

Chinese Language Requirements in the Hong Kong Job Market: A Survey on Job Advertisements

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1. Introduction

Research background:

- 1.1. Hong Kong prides itself to be an international metropolitan, and the city is both ethnically and linguistically diverse. Although more than ninety percent of the city's population speaks Cantonese as the usual language, there has also always been a significant and visible part of the work force that does not know the Chinese language and uses English as the usual language. There is also an impression in the collective conscious that this segment of Hong Kong's population occupies positions of privilege and can secure high-paying jobs.
- 1.2. Hong Kong Unison has been working with ethnic minority residents of Hong Kong, many of whom of South Asian and South-East Asian descent, since 2001, and many of the stories we collected seem to portray a reality very different from what was just described. Locally-educated young people told us their experience of sending out resume after resume without receiving any responses while their lower-performing Chinese peers secured jobs; and other ethnic minorities expressed frustration at the impossibility of securing even manual labor jobs because many of them require job applicants to know Chinese.
- 1.3. There does not seem to be a wide-spread consensus on whether Chinese language poses a language barrier in employment for people who do not know the language. For every person who thinks that the lack of Chinese language ability is a significant obstacle to employment in Hong Kong, there is someone who posits that there is an abundance of English-only jobs for anyone who put their mind into obtaining them. This research aims at providing some emperical evidence for this debate.

Language context of Hong Kong

- 1.4. Ever since the time Hong Kong was a British colony, English and Chinese has been the official languages of Hong Kong. While some people may take this to mean that every means of communications in public life in Hong Kong should be available in both Chinese and English, the legal definitions are much more limiting. The legal status of the two languages are outlined in the following excerpts:
- 1.5. "Both English and Chinese were established as the official languages in Hong Kong. Article 9 of the Basic Law provides that: 'In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.'" (Wong, 2015)
- 1.6. "The position of the two official languages is also strengthened by Section 3 of the Official Languages Ordinance (Cap.5) which stipulates that (1) the English and Chinese languages are declared to be the official languages of Hong Kong for the purposes of communication between the Government or any public officer and members of the public and for court proceedings and that (2) the official languages possess equal status and, subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, enjoy equality of use for the purposes set out in subsection (1)." (Wong, 2015)
- 1.7. It should be noted that only "executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" and "the Government or any public officers" are explicitly mentioned in Article 9 of the Basic Law and the Official Languages Ordinances



(Cap.5). The private sector, for example, seems to have no legal obligation in providing communications in both languages.

- 1.8. There has been significant changes in the language education policies in recent years too. Since the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China, promotion of bi-literacy and tri-lingualism has been a fundamental education policy in the educational system of Hong Kong. “Bi-literacy” refers to the learning of written Chinese and English, while “tri-lingualism” refers to the learning of spoken Cantonese (the local dialect), Putonghua (the official language of China) and English. The cardinal emphasis on written Chinese, spoken Putonghua and Cantonese is justified on the facilitation of effective communication and business exchanges with the Mainland. (Tung, 2001)
- 1.9. In addition to the Handover in 1997, the rise of the prominence of the Chinese language (Putonghua and Cantonese) can be attributed to the increasingly frequent trade activities with China (Li, 2009), national identity, the Mainland’s outstanding performance in economic terms, the growing clout of China in the international arena and the increasing number of users who has to use Chinese language at business or work. (Ho, 2005)

Ethnicity and language in Hong Kong

- 1.10. Numerically, ethnic-Chinese and people who speak Cantonese occupy a majority in Hong Kong. In 2011, the total population in Hong Kong was 6,890,500, among which 93.6% were of Chinese ethnicity. In terms of language, 93.5% of the ethnic-Chinese population reported that they usually speak Cantonese at home (Census and Statistics Department, 2011).
- 1.11. The Census and Statistics Department defines “ethnic minorities” as “persons who reported themselves being of non-Chinese ethnicity in the Population Census/By-Census”. When we exclude foreign domestic helpers, which constituted 56.9% of the ethnic minority population, the ethnic minority population in Hong Kong was 192,400, constituting 2.8% of the whole population (Census and Statistics Department, 2015). Among the ethnic minority population, ethnicities prominently represented include White, Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Indonesian, Filipino, Japanese, Koreans, Mixed, etc.
- 1.12. There is also tremendous linguistic diversity within the ethnic minority population. In terms of abilities in the two official languages, among those who are aged 5 or over, 44.2% reported that English was the language most commonly spoken at home, followed by Cantonese’s 31.7%. Ability-wise, 51.8% reported that they are able to speak Cantonese. A large proportion of ethnic minorities also reported a language other than Chinese or English as their usual language (Census and Statistics Department, 2011)
- 1.13. Knowing how to speak Cantonese does not necessarily mean having the ability to read and write Chinese. Without a coherent Chinese Language education policy for students whose mother tongue is not Chinese, many ethnic minority students in the public education system do not acquire adequate Chinese writing and reading abilities for meaningful participation in Hong Kong society. (Bacon-Shone, Bolton, & Luke, 2015)
- 1.14. Over the years, the media have reported stories of ethnic minorities facing difficulties in securing employment because of their low Chinese language proficiencies. For example, in 2012, an ethnic Indian graduate in laws with first honours reported fewer internship opportunities for being unable to read and write Chinese, even though she could



speak fluent Cantonese. (Apple Daily, 2012) In 2010, an ethnic Pakistani was reported to have been rejected for clerical and sales jobs, as well as a position of police constable, because he failed his Chinese language public examination, even though he spoke Cantonese, English and three South Asian languages. (South China Morning Post, 2010)

Employment situation of ethnic minorities

- 1.15. A high proportion of South Asians and South East Asians are engaged in elementary occupations; the proportion ranged from 35% to 40% for Pakistanis, Nepalese, Thais, and Indonesians. The proportion of elementary occupation workers in the whole population is 19.5%. (Census and Statistics Department, 2015)
- 1.16. Employment does not necessarily bring in sufficient income for many South Asian families in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2014 shows that in-work poverty is common: 22.3% of South Asian working households with children live under the poverty line, compared to 12.4% of the overall population. (Census and Statistics Department, 2015)
- 1.17. Other researchers have found that among the South Asian workers they surveyed, a large proportion worked as security guards, construction workers, clerical workers and delivery workers. From the perspective of working hours, it was reported that 31.2% of them had to work for 11 to 12 hours per day, portraying a situation of exploitation and low bargaining power among some South Asian workers. (Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon), 2012)

Language in the workplace

- 1.18. A study on the use of language in the workplace in Hong Kong outlined trends in the language use across five industry sectors. It found that the most important languages in the Hong Kong workplaces are Cantonese, Putonghua and English. It also found that the language used in communications largely depends on the geographical location of customers: Cantonese is used with customers in Hong Kong; Putonghua used with customers in Mainland Chinese; and English used with customers elsewhere. (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 2014)
- 1.19. The research also asked employers about the level of language they expected from employees. The researchers found that, for Cantonese, employers largely expect native speaker-level proficiency from employees (especially for talking to customers in Hong Kong as well as for oral presentation to other staff), while they mostly only expect effective communications rather than native speaker proficiency for English and Putonghua. A similar trend was found in written Chinese and English; employers were more likely to expect native speaker level proficiency for Chinese, and more likely to think that effective communication is enough for written English. (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 2014)



Chinese language education for Chinese language learners

- 1.20. The Hong Kong public education system has not been catering to the needs of students whose mother tongue is not Chinese, and this failure has caught attention both locally and internationally. The United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concerns “that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in higher education and that no official education policy for teaching Chinese as a second language for non-Chinese speaking students with an immigrant background in Hong Kong has been adopted”, and urged the HKSAR Government to “intensify its efforts to improve the quality of Chinese language education for ethnic minorities and non-Chinese speaking students with an immigrant background.” (United Nations Human Rights Committee, 2013)
- 1.21. Although both Chinese and English are official languages of Hong Kong, Chinese has not always been a compulsory and universally-provided subject area in the public education system. Prior to the introduction of the HKDSE public examination, secondary school students were required to study English and one other language to qualify for university admissions. For ethnic Chinese students, the “other language” studied was usually Chinese. However, ethnic minority students often attended schools where the majority of students were also ethnic minority, and in these schools, French or other South Asian languages were offered instead of Chinese. This is the reason why the majority of ethnic minority young people who graduated from secondary school before 2008 did not have the chance to take Chinese language lessons in school.
- 1.22. In recent years, ethnic minority students have had more options in Chinese language education. Many ethnic minority students sit for the British-administered GCSE or GCE Chinese language examination in lieu of the HKDSE Chinese language paper, and use this alternative Chinese qualification to apply for post-secondary education. However, the level of Chinese tested by the GCSE is equivalent only to about local primary two level. Many students who graduated from secondary school with GCSE Chinese qualifications find that their Chinese ability is too low to cope even with daily situations in Hong Kong – many even find reading a Chinese menu difficult despite their Chinese language qualification.
- 1.23. In terms of Chinese language education, what the Hong Kong public education system needs is a comprehensive and effective Chinese as a second language policy. Although the Chief Executive announced in the 2014 Policy Address the implementation of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework”, these measures are inadequate. The Education Bureau leaves the adaptation of the mainstream curriculum to school-based decisions without benchmarks and teaching targets. This has been proven ineffective because teachers find it difficult to adapt the curriculum without the relevant training and time.



2. Research Purpose

- 2.1. To find out the extent to which Chinese language poses a barrier in seeking employment for job seekers who do not know Chinese. We focus on two aspects: (a) whether job seekers can read job advertisements, given the language in which they are written; and (b) the language requirements stipulated in the job advertisement.
- 2.2. To map the characteristics of jobs that do not require Chinese speaking and reading/writing ability.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What is the percentage of jobs that have Chinese language requirements stated in their job ad?
- 3.2. If a job ad does not specify Chinese language requirements, does it mean the advertised job does not require Chinese?
- 3.3. If an applicant knows a language other than Chinese and English, does it compensate for the lack of Chinese ability?
- 3.4. What are the characteristics of the jobs that do not require Chinese abilities?
- 3.5. Is recruitment information accessible to non-Chinese reading job seekers?
- 3.6. How does language barrier impact the number of job leads available to job seekers who do not know Chinese?

4. Methodology

- 4.1. The research surveyed 1,500 internet job postings from 16 Hong Kong-based internet job search databases in April 2014 and December 2015. Stratified random sampling methods were used to ensure that different occupations are well-represented in this survey. In order to clarify missing or ambiguous information on language requirements, researchers also called and successfully spoke to 82 employers whose job postings that did not explicitly mention their Chinese language requirement or preference.
- 4.2. The data was drawn from 16 Hong Kong-based internet job posting search engines, which targeted a wide range of industries, job functions, types of job seekers, and types of jobs (see
- 4.3. Works Cited
- 4.4. Apple Daily. (2012, May 6). 樣樣頂呱呱弊在中文差 法律女精英在港求職碰壁. Hong Kong, China.

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- 4.5. Appendix 1: Profile of collected data for a complete list of the search engines).
- 4.6. Almost all job posting search engines organize their job postings by job functions. In order to ensure that different job functions are well-represented in this research, researchers randomly polled 5 jobs from each job function category page from each search engine.
- 4.7. From each job posting, researchers recorded the preferences or requirements for spoken-Cantonese, written-Chinese, spoken-Puhonghua, and other language requirements respectively. Each language requirement is classified as “required”, “preferred”, “not required” or “not mentioned” based on what was explicitly stated in the job ad. The language in which the job ad was written was also recorded.
- 4.8. Researchers also recorded other characteristic stated in the job ad, such as industry, occupation, education level required, years of experience required, and salary offered. These characteristics were categorized with reference to the 2011 Population Census Sample Data Set User Guide. For all the aforementioned details about a particular job, they would only be recorded if there were explicit descriptions displayed in the job posting. For the details that were not expressly stipulated, they would be recorded as “not mentioned”. Data collection was done in two weeks in April 2014, and one week in December 2015.
- 4.9. Spoken-Cantonese and written-Chinese requirements are the main dependent variables in this research. Among the 1500 job postings surveyed, about half of them did not explicitly state their spoken-Cantonese and/or written-Chinese requirements. In order to clarify missing information on language requirements, researchers randomly selected job postings that did not explicitly mention their Chinese language requirement or preference, and made phone calls to these employers. Some job postings did not include contact information of relevant persons, or have expired soon after the first round of data collection. 82 successful phone calls were made, which covered 10% of the job ads that did not mention spoken Cantonese requirements, and 11% of the job ads that did not mention written Chinese requirements.

5. Background of job ads surveyed

- 5.1. 1500 job ads have been surveyed from 16 Hong Kong-based internet job posting search engines. Some characteristics of the collected data are compared to that of the whole Hong Kong population (as per the latest Census in 2011) in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2. The figures show that the sample data is generally a good representation of jobs in Hong Kong across industries and occupations, with a few notable discrepancies. The discrepancies can be due to the fact that some industries and occupations, such as the over-represented “financing and insurance” and “professionals / associate professionals”, are more likely to advertise their job vacancies on internet job search engines than “import/export, wholesale and retail trades” and “elementary occupations”, which are under-represented in this research.



Figure 5-1 Distribution of industry (comparing sample data to Hong Kong population)

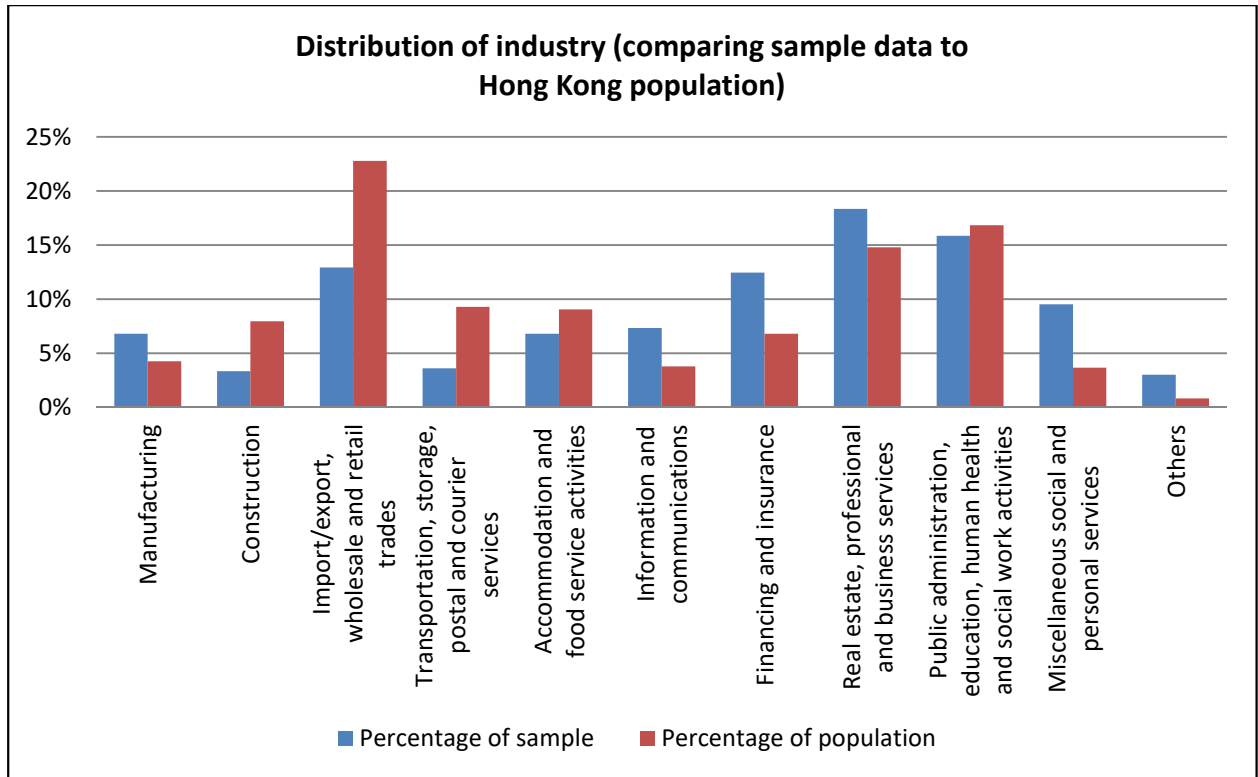
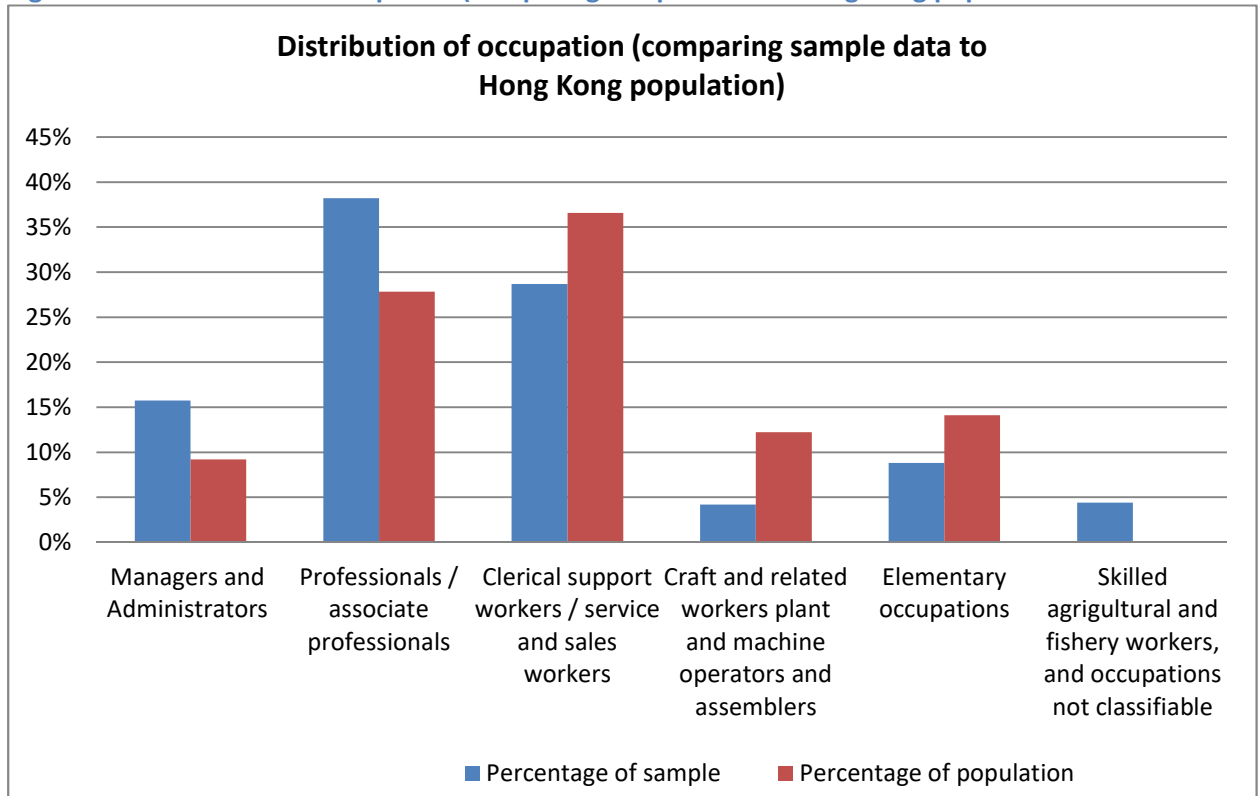


Figure 5-2 Distribution of occupation (comparing sample data to Hong Kong population)





5.2. Data was collected in two time periods; 1288 job postings were surveyed in the first two weeks of April 2014, while 212 in the last week of December 2015. A look into the industry and occupation distribution from the two sets of data tells us that the data collected in these two periods are comparable. For a detailed profile of the data collected, please refer to Appendix 1: Profile of collected data.

6. Main Findings and Analysis

1) What is the percentage of jobs that have Chinese language requirements stated in their job ad?

The majority of job ads require Chinese language abilities from applicants

6.1. Results show that most employers expect Cantonese speaking skills and Chinese writing skills from job candidates. We examined each of the job postings surveyed to look for explicit spoken-Cantonese, spoken-Putonghua and written-Chinese requirements stipulated. Among the 1500 jobs surveyed, 49% explicitly stated that spoken Cantonese was a requirement; 51% required written Chinese skills; and 26% required spoken Putonghua. Once we exclude the job ads that did not include information on their Chinese language requirements, we find that 97% required spoken Cantonese and 99% required written Chinese (



6.2. Table 6-1).

6.3. Employers rarely clearly stated on job ads that Chinese language abilities are not required. Out of the 1500 jobs we surveyed, only 1 stated that spoken-Cantonese is not required. None stated that written-Chinese or spoken-Putonghua is not required.

6.4. Given that the Hong Kong labour force has always had a visible portion that is occupied by employees who do not speak and/or write Chinese, this result is smaller than one might predict. It is possible that some of the job vacancies that did not require Chinese are among the approximately half of all surveyed job postings that did not mention language criteria explicitly (this is dealt with in details in the next section). However, it is also possible that many of these jobs are filled by employees recruited from overseas, or recruited by means other than online open recruitment.



Table 6-1: Chinese language requirements stated explicitly in job ads

	Spoken Cantonese		Written Chinese		Spoken Putonghua	
	% and tally	(% excluding "Not mentioned")	% and tally	(% excluding "Not mentioned")	% and tally	(% excluding "Not mentioned")
Required	49% 733	(97%)	51% 762	(99%)	26% 389	(79%)
Preferred	1% 21	(3%)	0% 7	(1%)	7% 104	(21%)
Not required	0% 1	(0%)	0% 0	(0%)	0% 0	(0%)
Not mentioned	50% 745	N/A	49% 731	N/A	67% 1007	N/A
Total	100% 1500	(100%) (755)	100% 1500	(100%) (769)	100% 1500	(100%) (493)

Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%

Speaking and writing skills are both highly valued

6.5. As seen previously in



6.6. Table 6-1, both speaking and writing skills in Chinese are equally valued by employers; 49% of job ads required spoken Cantonese, while 51% required written Chinese skills.

The jobs that required spoken Cantonese and the jobs that required written Chinese largely overlap, further illustrating how jobs that require Chinese language abilities value both spoken and written skills equally. As we can also see from

6.7. Table 6-2 below, 43.1% of job ads required both spoken Cantonese and written Chinese.

Table 6-2: Requirements on spoken Cantonese and written Chinese stated explicitly in job ads

	Written required	Written preferred	Written not required	Written not mentioned
Cantonese required	43.1%	0.1%	0.0%	5.7%
Cantonese preferred	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%	0.5%
Cantonese not required	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Cantonese not mentioned	7.2%	0.0%	0.0%	42.5%

Percentages rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

Percentages are based on the total number of job ads surveyed, i.e. 1500.

Spoken Cantonese is more often required, compared to spoken Putonghua

6.8. Employers are more often stating that they require spoken Cantonese skills than Putonghua skills; as seen from Table 6-1, 733 jobs specified Cantonese requirement, while 389 jobs specified Putonghua requirements. Results also show that jobs that require candidates to speak Putonghua are also more likely to also require candidates to speak Cantonese. As seen in Table 6-3, 72% of the jobs that required Putonghua also explicitly required Cantonese. In contrast, as seen in Table 6-4, only 38% of jobs that required Cantonese also explicitly required Putonghua.

Table 6-3: Cantonese requirements, among jobs that required spoken Putonghua

	Tally	Percentage
Cantonese required	282	72%
Cantonese preferred	2	1%
Cantonese not required	1	0%
Cantonese not mentioned	104	27%
Total jobs requiring Putonghua	389	100%

Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%

Table 6-4: Putonghua requirements, among jobs that required spoken Cantonese

	Tally	Percentage
Putonghua required	282	38%



Putonghua preferred	78	11%
Putonghua not required	0	0%
Putonghua not mentioned	373	51%
Total jobs requiring Cantonese	733	100%

Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%

Figure 6-1: Sample job ad - this international company requires its engineers to know spoken and written Chinese

██████████ a wholly-owned subsidiary of ██████████ (a Fortune 500 Company) is the largest world-wide air-conditioner equipment supply & after-sales services company. With regional offices in 172 countries and over 45,000 employees around world.

████████████████████

To cope with the continuous business expansion of the Company, we invite talented and professional Candidates to join our growing team as:

Engineer (Airport) ██████████
██████████

Responsibilities

- To ensure Mechanical, Ventilation & Air-conditioning (MVAC) system is operating in good conditions
- To assist Project Manager in handling of fitting out works of MVAC system
- To supervise and monitor of preventive / comprehensive maintenance works with technical workers
- To prepare all submission works such as job tender, quotation etc.
- To manage on the performance of technical staffs and outside contractors

Qualifications

- Degree holder or Higher Certificate in Building Services / Mechanical Engineering or other related disciplines
- Minimum 3 years' in maintenance or installation of MVAC system
- Good command of both spoken and written English and Chinese, including Mandarin
- Proficiency in using MS applications such as Excel, word, Powerpoint & AutoCAD drawing software
- Working location: **Hong Kong International Airport**



Figure 6-2: Sample job ad – Some lower-skilled jobs also have high language requirements

● 髮型助理	
Vacancy No	[REDACTED]
No. of vacancies	3
Job Title	髮型助理
Industry	Personal Services
On-the-job Training Period	12 months
Working Location	Hung Hom
Working Hours	星期一至日：中午12:00 - 下午9:00, 6 working days per week, Rotating days off
Salary and Benefits	\$9,000 per month
Requirements	Below F3; Fluent Cantonese; Fluent Putonghua; Fluent English; Able to read and write Chinese; Able to read and write English
Duties	協助髮型師提供洗頭、染髮、電髮、剪髮、頭髮護理等服務；協助髮型屋運作
● Details of Training Plan	
Skills to be Acquired	髮型屋運作及行業知識，洗頭、染髮、電髮及剪髮等技巧，髮型設計及知識
On-the-Job Training	Job attachment
Off-the-Job Vocational Training Course	Hair dressing and beauty services training
APPLY NOW	

2) If a job ad does not specify Chinese language requirements, does it mean the advertised job does not require Chinese?

6.9. Many employers neglected to clearly state the Chinese language requirement or expectation in the job ads. For example, as seen in



6.10. Table 6-1, 50% of the jobs we surveyed did not explicitly state their expectations on spoken-Cantonese skills. There are multiple ways to interpret this data; for example, the employer may be lenient towards the job applicants' Chinese language abilities; or they may have taken for granted that job applicants in Hong Kong all speak Cantonese and/or write Chinese.

6.11. Through the follow-up telephone calls we made to employers who did not explicitly state their Chinese language requirements in their job postings, we aimed to clarify this ambiguity as much as possible. There were 839 job ads that either did not mention spoken-Cantonese requirement or did not mention written-Chinese requirements; among them, we randomly selected and successfully called 82 (10%) of these employers.

Most of the employers who did not explicitly state their Chinese language requirements in the ad still expected applicants to have command of the Chinese language

6.12. As shown in Table 6-5, 66% of the telephoned employers required job applicants to know spoken Cantonese, while only 12% (9) explained that they did not require Cantonese skills. Similarly, 67% of employers that did not state their Chinese writing requirements stated that they require the skill; only 10% (8 employers) explained that they do not require Chinese writing skills.

6.13. According to this trend, it may be deduced that although close to half of the surveyed job postings did not clearly list Chinese language requirements, most of those employers still require Chinese speaking and writing skills from applicants, and simply took for granted that applicants from Hong Kong would speak Cantonese and write Chinese.

Table 6-5: Responses from phone calls to employers, out of the jobs that did not mention spoken-Cantonese or written-Chinese requirements

	Spoken Cantonese	Written Chinese
Required	66%	67%
Preferred	9%	10%
Not required	12%	10%
Unable/ unwilling to clarify	13%	13%
Total number called that did not mention this language in the ad	77	79

** Out of the 82 employers called, 77 did not mention spoken Cantonese requirement while 79 did not mention written Chinese requirement in their job posting. The percentages in this table are based on 77 and 79 respectively.*

3) If an applicant knows a language other than Chinese and English, does it compensate for the lack of Chinese ability?

The ability to speak other languages may not offset disadvantages of not knowing Chinese

6.14. Among the 1500 job ad surveyed, only 25 (less than 2%) listed a preference or requirement for the ability to speak a language other than English or Chinese.



6.15. Moreover, most of them require or prefer either spoken Cantonese, written Chinese or spoken Putonghua skills. Among those 25 jobs, 13 (52%) also require or prefer the job seeker to speak Cantonese, while 17 (68%) of them also required or prefer the job seeker to speak Putonghua. Only 5 out of these 25 jobs did not mention any requirement for Cantonese or Putonghua; none of them explicitly stated that they did not require any Chinese speaking skills. (Table 6-6) This shows that even for jobs that favour speakers of other languages, Chinese proficiency is still a basic requirement for most.

Table 6-6: Chinese language requirements among the 25 job ads that listed a preference or requirement for the ability to speak a language other than English or Chinese

Chinese language requirements	Tally	Percentage
Require or prefer Cantonese	13	52%
Require or prefer written Chinese	10	40%
Require or prefer Putonghua	17	68%
Did not mention Cantonese, written Chinese or Putonghua	5	20%
Not require any Chinese skills	0	0%

(Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%. Percentages were based on the 25 job ads that listed a preference or requirement for the ability to speak a language other than English or Chinese).

4) What are the characteristics of the jobs that do not require Chinese abilities?

6.16. Given that Hong Kong has always had a visible portion of jobs that are occupied by employees who do not speak and/or write Chinese, this research set out to find the characteristics of these jobs. In what industries are they usually found; of what occupations do they belong; and what are the education level and experience level they require?

6.17. Unfortunately, the survey did not produce adequate data for this analysis. As stated earlier in this report, only one out of the 1500 surveyed ads that said Chinese not required. Even the number of jobs that were expressly lenient towards Chinese ability (by stating that Chinese is only preferred instead of required) is very small. Therefore, no further characteristics analysis on these jobs can be done unless we have a significantly larger dataset, or be able to systematically clarify the language requirements of a much larger proportion of the vacancies that did not explicitly mention them in the job posting. Data on language requirement, categorized by various characteristics of the job vacancy, is printed in Appendix 2 for reference.

5) Is recruitment information accessible to non-Chinese reading job seekers?

Many job ads are inaccessible to job seekers who cannot read Chinese

6.18. The language in which job ads are written impacts whether recruitment information is accessible to non-Chinese reading job seekers. This research examined the language in which



job postings were written, from the perspective of job seekers who do not read Chinese; if a job ad is written in Chinese only and unaccompanied by an English version, it is completely indecipherable to a non-Chinese reader without assistance. Similarly, some job postings are partially bilingual, but with some essential information written in Chinese only, thus still largely inaccessible to job seekers who do not read Chinese. Only job postings that are completely written in English are accessible to job seekers who do not read Chinese.

- 6.19. Many job ads are inaccessible to job seekers who cannot read Chinese. Among the 1500 job ads surveyed, 16% were written in Chinese only, while 22% were partially bilingual but had essential information written in Chinese only. When combined, 39% of the job ads surveyed were inaccessible to non-Chinese reading job seekers. 61% of the job ads were written entirely in English. (Table 6-7)

Table 6-7: Language in which the job posting was written

Language	Tally	Percentage
In Chinese only	245	16%
Some vital information in Chinese	337	22%
Entirely in English	918	61%
Total	1500	100%

(Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%, and thus the sum may not be 100%)

Figure 6-3: Sample job ad - example of an ad that is partially bilingual with important information in Chinese

Vacancies: 2		
No.:12-14-0009079 DH	Date:11/04/2014	
Job Title:Delivery Worker		
Company/Employer Name:-		
District:Chai Wan	Industry:Transport	
Responsibilities: 負責執貨, 送貨		
Requirements : Primary 6; Fluent Cantonese ; Little English ; Able to read & write Chinese ; 勤奮 , 有禮, 需懂得操控哪車		
Employment Terms: \$8,000 per month, with Good Attendance Bonus and Medical Benefits, Mon to Sat: 9:00AM-6:00PM, 6 working days per week, 8 working hours per day		
Application Information: Job seekers may contact MS. YVONNE CHAN at 28898596 .		
Remarks:-		



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Ads for lower-skilled jobs are more likely to be in Chinese

- 6.20. A further analysis tells us that ads for lower-skilled jobs are more likely to be in Chinese. As shown in
- 6.21. Table 6-8, 53% ads for lower-skilled jobs are partially or entirely written in Chinese only, and 20% are written entirely in Chinese only, as opposed to 26% and 13% respectively for higher-skilled jobs. Notwithstanding, one-fourth is still a high proportion of postings of higher-skilled jobs that are inaccessible to non-Chinese readers.

Table 6-8: Language in which the job posting was written, by occupation

Skill level	Occupations	In Chinese only + some vital info in Chinese only		In Chinese only		Total	
Higher-skilled	Managers and Administrators	26%	30%	13%	13%	809	236
	Professionals / associate professionals		25%		13%		573
Lower-skilled	Clerical support workers / service and sales workers	53%	48%	20%	21%	691	430
	Craft and related workers plant and machine operators and assemblers		79%		25%		63
	Elementary occupations		72%		26%		132
	Skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and occupations not classifiable		24%		0%		66
Total							1500

(Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%)

6) How does language barrier impact the number of job leads available to job seekers who do not know Chinese?

6.22. This research has so far found that, if you are a job seeker in Hong Kong who does not know Chinese, many job ads are inaccessible to you because they are written in Chinese. Yet, even among the job ads that you can read, a large number of them explicitly stated that knowing Chinese is a prerequisite. Considering this language barrier only: out of all the job vacancies advertised online, how many are there left available to you?

Job seekers who do not know Chinese only has 19% of all advertised jobs available to them

6.23. As seen from Table 6-9, there are 918 surveyed job vacancies that were advertised entirely in English; out of these vacancies, if we take away those that required or preferred applicants to know how to write Chinese, then 386 remain. If we further take away the vacancies that required or preferred spoken Cantonese, then 313 remained. Take away vacancies that require or prefer any Chinese language skill, then only 288 out of the original 1500 remain.



6.24. In other words, if a job seeker can only read job ads that are written in entirely in English, and does not apply to any jobs that stated written Chinese, spoken Cantonese, and/or spoken Putonghua as a requirement or preference, then this job seeker essentially only has 19% of internet-advertised job vacancies available to him.

Table 6-9: Job leads from the sample that are available to job seekers who do not know Chinese

	Language in which the job posting was written			
	Can only read ads entirely in English		Can read ads in English and ads that have some information in Chinese	
Ads that are written in a language the job seeker can read	918	61%	1255	84%
Job seeker does not write Chinese	386	26%	577	38%
Job seeker also does not speak Cantonese	313	21%	495	33%
Job seeker also does not speak Putonghua	288	19%	461	31%

(Percentages rounded to the nearest 1%; percentages are based on the 1500 job ads surveyed)



7. Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1. This research seeks to find out the extent to which Chinese language poses a barrier in seeking employment for job seekers who do not know Chinese. It uses the language requirements stated in online job advertisements as a proxy for measuring employers' language expectations and requirements on job applicants, and focused on two aspects that can be explored through job advertisements: (a) whether job seekers can read job advertisements, given the language in which they are written; and (b) the language requirements stipulated in the job advertisement.
- 7.2. Finding out the language expectations and requirements of Hong Kong employers has significance in regards to both employment and education policies. It should will help determine how labor services and adult education services can help non-Chinese speaking job seekers. It can also help education authorities determine the learning objectives and curriculum design in language education, especially for students learning Chinese as a second language. Although this research does not predict the language trends in the job market five or ten years from now, it shows us the current realities of the job market in regards to language requirements.
- 7.3. The results show that the lack of Chinese language abilities is a significant barrier for job seekers who do not know Chinese in two main ways. The first is that a large number of jobs are either written in Chinese only, or are partially bilingual but have vital information written in Chinese only. It means that job seekers who do not read Chinese can only comprehend about sixty percent of the job advertisements posted on the internet. The second is that many employers explicated stated in job advertisements that they are looking for candidates who know either how to speak Cantonese, write Chinese, or speak Putonghua. In the end, job seekers who do not know Chinese only has 19% of all advertised jobs available to them.
- 7.4. Results also show that both written Chinese and spoken Cantonese are equally valued by employers. This poses some difficulties for many locally-educated ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority residents who grew up in Hong Kong are likely to know spoken Cantonese – many acquired the skill in the community or through daily use – but are rarely proficient in written Chinese because Hong Kong does not have an effective Chinese as a Second Language education policy.
- 7.5. This research also finds that most of the employers who did not explicitly state their Chinese language requirements in the ad still expected applicants to have command of the Chinese language – many may have taken for granted that job applicants in Hong Kong are ethnic Chinese and/or are able to speak and write Chinese. This is a source of great frustration for many ethnic minorities, who applied to jobs that did not mention Chinese language requirement, only to be rejected because of it. In the boxes below are two examples of such experiences.



Case 1:

Pooja (pseudonym) is a 20 year-old girl of Nepalese origin and has been living in Hong Kong for 10 years. She is a Year 3 university student studying science. Pooja went to a public secondary school in which almost all students were ethnic minorities, and in school she had only taken basic Chinese classes and thus does not have good command in either Cantonese or written Chinese.

Last year she applied for an internship in a multinational company. The internship advertisement did not specify Chinese language requirement. During the group interview the interviewers suddenly said that they would ask the remaining questions in Cantonese & Putonghua. Although Pooja understood the questions asked in Cantonese, she could answer in English only. At that time she knew that she would not be selected. She was so disheartened that she almost burst into tears during the interview. In the end they told her that the company might still hire her, but she knew that she did not stand a chance.

She has explored other science-related internships and every time because of her low Chinese proficiency she did not succeed. Thereafter she is now careful to check the language requirements stated in the job advertisements. She reflects on the situation of her Chinese classmates, who only need to concentrate on performing well in the interviews. Soon she will begin her final year in university and Pooja has not been able to get into an internship related to her interest because most of them require Chinese language ability.

Case 2:

Hasan (pseudonym) is a 23-year-old man of Pakistani origin. When he was 9 years old he moved to Hong Kong with his family. He is currently working in customer service. He can speak fair Cantonese but is not fluent. Usually, when Hasan is browsing through job vacancy postings, he only looks for advertisements which do not mention Chinese language requirements or which only asks for English language proficiency.

But in reality the scenario is quite different. In the spring of 2015 he applied for a job in a reputed multinational company. The language requirement was that the candidate should be fluent in English and one other South Asian languages like Hindi, Urdu etc. He was pretty hopeful that he would qualify. During the interview he was asked whether he could speak fluent Cantonese. When he told them that his spoken Cantonese is not fluent, the company explicitly told him that they wanted someone who could speak fluent Cantonese. Hasan feels that although he was qualified for the job he still did not get it.

He has faced similar situations at job interviews in other companies as well; where the job advertisement did not mention about Chinese language requirements, but during the interview he was asked about it. And so when he tells them that he is not fluent in Cantonese they say they cannot hire him. These experiences make him feel frustrated.



Limitations

There are limitations to this research; they include:

7.6. Street advertisements, advertisements in print media, and job seeking through head hunters are not surveyed

As this research only surveyed online job advertisements, the language barriers in reading the advertisements for those who do not use the Internet (potentially more low-skilled labour) are not surveyed. Also, it is reasonable to expect that firms that rely on head hunters to seek employees are firms that provide higher-end services. The language barriers for candidates of those jobs are not studied. Nonetheless, online job advertisements still represent a significant portion of job vacancy information, and is an important avenue for job seekers.

7.7. The exact level of Chinese ability required or preferred by employers is not measured

This research only studies whether the jobs require Chinese ability, prefer Chinese ability, or deem Chinese ability as irrelevant. However, the exact level of Chinese ability required or preferred is not measured. Given that the level of Chinese ability of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong varies, ethnic minorities who know Chinese may still face barriers in seeking jobs if their level of Chinese ability is lower than that required or preferred by their prospective employers, which cannot be reflected by this research.

7.8. Represents jobs advertised in Hong Kong, rather than jobs that are stationed in Hong Kong

Not all jobs stationed in Hong Kong recruited in Hong Kong. For example, positions targeting expatriates or aiming to hire citizens of other places are not surveyed in this research, even if those positions are based in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, by surveying jobs that are recruiting in Hong Kong only, this research presents a more accurate picture of the job opportunities of workers in Hong Kong.

7.9. Does not reflect the experience of whole job search and recruitment process

The impact of language requirements on job searches cannot be fully represented by a survey on job advertisements. This research does not take into account recruitment procedures after the publication of the job ad, such as screening process and interviews.

7.10. Factors other than Chinese language ability are not measured

Language barriers may only be one of the many difficulties faced by ethnic minorities in seeking jobs. Other difficulties, such as racial prejudice and discrimination, cultural and societal norms etc. are not surveyed.

7.11. The exact effects of Chinese ability on competitiveness are not measured

For jobs that do not strictly require Chinese ability but prefer so, the exact weighting of Chinese ability in overall competitiveness is not measured. Even if a job does not require Chinese, candidates who know Chinese may still have a competitive edge over candidates who do not. Therefore, for a candidate who does not know Chinese, the research will not



be able to present the exact extent of disadvantage that he/she faces because of Chinese language in the job seeking process.

7.12. **Effects of Chinese ability on promotion prospects are not measured**

This research only studies the language barriers in seeking jobs, but after being employed, Chinese ability may have influence on promotion prospects, regardless of whether it is relevant in the initial employment. This is not reflected by this research.



8. Policy Suggestions

Labour Department

- 8.1. The Labour Department should develop an employment programme for ethnic minorities with reference to the “Employment Programme for the Middle-aged” and other similar measures. The programme should provide adequate support to ethnic minority job seekers to overcome language barriers and other difficulties, and provide encouragement and incentives for employers to hire ethnic minorities. The Labour Department should initiate such project at the department and be a role model to other employers.
- 8.2. The Labour Department should raise the awareness of employers on whether the job really requires Chinese proficiency when posting the vacancies. Employers should be reminded that they must be able to justify any language requirement or condition by showing that it is relevant to and not more demanding than what is required for doing the job as an unjustifiable requirement can lead to claims of indirect discrimination.

Adult Chinese language classes

- 8.3. The government should enhance its efforts in providing accredited adult Chinese classes to residents who need them. Although some organizations (including the Employees Retraining Board, HAD-funded support service centres for ethnic minorities, and tertiary institutions) operate government-funded Chinese language classes, there is a lack of coordination between these courses. Classes provided by community centres are mostly beginners’ level, and the lack of coordination makes it difficult for learners to progress to advanced classes in other institutions. There are also few Cantonese-based Chinese classes in the private market.

Chinese language learning in post-secondary education

- 8.4. The Education Bureau should encourage and support post-secondary education institutions to provide appropriate Chinese language learning opportunities to students to whom Chinese is a second language, in order to increase their competitiveness for the job market after graduation (bridge GCSE/GCE level to higher proficiency).

Chinese language education for second-language learners

- 8.5. Many ethnic minority residents graduated from the public education system without adequate Chinese language skills because there has not been an effective Chinese as a second language policy. The government should implement an effective Chinese as a Second Language policy that includes appropriate curriculum, teaching materials, learning objectives, assessment tools and teacher training in order to help ethnic minority students access the full range of employment opportunities. The government should also study the level of Chinese needed to allow full access to economic opportunities and community life in Hong Kong, and design the Chinese-language curriculum accordingly.



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Appendix 1: Profile of collected data

Industry: Sample data vs Census 2011 population data

Industry	Population: Employees (Excluding Foreign Domestic Helpers)	Sample data
Manufacturing	123162	102
Construction	230054	50
Import/export, wholesale and retail trades	660052	194
Transportation, storage, postal and courier services	268803	54
Accommodation and food service activities	261999	102
Information and communications	109350	110
Financing and insurance	197033	187
Real estate, professional and business services	428277	275
Public administration, education, human health and social work activities	486975	238
Miscellaneous social and personal services	105623	143
Others	23799	45
Total	2895127	1500

Occupation : Sample data vs Census 2011 population data

Occupations	Population: Employees (Excluding Foreign Domestic Helpers)	Sample data
Managers and Administrators	266067	236
Professionals / associate professionals	806065	573
Clerical support workers / service and sales workers	1058754	430
Craft and related workers plant and machine operators and assemblers	354002	63
Elementary occupations	408402	132
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and occupations not classifiable	1837	66
Total	2895127	1500



Education level stipulated

Education level	Tally	Percentage
Primary or below	59	4%
F.5 / DSE F.6	351	23%
Matriculation	36	2%
Certificate / diploma	198	13%
Sub-degree	40	3%
Bachelors degree	408	27%
Masters	11	1%
Doctors	2	0%
Not provided	395	26%
Total	1500	100%

Years of experience required

Years of experience	Tally	Percentage
Experience not required	281	19%
1-3	538	36%
4-6	198	13%
7-9	44	3%
10+	43	3%
Not stipulated	396	26%
Total	1500	100%



Source internet job posting search engine

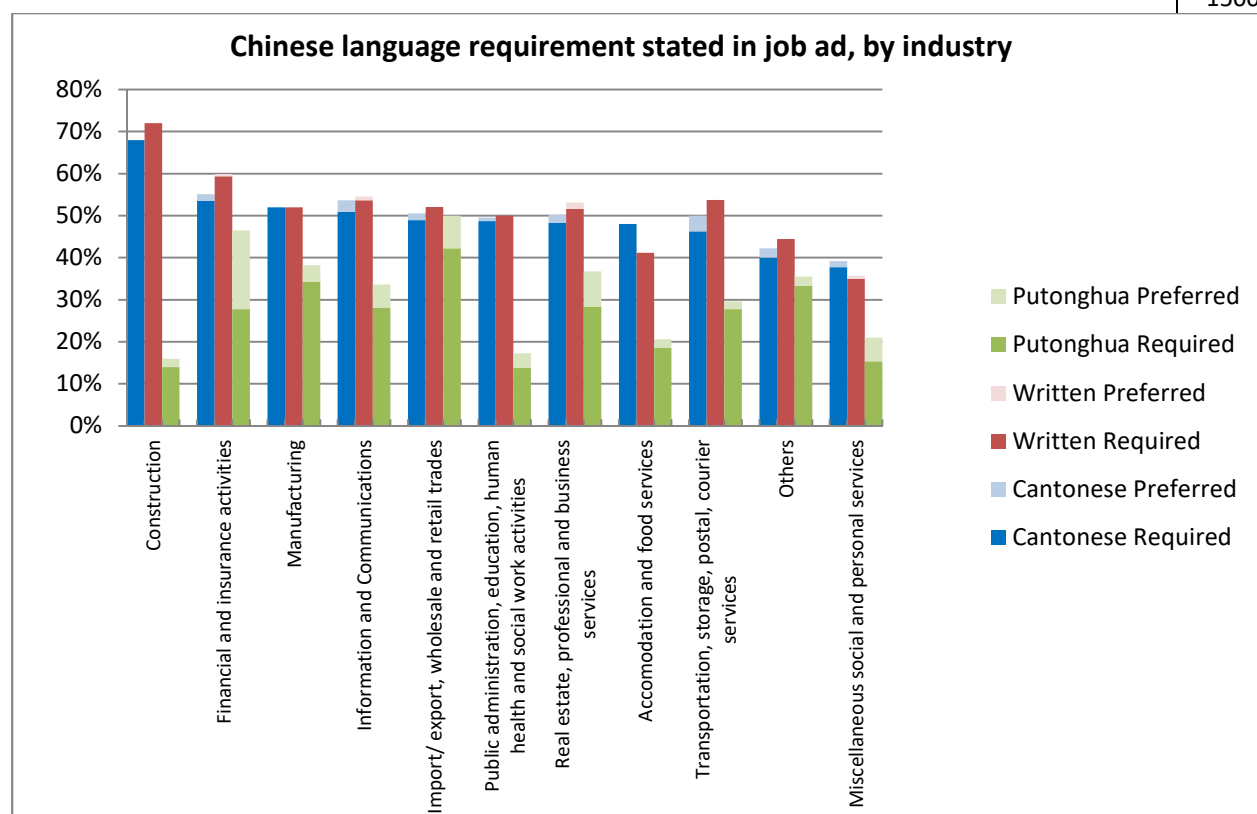
Internet job posting search engine	Tally	Percentage
Career Times	243	16.2%
cpjobs.com (previously ClassifiedPost.com),	149	9.9%
Ecjobs	35	2.3%
Geoexpats jobs	14	0.9%
Headline Jobs HK	174	11.6%
JiuJik.com (which merged into cpjobs.com in 2016)	159	10.6%
JobsDB	130	8.7%
Kijiji Hong Kong (which closed its Hong Kong website after the research period)	90	6.0%
Labour Department Interactive Employment Service	168	11.2%
MingPao Jump	74	4.9%
Monsters.com	25	1.7%
Recruit.com.hk	14	0.9%
Labour Department Youth Employment and Training Programme Interactive Job Search	55	3.7%
Civil Service Bureau Government Vacancies Enquiry System	16	1.1%
Hong Kong Professional Teacher's Union job posting database	7	0.5%
JobMarket.com.hk	147	9.8%
Total	1500	100%



Appendix 2: Charecteristics x Language requirement

Industry

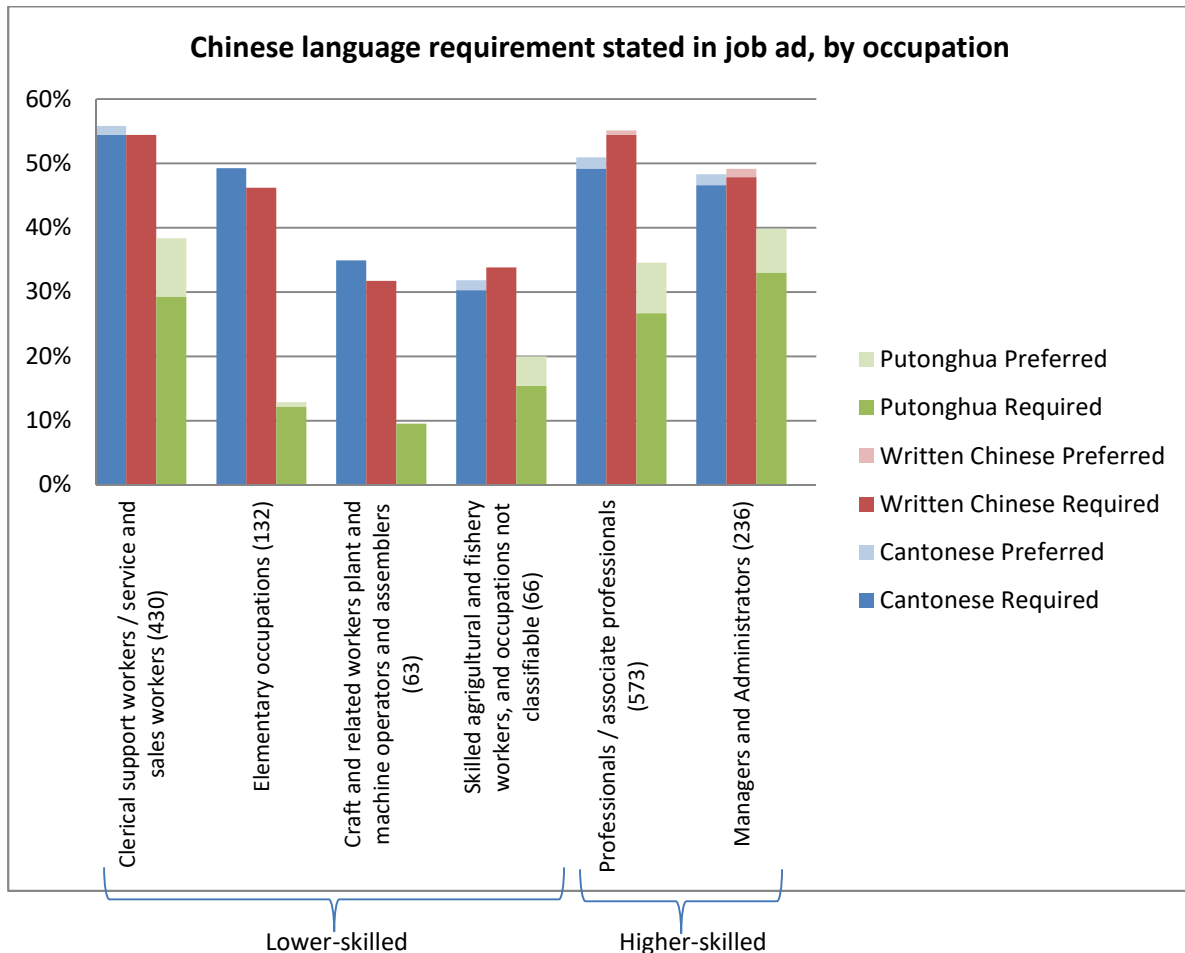
	Spoken Cantonese		Written Chinese		Spoken Putonghua		Total
	Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	
Construction	68%	0%	72%	0%	14%	2%	50
Financial and insurance activities	53%	2%	59%	1%	28%	19%	187
Manufacturing	52%	0%	52%	0%	34%	4%	102
Information and Communications	51%	3%	54%	1%	28%	5%	110
Import/ export, wholesale and retail trades	49%	2%	52%	0%	42%	8%	194
Public administration, education, human health and social work activities	49%	1%	50%	0%	14%	3%	238
Real estate, professional and business services	48%	2%	52%	1%	28%	8%	275
Accomodation and food services	48%	0%	41%	0%	19%	2%	102
Transportation, storage, postal, courier services	46%	4%	54%	0%	28%	2%	54
Others	40%	2%	44%	0%	33%	2%	45
Miscellaneous social and personal services	38%	1%	35%	1%	15%	6%	143
							1500





Occupation

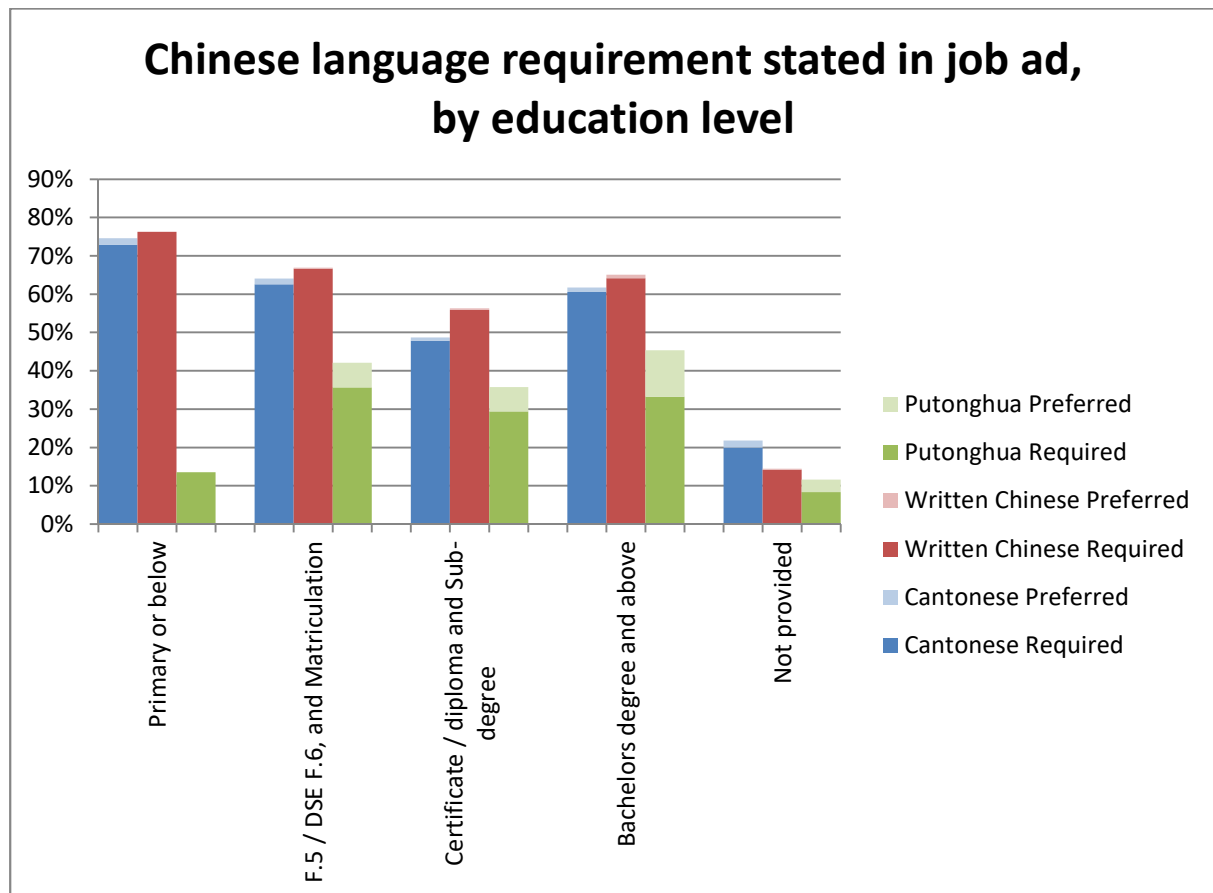
		Cantonese		Written Chinese		Putonghua		Total
		Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	
Higher-skilled	Managers and Administrators	47%	2%	48%	1%	33%	7%	236
	Professionals / associate professionals	49%	2%	54%	1%	27%	8%	573
Lower-skilled	Clerical support workers / service and sales workers	54%	1%	54%	0%	29%	9%	430
	Craft and related workers plant and machine operators and assembler	35%	0%	32%	0%	10%	0%	63
	Elementary occupations	49%	0%	46%	0%	12%	1%	132
	Skilled agricultural and fishery workers, and occupations not classifiable	30%	2%	34%	0%	15%	5%	66





Education level stipulated

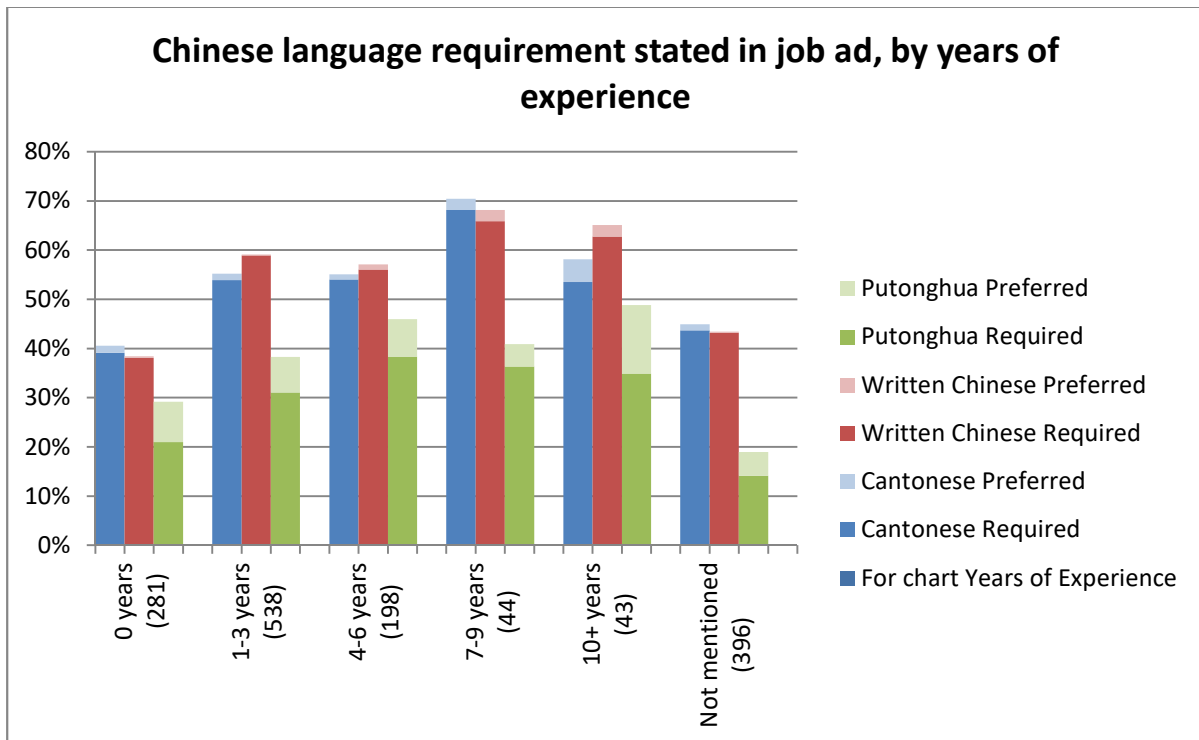
Education	Cantonese		Written Chinese		Putonghua		Total
	Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	Required	Preferred	
Primary or below	73%	2%	76%	0%	14%	0%	59
F.5 / DSE F.6, and Matriculation	63%	2%	67%	0%	36%	6%	387
Certificate / diploma and Sub-degree	48%	1%	56%	0%	29%	6%	238
Bachelors degree and above	61%	1%	64%	1%	33%	12%	421
Not provided	20%	2%	14%	0%	8%	3%	395





Years of experience required

	Require Cantonese	Require Written Chinese	Require Putonghua	Total
0 years	39%	38%	21%	281
1-3 years	54%	59%	31%	538
4-6 years	54%	56%	38%	198
7-9 years	68%	66%	36%	44
10+ years	53%	63%	35%	43
Not mentioned	44%	43%	14%	396



Salary level

Salary level trends were not analyzed by language requirement since the majority of job postings did not clearly state salary level of the vacancy. Below is a table of the numbers of postings that did and did not state salary level:

Stated salary level	396
Did not state salary level	1104