

# **Keeping the Policy Window Closed: Framing Putonghua as a Medium of Instruction in Hong Kong**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines 138 news articles published in Hong Kong print media on Putonghua as a medium of instruction (PMI) for teaching Chinese during a one-year period. Informed by theories of framing and the multiple streams approach (MSA), the study investigated the local Chinese print media's participation in the PMI policy process. Detailed content analysis revealed how the press discursively impeded policy outputs with regard to PMI in Hong Kong. The results remind policy entrepreneurs of the importance of framing and counter-framing. More studies from the policy process perspective are needed to explore the ways in which stakeholders, policy entrepreneurs and policy makers engage with the mass media in the educational language policy debate.

## **Introduction**

Since the early 1990s, scholars have noted that in education policy research, the role of the media 'may have been underplayed' (Wallace 1993, p. 322). To understand 'the media's participation in the education policy process', theories, approaches and methods developed in the fields of education policy and communication studies should be combined to offer 'a starting point' for a more comprehensive understanding (ibid, p. 323). Scholars in language policy research have also realised the need for 'a constructive, interdisciplinary dialogue engaging in the different advantages of methods, concepts, and concerns' (Peled, Ives & Ricento 2014, p. 296). A number of studies have focused on the role of mass media in shaping education or language policy. For example, Blackmore and Thorpe (2003) show how a neo-liberal government strategically utilised the media to promote radical education reform. More recent studies analyse the way newspapers frame language policy incidents to construct and influence public opinion (Gao 2015, in press; Tollefson 2015). Research on language policy, however, could go further in terms of interdisciplinarity. Education policy, language policy and media studies have been treated as different fields of research, and insights from policy *process* theories have seldom been included in educational language policy studies. To address these limitations, this paper uses framing theory from media studies and the multiple streams approach (MSA) from policy process studies to examine the print media coverage of Putonghua as a medium of instruction (PMI) for teaching Chinese in Hong Kong. The study

focuses on media participation in this particular policy process in terms of reporting activities that were triggered by an incident in early 2014.

In February 2014, many Hong Kong residents found themselves in a public debate about the role of Putonghua (the national standard form of spoken Chinese) in teaching the Chinese language as a school subject; it had previously been taught in Cantonese, a regional Chinese variety that was the lingua franca for 89.5% of the residents in the city (Lai 2013). The debate arose in response to a content update on the Education Bureau's website in which two statements were redacted: the first noted a lack of 'substantial evidence suggesting the improved general language competence among students who learn Chinese in Putonghua' and the second reported the results of two research projects in which 'students who learnt Chinese in Putonghua demonstrated no more, or sometimes even less, competence than their counterparts who learnt Chinese in Cantonese' ('Disadvantages of PMI Redacted' 2014). The deletion of the two statements caused worry among those who perceived it as a move for a policy change in favour of PMI or, in Kingdon's (2016) terms, as the possible opening of a 'policy window'. A group of student volunteers who noticed the deletions expressed anxiety about the possible next move: compulsory PMI for teaching Chinese. They created a Facebook page on February 6 with the following stated purpose: 'We stand firm against PMI as it threatens the very existence of our unique culture and language, which we strive to protect' (PMI Students Concern Group n.d.). Within five hours, these students had collected more than 2,000 Likes. Later, this group became a registered NGO called the PMI Students Concern Group, which attracted media attention and continuous reporting activities, on which the present study focuses.

### **PMI in the context of mainland–Hong Kong conflicts**

Medium of instruction (MOI) has been a sensitive and heatedly debated topic in Hong Kong for a long time. In the last few decades, the city has witnessed multiple rounds of MOI switchover and fine-tuning (Evans 2013). Residents in Hong Kong understand that apart from the apparent pedagogical justifications, MOI policies are highly political (Tollefson & Tusi 2004). After the handover of sovereignty, the Hong Kong government established its bi-literacy (Chinese and English in writing) and tri-lingual (English, Cantonese and Putonghua in speaking) policy. Because Putonghua is China's national language, PMI for teaching Chinese was set as a long-term goal by the education authorities (Tam 2012). Considering that Cantonese is the mother tongue of the majority and that no concrete evidence was found

to support the pedagogical assumption that learning Chinese in Putonghua would be more effective, the government, although encouraging individual schools to adopt PMI, has not made it compulsory (Tam 2012). However, the website incident could be interpreted as indicating that the government may have opened a policy window for compulsory PMI.

In language policy incidents, people ‘whose communal language is a smaller one, not spoken by many people outside the community’ often feel acute tension (Weinstock 2014, p. 320). In the PMI case, Hong Kong residents may feel that their culture and language are increasingly threatened in light of the mainland–Hong Kong conflicts, which have been widely covered in the media. In recent years, this dense city has been overloaded as ‘an increasing number of mainland Chinese have come to Hong Kong to travel, study, work, and reside’ (Li 2016, p. 153). A related series of problems have occurred, such as mainland ‘pregnant women giving birth in Hong Kong ... fast-growing local property prices, the parallel traders’ and so forth (ibid, p. 154). More importantly, the role of Beijing in Hong Kong’s political development has been viewed negatively by many local residents. The alignment between Beijing and the local business elite since the handover has ‘contributed to the increase in economic inequality, which is highest among developed economies’ (Ortmann 2015, p. 34). Moreover, Beijing’s tightening control over Hong Kong (e.g., the ruling out of true universal suffrage and proposal of a Beijing-defined policy) has been perceived as ‘opposition to the democratisation of Hong Kong’ (ibid, p. 7); this eventually led to the pro-democracy Umbrella Movement. The mass media discourse on the mainland–Hong Kong conflicts has been constructed against the backdrop of these issues, and the public debate about PMI is situated in this context.

### **Framing language policy in the print media**

Tsui and Tollefson (2007) note that increasing numbers of MOI policy debates are taking place in the mass media with the active participation of stakeholders and the wider public. The media can shape the policies adopted in multilingual contexts (Tollefson 2015). In fact, the press in Hong Kong constituted a major arena for the PMI debate. However, how local Chinese print media use news reports and commentaries to influence the PMI policy process has remained unexplored.

Framing is useful to investigate the media’s participation in the policy process. Frames are ‘organising principles’ from which certain aspects of the world derive meaning (Reese 2010, p. 17). These aspects are made salient in the print media ‘in such a way as to promote a

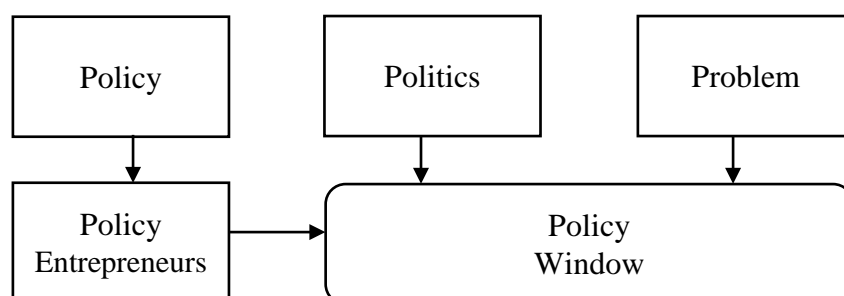
particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entman 1993, p. 52). As ‘an unavoidable reality of the public communication process’, framing can result in challenges to the traditional norms of news reporting activities (e.g. objectivity, impartiality and neutrality) (Nisbet 2010, pp. 44-5). Hence, analysing media coverage of policy debates from a framing perspective means that the media are seen as actors who seek to influence politics and public policy.

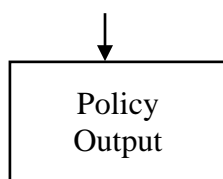
Several studies have adopted a framing perspective to investigate the role of the media in shaping language policy. For example, Gao (2015) examines the coverage of the ‘dialect crisis’ by state-owned print media in China and finds that regional Chinese varieties (or dialects) were framed as identity markers, individuals’ cultural heritage and tools to resist cultural invasion from the outside. Shao and Gao (in press) consider frames in Chinese state-owned print media reports on English in high-stakes examinations and find that newspapers in China ‘speak for the Chinese government’s control of language policy formulation and implementation’. Tollefson (2015) points out that people in power ‘have been able to use their access to media resources to establish a symbolic unity among diverse groups supporting English MOI’ (p. 145).

From the framing perspective, it seems that these studies on the role of the press in shaping education/language policy could have made stronger claims if policy *process* theories explaining ‘the interactions over time between public policy and its surrounding actors, events and contexts, as well as the policy or policies’ outcomes’ had been incorporated (Weible 2014, p. 5).

### **The multiple streams approach**

A useful framework to explain the policymaking process is the multiple streams approach (MSA) (Fig. 1) (Zahariadis 2014). Based on Kingdon’s 1984 seminal work on policy window (see Kingdon 2016), MSA is particularly helpful for analysing the role of mass media in the policy process because it considers the whole policy process – including agenda setting, decision-making and implementation – throughout which the media take part.





**Fig. 1** The MSA Framework (adapted from Zahariadis 2014, p. 31)

A policy window is ‘an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions or to push attention to their special problems’ (Kingdon 2016 p. 433); it is a critical moment for a policy proposal to become actual policy output. This window may be opened by domestic and/or international politics, a particular problem or a solution proposed by policy entrepreneurs. When the problem, politics and policy streams converge, the possibility of opening the window is highest – that is, decision makers are then most likely to adopt the proposal.

Media participation is important in each stream. In the problem stream, by making particular indicators salient or focusing only on certain events, the media inform the public and policymakers regarding whether a situation is deemed as a problem to be addressed. In the politics stream, the media pass the national mood to the public and cover the pressure-group campaigns. In the policy stream, the media are the arena for debates about the details of proposed policies. Adding the MSA dimension to the analysis of news reports and commentaries could thus help gain insights into the mass media’s participation in and influence on the process of educational language policy.

## **The study**

Informed by the MSA, the study addresses the following research question:

How did the local Chinese print media participate in the PMI for teaching Chinese debate by means of framing following the aforementioned EDB’s website incident?

## **Data collection**

WiseNews, a database covering almost all local Chinese newspapers and magazines, was accessed to collect news articles. Because ‘the entire discourse was relevant’ (Reese 2010 p. 29), I included reports, editorials and featured articles. The time period was set as Feb 4,

2014 to Feb 3, 2015. The Chinese keyword ‘普教中’, meaning ‘PMI for teaching Chinese’, was used to search target items. Some 200 articles appeared. After removing advertisements and articles mentioning PMI only in passing, 138 articles from 15 newspapers and magazines remained in the corpus. The present study did not include articles from English print media because the author found only four articles published during the selected period in one local English newspaper.

### **Data analysis**

Identification of how PMI was framed was conducted by a coding process for excerpts containing catchphrases, topic sentences, metaphors and problem definitions that denote an organising principle. Excerpts rather than full articles constituted the units of analysis because ‘frames are embedded across a body of discourse and speakers, rather than clearly identified within a single article’ (Reese 2010, p. 29). After two rounds of reading, several patterns started to emerge. I carefully examined these patterns, repeatedly referring back to the full texts, and then built parent nodes for the frames. Each highlighted excerpt was assigned to one frame category. Because the same frame can be used to support different arguments, child nodes for arguments were also built. The main argument of each excerpt was determined and assigned to one argument category. As a result, four frames and 11 arguments were finalised. For an inter-coder reliability check, thirty excerpts and the frame/argument categories were sent to a faculty member; the agreement percentage was 93.3%.

### **Findings**

In this section, I first report the descriptive statistics of the frames and the arguments identified from the 138 articles. I then discuss the details of the excerpts that were translated into English by the author. To follow the principles of research ethics (Tao, Shao and Gao in press), all the names mentioned in the original news articles were anonymised.

#### **Frames and arguments identified**

Four frames were identified: Legal status of Cantonese, Culture/language crisis, Politics, and Pedagogy and linguistics.

**Table 1** Frames and arguments identified

| Frame                            | Argument                     | Number | Source  |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|---|
| Legal status of Cantonese<br>(6) | No legal protection          | 3      | AD = 1; ST = 2  |
|                                  | Not a dialect                | 3      | AD = 2; SU = 1  |
| Culture/language crisis<br>(21)  | In danger                    | 18     | AD = 5; MD = 2; AM = 1; ST = 2; OD = 2; MP = 2; SU = 3; EJ = 1                  |
|                                  | Not in danger                | 3      | HD = 1; WW = 1; OD = 1  |
| Politics<br>(58)                 | Political issue              | 22     | AM = 2; MP = 3; SU = 4; SP = 2; ST = 2; EJ = 5; MD = 1; AD = 2; ET = 1          |
|                                  | Pan-politicised issue        | 7      | ST = 1; TK = 4; MP = 1; HD = 1  |
|                                  | mainland–Hong Kong conflicts | 29     | HD = 2; MP = 4; EJ = 2; AD = 6; ST = 6; SU = 4; AM = 2; SP = 1; ET = 1; SK = 1  |
| Pedagogy and linguistics<br>(53) | Cantonese’s advantage        | 10     | MP = 4; AD = 2; AM = 3; SK = 1  |
|                                  | Putonghua’s advantage        | 1      | MP = 1  |
|                                  | Pedagogical argument         | 29     | MP = 6; SU = 4; TK = 4; SK = 1; ET = 2; WW = 3; ST = 5; OD = 2; EW = 1; HD = 1; |
|                                  | Lack of/counter evidence     | 13     | MP = 2; AD = 1; ET = 1; MD = 3; EW = 1; TK = 1; WW = 1; ST = 1; SP = 1; SK = 1  |

*Note:* *Headline Daily* = HD; *am730* = AM; *Apple Daily* = AD; *Sing Tao Daily* = ST; *The Sun* = SU; *Metro Daily* = MD; *Ming Pao* = MP; *Oriental Daily* = OD; *Hong Kong Economic Journal* = EJ; *Wen Wei Po* = WW; *Sing Pao* = SP; *Hong Kong Economic Times* = ET; *Ta Kung Pao* = TK; *Sky Post* = SK; *East Week* = EW

As Table 1 suggests, the Politics frame is used most frequently, appearing in 58 articles, followed by the Pedagogy and linguistics frame, which appears in 53 articles. Culture/language crisis is a less frequently used frame, appearing in 21 articles. The definitions of these frames and the arguments are introduced in detail in the following subsections. Because the legal status of the Cantonese frame is found in only six articles in the first month after the website incident, a brief overview of its adoption will suffice here. These six articles discuss the legal status of Cantonese, among which three hold the view that the status of Cantonese has no legal protection by the government, as shown in the following example:

The public will not be satisfied with the so-called clarification by the Education Bureau because it fails to take any concrete measures to ensure the legal status of Cantonese in Hong Kong. (AD)

The other three articles using the same frame emphasise that Cantonese is a language rather than a dialect, e.g.:

Some think that whether a language is a dialect or not depends on what the official language is. Now that Putonghua is the only official language of China, all other languages are, automatically, dialects. This is absurd ... German is the official language of Germany, but some German citizens living in the France-Germany border area speak French. Does this make French a German dialect? (SU)

The Legal status of Cantonese frame was not found later, probably because there was little room to debate against the consensus among Cantonese speakers that Cantonese is a language rather than a dialect (Gao 2012). The other three frames, however, were used throughout the entire time period.

### **Culture/language crisis**

The Culture/language crisis frame suggests that the local culture/language is under threat, raising 'well-justified alarm' (Fishman 2001, p. 1). Twenty-one articles adopt this frame, among which only three claim that there is no danger at all. Eighteen articles frame PMI for teaching Chinese as a danger to Cantonese or as an indicator of local culture on the wane. Half of the 18 draw examples from language incidents in other places to illustrate how local culture/language is endangered. The 2010 Cantonese Protection Movement that occurred in Guangzhou (Gao 2012) is mentioned in six articles.

In 2010, citizens in Guangzhou took to the streets to protect Cantonese, their mother tongue, protesting against Putonghua as the medium of news broadcasting. After a quick victory, Guangzhou TV Station now uses Putonghua ... Shanghai was occupied by Putonghua even earlier with the majority of the new generation unable to understand Shanghainese... (MP)



The example of Guangzhou can be quite persuasive because Hong Kong residents are familiar with the 2010 Cantonese Protection Movement because of the intensive coverage by the mass media. The movement was a demonstration of public reaction to a proposal to switch the language of news broadcasting in Guangzhou to Putonghua (Gao 2012). Although the government promised at the time that it would not marginalise Cantonese, broadcasting changed suddenly from Cantonese to Putonghua in 2014 without prior notice.

Similarly, examples of language crisis in other places are provided in other articles, as in the following excerpt:

The next generation of Tibetans learned the Han people's language and culture. The Tibetan language was totally ignored in formal education ... In recent years, the call for PMI to teach Chinese in Hong Kong has been frequently heard ... The trend seems irresistible... (EJ)

Articles discussing endangered languages can enhance perceptions of the Culture/language crisis, which might strike a chord with readers who worry about the possible marginalisation of Cantonese in Hong Kong. Conversely, three articles using the same frame insist that Cantonese language and culture are safe. For example:

...A headmaster whose school adopts PMI for teaching Chinese says it improves students' grammar. Because other subjects are taught in English or Cantonese, PMI for teaching Chinese will not endanger the so-called 'cultural and linguistic heritage'. (WW)

In many schools, Putonghua is not the only medium of instruction for all classes. In addition, the majority of the local population speaks Cantonese as their mother tongue. There is no reason to worry about the fading of Cantonese. (OD)

The argument of the three articles asserting that Cantonese is not in danger is weakened by 18 articles using the same frame. The supporting evidence used in the three articles comes from personal experiences and opinions or some particular school and is thus much less persuasive than the vivid examples of endangered languages and the follow-up development

of the 2010 Cantonese Protection Movement. The pro-PMI articles using the Culture/language crisis frame could scarcely have competed with their rival articles.

### **Politics**

The Politics frame suggests that the issue of PMI is not simply pedagogical but also highly political (Tollefson & Tusi 2004). Under the guise of pedagogy are hidden agendas, competing ideologies, conflicts of interests and political conspiracies. In the present study, the Politics frame was found to have been the most frequently adopted by the Hong Kong print media – 58 articles used this frame, and three main arguments were identified (See Table 1).

Twenty-two articles were published during the one-year period framing PMI for teaching Chinese as a political issue. The earliest commentary using this argument was published on February 7, 2014. Citing Daudet's short story 'La Dernière Classe', the article implies that PMI is an invaders' policy:

Prussian troops have occupied French cities. 'The order from Berlin has reached schools... Only German is allowed in schools... Today is your last French class.' At the end of the class, the teacher wrote on the blackboard in the largest letters he could: 'Vive la France!' This story illustrates well the meaning of language in politics. The Germans not only occupied the cities but also wanted to occupy the field of language. The French had to be exterminated culturally through forcible assimilation. (MP)

Another article also mentions this French short story, associating PMI with the Franco-Prussian War:

People who have the very basic common sense in culture and history know that the language issue has nothing to do with academics. It is definitively political, or otherwise the French writer Daudet would not have written the story 'La Dernière Classe'. (ST)

The following excerpts also illustrate how authors try to persuade readers that PMI is not simply a pedagogical issue. Although mentioning the Communist Party tended to be a frequent strategy, some articles challenge the prestige of the national/common/official

language by pointing out that no language is by nature linguistically superior to its counterparts:

The PMI debate is not about language at all. It is a political issue... 99% of the local population speak Cantonese. To enforce Putonghua in Hong Kong raises suspicions that the Communist Party is taking colonialising measures... (SU)

The typology dividing languages into the common language and dialects is political. Every single language has its geographic origin... It is politics rather than language *per se* that makes a regional language the common language. Simply put, it is designated by the regime. The issue of which language is the common language and which is a dialect is thus, in its essence, political. (SP)

In total, 22 articles frame PMI as a political strategy by Beijing to tighten its grip on Hong Kong. Voices in favour of PMI counter-argue that PMI could have been a purely pedagogical issue if it had not been pan-politicised by the Pan-democracy Camp and the Localism Camp. For example:

To incarnadine PMI (to relate PMI to the Communist Party) is overly pan-politicising. (ST)

There are two anti-PMI discussions. One concerns pedagogical effectiveness. The other is more about the pan-politicised conspiracy theory. (TK)

Quoting a spokesperson from the Education Bureau, a news report in Tai Kun Po criticises the pan-politicisation strategy:

Our Bureau deplores the politicisation of an educational issue by a minority of people. (TK)

Seven articles use the Pan-politicised issue argument. However, they could be easily ignored by readers because apart from rival articles using the Political issue argument, 29 articles use the mainland–Hong Kong conflicts argument to oppose PMI. The powerful discourse of the mainland–Hong Kong conflicts (See Li 2016) could have strong effects on local readers.

Framing PMI as another component of the conflicts may have been viewed as more effective. Using this argument, these 29 articles present binary good-versus-evil opposition between Hong Kong and the mainland and between Hongkongers and mainlanders. All causes of trouble are attributed to Beijing and mainlanders. At the time when the Hong Kong–mainland relationship was particularly sensitive, this radically bipolar framing strategy might have had mass appeal. The following are some examples:

Those Putonghua speakers from the mainland are going to destroy every culture and every language wherever they go. Hongkongers need to wake up and protect our own language. (AD)

Now the Education Bureau is advocating PMI. It is clear that the leaders of the Communist Party of China want to govern Hongkongers with a dictatorship and to unify language use and kill Cantonese. (AD)

The Communist Party has been suppressing all dialects these years ... to serve the regime... The mainland government officials' anti-intellectual, uncivilised cultural policies come from poor moral standards and shabby administration... (MP)

As Table 1 shows, 51 articles using the Politics frame argue against PMI for teaching Chinese, and only 7 support it; thus, the debate is heavily one-sided.

### **Pedagogy and linguistics**

Articles in the category of Pedagogy and linguistics frame the debate of PMI for teaching Chinese as a pedagogical or linguistic issue. Four main arguments using this frame were identified (See Table 1). Ten articles emphasise that Cantonese is linguistically and culturally superior it has nine tones, compared with the four tones in Putonghua, and is closer to the spoken language used in the age of classical Chinese literature. It may be surprising that although the argument that no language is by nature linguistically superior was used to defend Cantonese, the superiority of Cantonese is also used as an argument. See the following examples:

From the cultural perspective, he (a professor) thinks that PMI should not be adopted... Cantonese is a superior language that retains some traces of ancient culture... It is so elegant and quaint. (MP)

Compared with Northern languages, Cantonese is more elegant phonetically, grammatically and lexically. (AM)

The following excerpt comes from the only article emphasising the superiority of Putonghua. It quotes a headmaster using old rhetoric from the perspective of instrumental motivation (Gardner & MacIntyre 1991). Again, this argument in favour of PMI was outnumbered by the opposition.

I always tell parents not to be narrow-minded. Don't focus only on Hong Kong. Consider the wider world. Putonghua and simplified Chinese are used in the United Nations! (MP)

Thirteen articles argue that there is a lack of evidence to support the pedagogical effectiveness of PMI or that there is even counter evidence. The implication is that because there has been no consensus, PMI should not be widely adopted.

Twenty-nine articles draw on more detailed and rational pedagogical arguments, among which 11 are in favour of Cantonese as the MOI not for the sake of Cantonese itself but for the merits of using students' mother tongue in education. Seven articles cite poor Putonghua examination results from a single source to argue for more PMI. One insists that the medium of instruction should be determined by practical classroom needs, not by government officials. Three perceive various MOIs as cognitively harmful and perplexing for children. Seven present technical problems in current PMI classes, such as the blurred boundary between Putonghua as a second language and as an MOI and the challenges of heavily listening-oriented teaching practices.

## **Discussion**

The MSA framework is used here to interpret the role of the media in the policy process because it focuses on the whole policy process, including agenda setting, decision-making and implementation (Zahariadis 2014). Analysis of the frames and arguments adopted by the

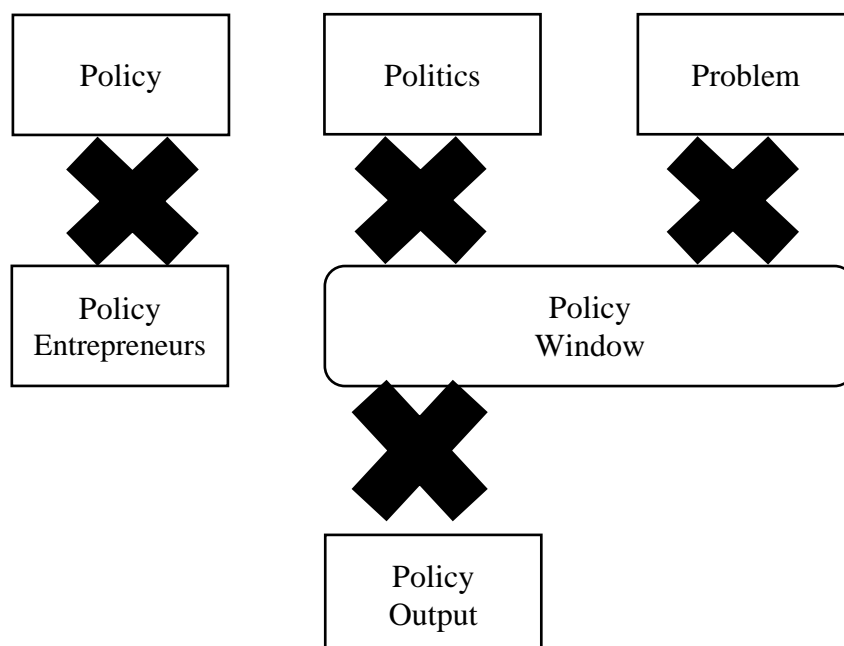
local print media during the one-year period suggests that the local print media attempted to close the policy window for the further development of PMI for teaching Chinese: articles against PMI overwhelmingly outnumber those in favour of it. The policy debate presented by the press was not truly a debate because public opinion was portrayed as almost one-sided.

### The problem stream

The website incident triggered anxiety among local residents, and although PMI for teaching Chinese is not yet compulsory in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, many schools have adopted PMI of their own volition. This may have some consequences. Frame sponsors have presented the culture/language crisis as a problem, claiming that Cantonese language and local culture are in danger. The goal is to make the problem sufficiently salient to persuade that PMI is the sole cause rather than to prove any causal correlation. The frame has also been successful in terms of the presentation of Cantonese as an endangered language of interest to language policy scholars because linguistic diversity is their central concern (Peled, Ives & Ricento 2014). Voices claiming that Cantonese is in no danger or that PMI is not a threat might have difficulty finding a place in the mainstream print media.

Frame sponsors against PMI took control of the problem stream through the monopoly of opinion. This enables them to ensure that the policy window for PMI cannot be opened with ease (See Fig. 2). Further promotion of PMI, regardless of rationale, would not gain support from policy makers in view of the likely public opposition .

Although there could be some other agenda in the problem stream, such ‘problems’ are not significant or salient enough to compete with the discourse associated with culture/language crisis.



**Fig. 2** Keeping the policy window in favour of PMI closed

### **The politics stream**

The mainstream print media in Hong Kong have framed PMI as political. Two arguments or discursive strategies have been used. First, the PMI policy is portrayed as a political agenda. Second, PMI is associated with the powerful discourse of mainland–Hong Kong conflicts. In the 29 articles mentioning this discourse, the attribution of responsibilities is obvious and simple: from the mainland comes all the evil. The binary opposition established in this discourse appears to be simplified, stereotyped and racist. PMI has been portrayed as a powerful weapon of the invading demon, the Communist Party of China, and local people have to fight for their freedom. Indeed, the short story ‘La Dernière Classe’ was brought up in the earliest news commentary using the Politics frame. It has been implied that the current situation is a war in which being politically wrong – in this case, supporting PMI – is tantamount to treason.

With this most frequently adopted Politics frame, the mainstream print media have attempted to create a ‘national mood’ (Zahariadis 2014 p. 34) among citizens such that any further promotion of PMI is politically wrong to keep the policy window in the politics stream for PMI shut.

### **The policy stream**

In the policy stream, the policy entrepreneurs propose their own solutions/policies, hoping that decision makers will adopt them. In the present study, PMI for teaching Chinese has been under the scrutiny of the press. Fifty-three articles touch upon pedagogical and linguistic issues and debate the advantages and disadvantages of PMI and Cantonese as the MOI. At the same time, 13 articles claim the non-existence of evidence or counterevidence of PMI having pedagogical effectiveness to improve students’ written Chinese, which was precisely the deleted content on EDB’s website; however, not a single counterargument of this sort was found in the present study.

Only one news report cites a headmaster who favours Putonghua from an instrumental perspective, whereas 10 articles claim that Cantonese is a linguistically and culturally better MOI. Some of the articles use explicit language filled with nativist sentiment to describe

Putonghua as a shabby language spoken by Northern, uncivilised people and made official by the Communist Party.

As mentioned earlier, in the 29 articles making more detailed pedagogical arguments, 7 are in favour of Putonghua. These cite poor Putonghua examination results to argue for more PMI. However, they are hardly persuasive. First, there was only one frame sponsor. The single source was the Hong Kong New Chinese Association, a for-profit organisation teaching Putonghua. Compared with various frame sponsors who oppose PMI, the single source with an obvious interest in the education industry is not reliable. In addition, the argument used is problematic and untenable. The poor Putonghua speaking test results could be used as counterevidence against the effectiveness of the current PMI policy. Other articles among the 29 point out technical problems in the real-life practice of PMI for teaching Chinese – for example, the classes that could have been teaching Chinese literature became second language pronunciation classes. These insightful articles are relatively few, however. Although not against teaching Putonghua as a second language, they do not support Putonghua over Cantonese as the MOI for teaching Chinese.

Because the media have presented the voices against PMI as the mainstream, the policy window for PMI has been closed in the policy stream. As a result, the three streams have converged as a strong force resisting the opening of policy possibilities in favour of PMI (see Fig. 2).

## **Concluding remarks**

This study examined 138 articles published in local print media about PMI for teaching Chinese over a one-year period. Drawing on theories of framing and the multiple streams approach, it has demonstrated how the mass media participated in the policy process of PMI for teaching Chinese in Hong Kong. The findings reveal that the majority of the local print media functioned discursively to keep the policy window for PMI closed by framing PMI as culturally invasive, politically wrong, pedagogically lame and linguistically inferior. Overall, the reporting was one-sided because alternative perspectives were either weak or may have encountered difficulties in finding space in mainstream print media other than pro-Beijing newspapers.

Viewing interdisciplinary convergence as helpful, this study demonstrates a necessary combination of framing and MSA that informs educational language policy research. This convergence perceives the media as a participant wielding its agency in the policy process



and offers a framework to analyse the media's discursive activities in mediating public problems (issue/agenda), politics (national mood) and policy (concrete proposals) that affect policy output. By focusing on policy process rather than policy content, this study informs researchers, policymaking bodies and policy entrepreneurs of how the media could prevent policy proposals from becoming outputs. It reminds policy entrepreneurs of the importance of frames and counter-frames. More studies from the policy process perspective are needed to explore the ways in which stakeholders, policy entrepreneurs and policy makers engage with the mass media in the discursive struggle of the educational language policy debate. Such studies may facilitate critical reflection on the mass media as an active policy actor and the improvement of effective policy communication.

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