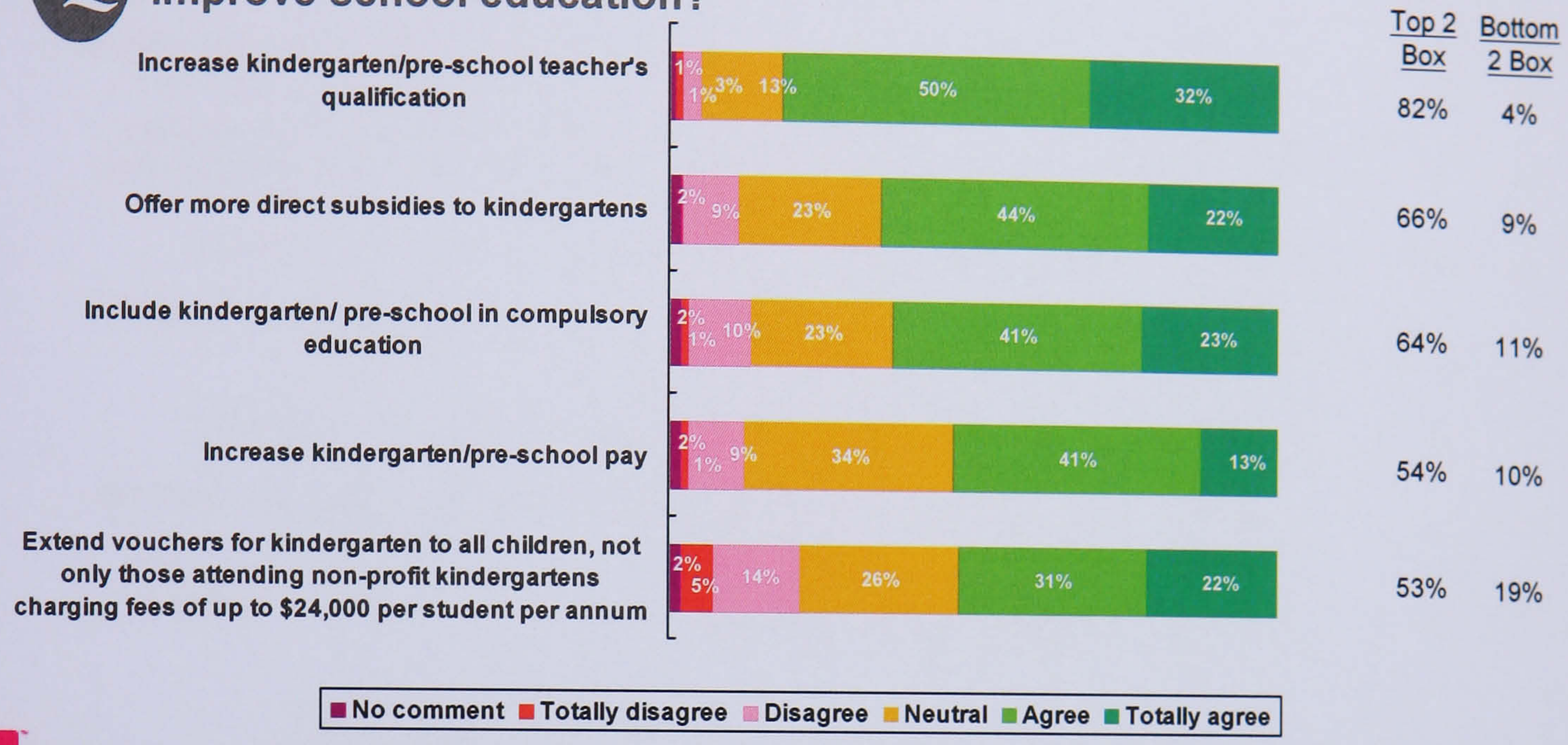


Base: All respondents (n=698)

Initiatives to improve education

Kindergarten/ Pre-school

Do you agree the government should adopt the following measures to improve school education?



Base: All respondents (n=698)

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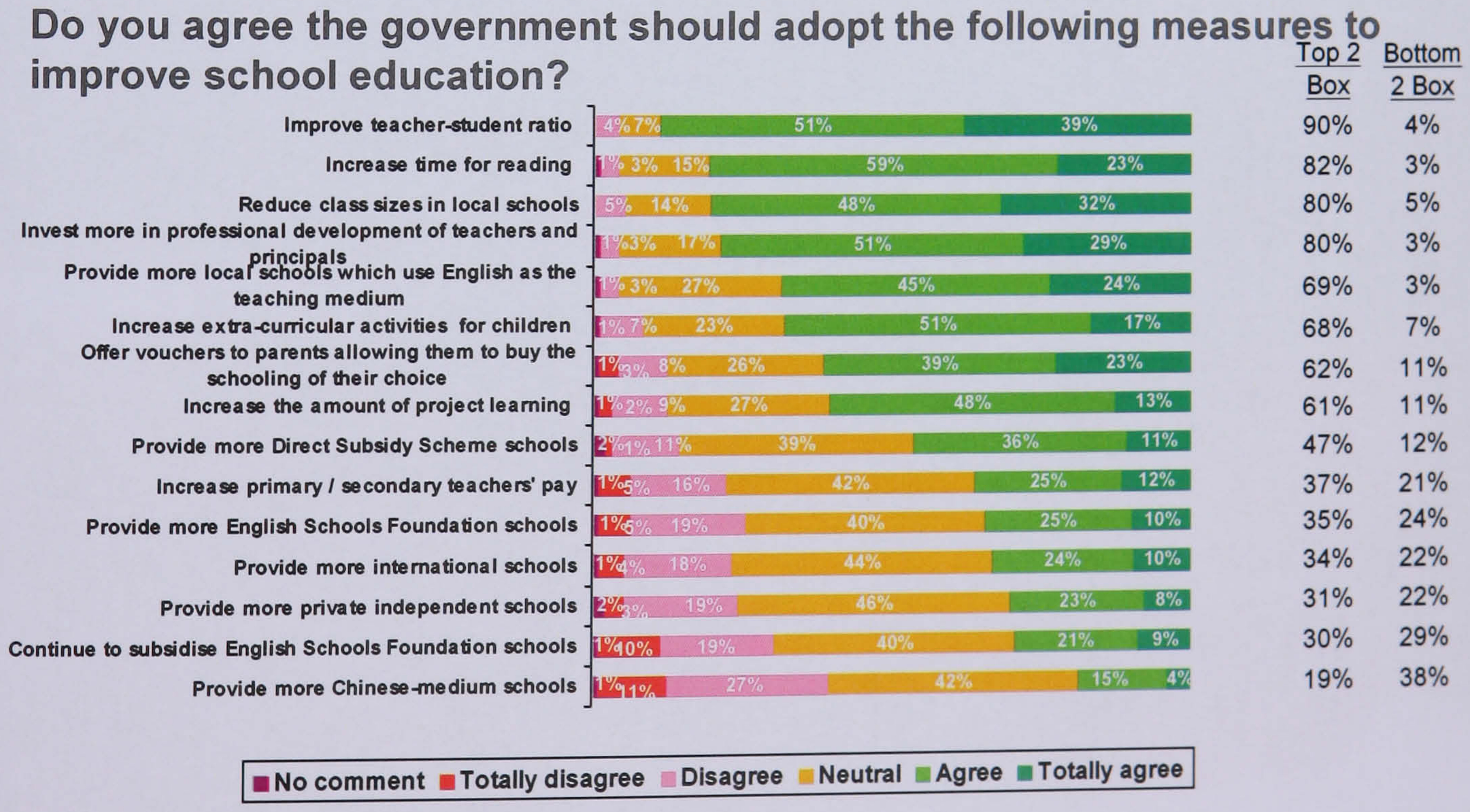
Initiatives to improve education

Primary/ Secondary

Do you agree the government should adopt the following measures to improve school education?

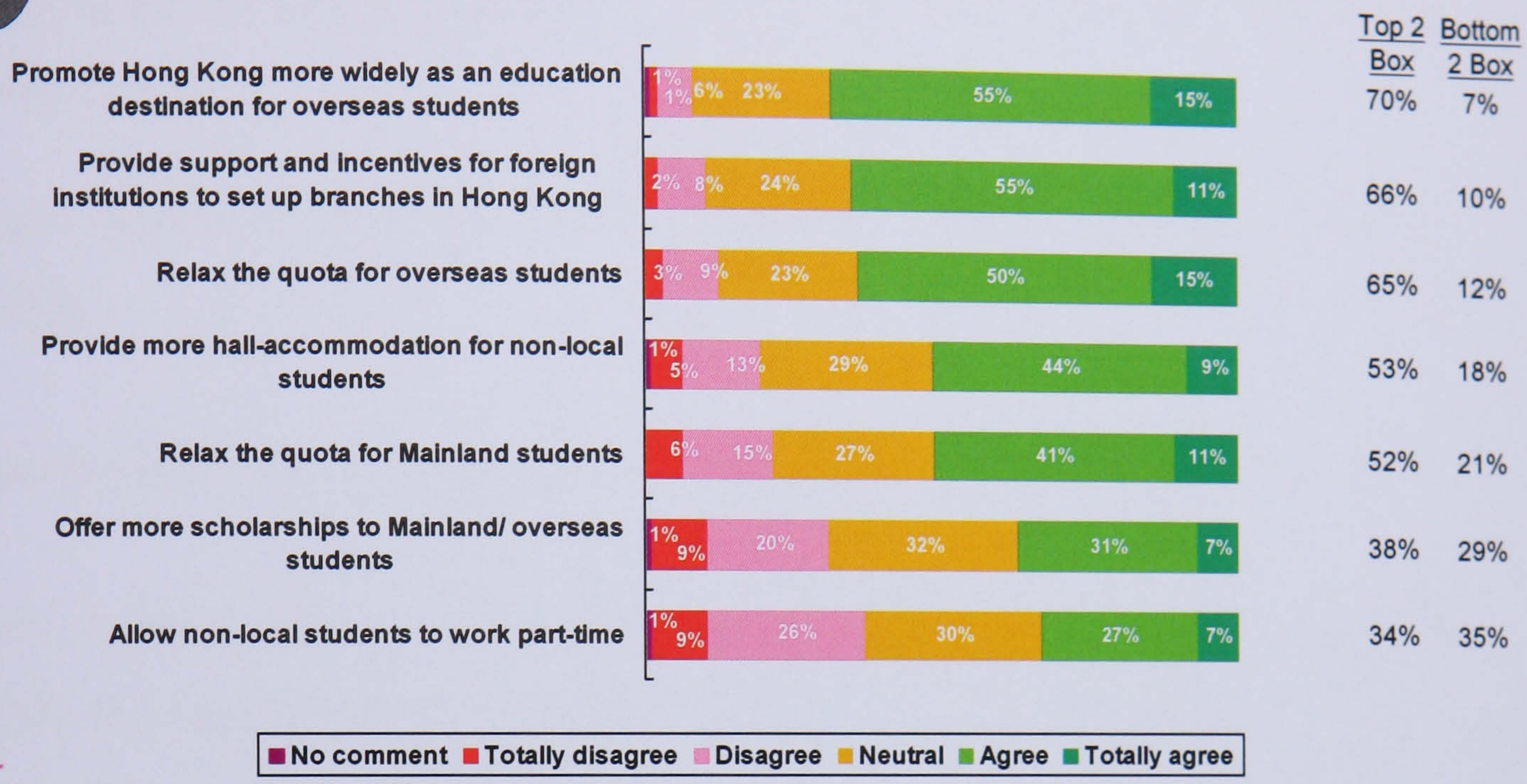


Base: All respondents (n=698)

Page 32

Measures to promote HK as an education hub

Q **Do you think Government should adopt the following measures to promote Hong Kong as an education hub?**



Base: All respondents (n=698)

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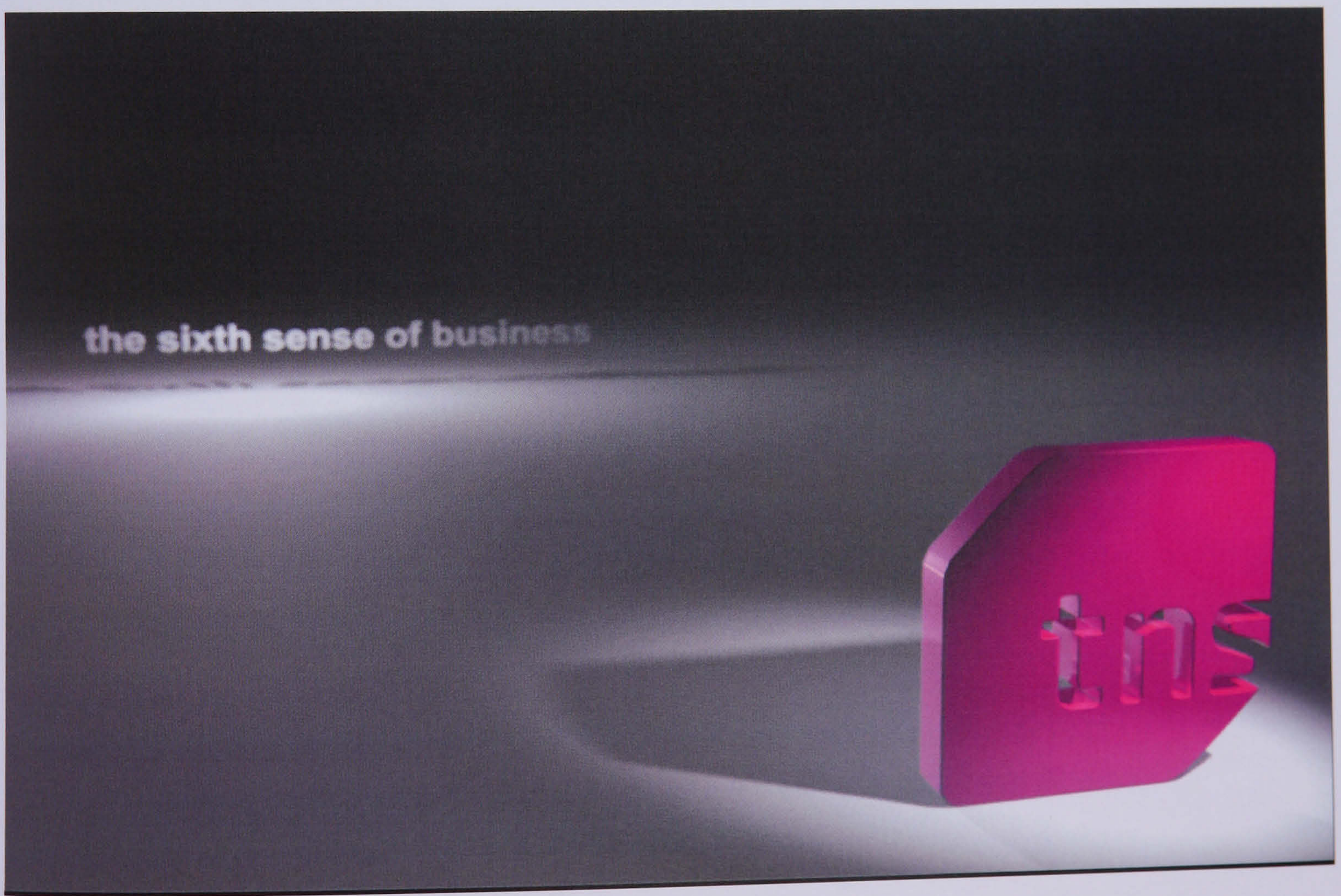

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