

Investigation on the Integration of “Gao” in Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Mandarin

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From the diachronic dimension, this paper makes a two-way interactive investigation on the integration of Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Mandarin. “Gao” is a delexical verb in contemporary Chinese. In different words and expressions related to “gao” character, there are mutual absorptions between Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, which is characterized by starting from nothing to something and from less to more.

Keywords: Hong Kong Chinese, Mainland mandarin, “Gao (搞)”

Introduction

With the deepening of reform and opening-up, China has promoted communication between Hong Kong and mainland which also leads to some similarity in language use. This is called “language integration” (Diao, 2018). In the early stage, Hong Kong Chinese influenced mainland mandarin more apparently, while in recent years, the mainland economy has developed rapidly and its overall strength has been greatly enhanced which leads to more influence in Hong Kong.

“Gao”, a delexical verb, is generally believed to have come from the Southwest dialect (Yang, 2002; Xu, 2003). It is widely used from mid-20th century until now. The use of “gao” character in Hong Kong originally comes from Chinese mainland. After it is introduced in Hong Kong, “gao” quickly creates its distinctive words, combinations and expressions which are quite different from that in mainland Chinese. Some of the words and expressions related to “gao” also spread to mainland and become popular.

The following research is based on “input” and “output” of mandarin. According to the degrees of integration, there are two kinds of stage: “jieyong (借用)”, which means quote directly from other articles, and “huayong (化用)”, which means do some slight change about the original meaning or form in order to adapt to its local contexts.

The Amount of the Use of “Gao”

The amount of the use of “gao” in Hong Kong Chinese and mainland mandarin appears some similarity during diachronic development. Based on WiseSearch database, the amount of articles using “gao” in Hong Kong and mainland between 1998 and 2022 is shown in the figure below:

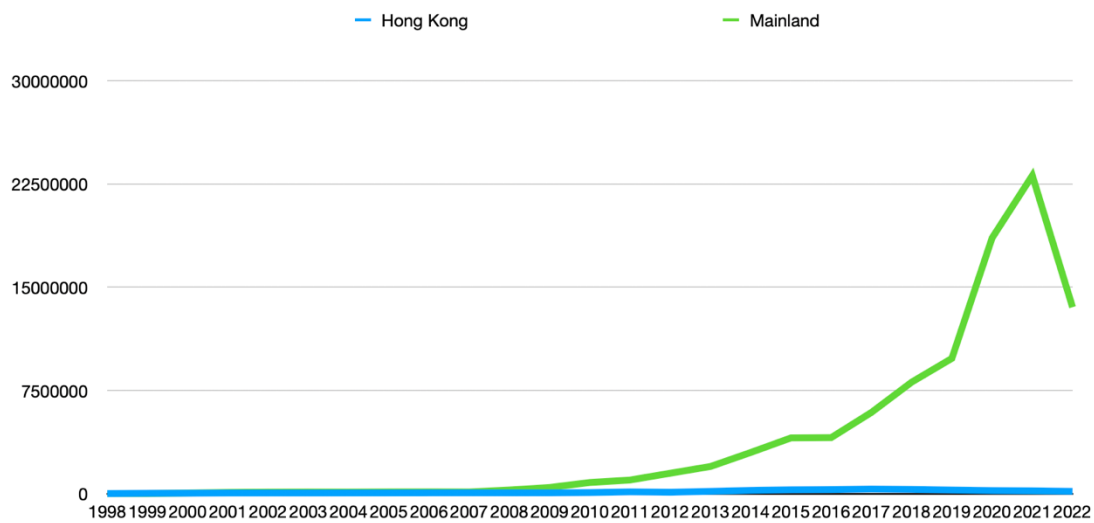


Figure 1. Trend chart of annual usage of “gao” in Hong Kong and mainland.

As can be seen from Figure 1, compared with Hong Kong Chinese, the quantity of “gao” in mandarin has increased rapidly since 2008. Besides, both have seen a decline in the amount of articles using “gao” in recent years, which possibly because of the saturation.

We also investigate the annual usage of “gao” in the press and website, as shown in Figure 2:

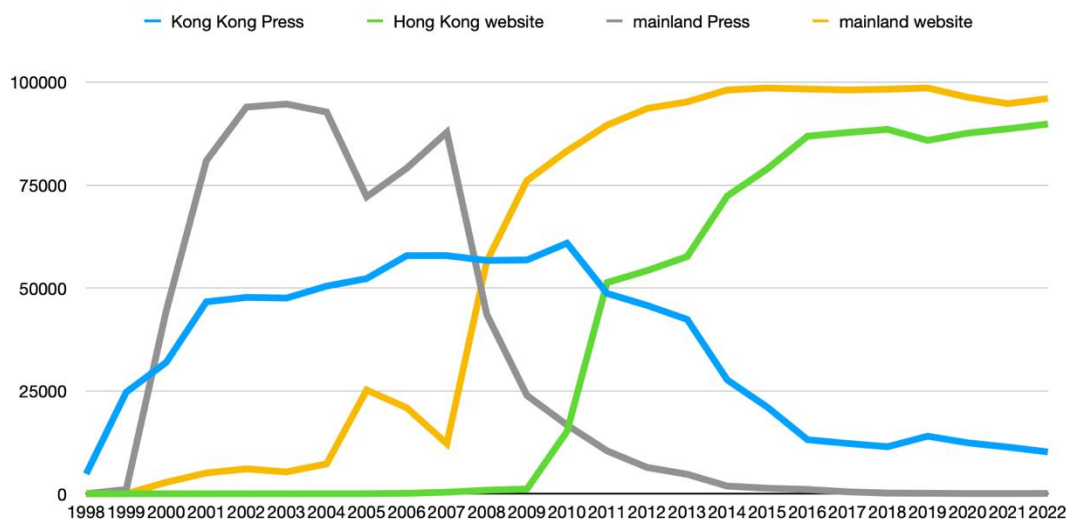


Figure 2. Trend chart of annual usage of “gao” between the mainland and Hong Kong in the press and websites.

According to the figure, the usage of “gao” exists certain degree of similarities between these two places in the press and websites. In these years, the annual usages of “gao” suffer a great drop in the press in both Hong Kong and mainland, while the usages on websites grow significantly. Besides, “gao” is much more used on websites than used in the press nowadays.

Based on “Input” of Mandarin

Based on “input” of mandarin means that mainland has introduced and absorbed some new words and expressions of other places. In terms of “gao”, some words related to “gao”, such as “gaoxiao (搞笑)”, “egao (恶搞)”, “gaoding (搞定)/ gaodian (搞掂)”, are introduced from Hong Kong.

Take “gaodian (搞掂)” as an example, it originates from Cantonese, and then it spread to mainland while the morphology changes to “gaoding (搞定)”, see examples:

- (1) 货源搞定，接下来就是找客户。(《北京青年报》，2023-06-21)

The supply is done. The next step is to find customers. (*Beijing Youth Daily*, 2023-06-21)

- (2) 儿童流感疫苗“一喷搞定”。(《解放日报》，2022-09-25)

Influenza vaccine for children, just one spray. (*JieFang Daily*, 2022-09-25)

- (3) “现在好了，不管什么业务，一个窗口就能搞定。”(人民网，2021-05-27)

It's much better now, no matter what kind of business, one window to get it done. (People's Daily Online, 2021-05-27)

The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (5th edition) makes an explanation as “搞定：<方>动把事情办妥；把问题解决好”，while in 6th edition, it deletes dialectal notation and records “搞掂：<方>[动]搞定。原为粤语，传入北方话地区后多说搞定” for the first time. This change means “搞定” has gained its popularity in mainland and even has entered common vocabulary system of mandarin.

What is more, the expression “搞到+结果补语 (resultative complement)” also dates back to Hong Kong Chinese before enters mainland mandarin. In the early time, “搞到” is usually followed by a nominal object in mandarin, see examples:

- (4) 见到国外饰品中的“六角雕”很受欢迎，孙美英便搞到样品，将其拆开来研究。(《中国社会报》，1999-11-20)

Seeing the popularity of foreign jewelry in the “hexagonal carving”, Sun Meiying got. the sample and take it apart to study. (*China Society News*, 1998-11-20)

Influenced by Hong Kong Chinese, “搞到” which followed by resultative complement is used in mainland mandarin. Based on WiseSearch database, we selected 100 cases of “搞到” randomly every year. The results show that in 2000, there are 75 cases of “搞到” followed by nominal object while 25 cases followed by resultative complement. In 2022, there are 49 cases followed by nominal object while 51 cases followed by resultative complement. We can infer that the use of “搞到+结果补语 (resultative complement)” becomes more popular.

What is noteworthy is that the dominant usages of “搞到” are quite different in written Chinese among Hong Kong and mainland. In mainland, “搞到” is mainly followed by nominal object. However, in Hong Kong, it is much more often followed by resultative complement.

Based on “Output” of Mandarin

Based on “output” of mandarin means that mainland has exported words and expressions to other places. For example, Hong Kong has introduced mainland culture and language.

The emotional colors of “gao” in Hong Kong Chinese are becoming neutral and positive, while the negative expressions of “gao” are declining in some extent. It is mainly influenced by mandarin because the emotional

colors of “gao” in mandarin are principally positive or neutral. Hong Kong Chinese has introduced many words and expressions which has positive emotional colors from mandarin, such as “搞活”, “搞好”, and “大搞”.

Take “搞好” as an example, we surveyed the amount of “搞好” in Hong Kong during 1998 and 2022 based on WiseSearch database, as shown in figure 3:

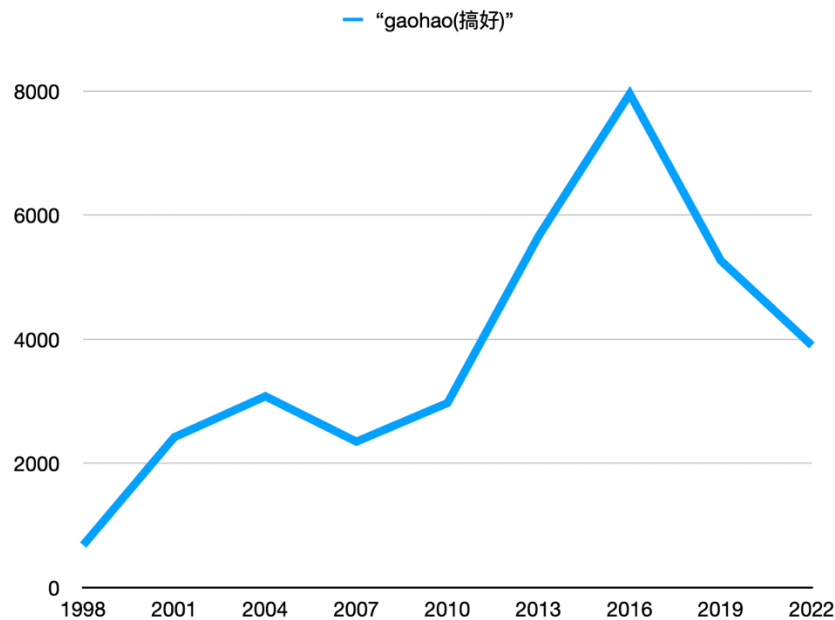


Figure 3. Trend chart of annual usage of “搞好” in Hong Kong.

As can be seen, the figure experienced a quick grow during 1998 and 2016, which is mainly influenced by mandarin. When “搞好” firstly appeared in Hong Kong Chinese, it mainly comes from *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*, which are closely contact with the mainland, see examples:

- (5) 【本报讯】郑州二十七日消息：中共中央政治局委员、国务院副总理温家宝日前在河南省农村考察时指出，.....搞好农村社会治安综合治理，形成良好的社会风尚，创造良好的治安环境。(《大公报》，1998-11-28)

A report from Zhengzhou: Wen Jiabao, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and vice Premier of The State Council, pointed out when he visited rural areas in Henan Province recently,improve public security in rural areas in a comprehensive manner, form a good social fashion, create a good public security environment. (*Ta Kung Pao*, 1998-11-28)

This piece of news belongs to “jieyong”, which means quote the mainland news context directly. The object of “搞好” in Hong Kong Chinses contains “经济/关系/健康/发展/事业/服务/企业” and so on. The emotional colors are normally neutral. In these years, more and more expressions related to “搞好” are used in Hong Kong’s local context, which is called “huayong”, see examples:

- (6) 朱咪咪唱完酒廊，便与丈夫四处睇楼，看到合心水的便买下，搞好装修自住。(《经济一周》，2022-12-14)

When finished singing in the pub, Zhu Mimi wondered around for the houses with her husband, bought the one she liked and decorated for living. (*Economic Digest*, 2022-12-14)

In addition, Hong Kong Chinese has created its own expressions of “搞好+个+X”, see examples:

- (7) 问及近年正在推行的智慧监狱设施, 他说:「你搞好个底先啦! 环境又唔好伙食又差!」(东网, 2019-12-30)

When it comes to intelligent prison facility in these years, he said, “you have to do some basic things, the environment and the food are so bad!” (on.cc, 2019-12-30)

- (8) 十九很爱美, 要影相的话, 一定会先化妆, 再搞好个发型。(香港新浪网, 2022-10-12)

Shi Jiu loves beauty so much. Once taking photos, she must make up first and do hairstyle. (Sina Hong Kong, 2022-10-12)

- (9) 坚叔坦言:「我哋做地产(发展)商, 唔系净系睇住自己卖唔卖到楼, 最紧要系搞好个经济。」(《信报财经新闻》, 2022-10-17)

Jian Shu declared that, “as a land agent, I not only focus on selling houses, but also promote the economic growth”. (*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 2022-10-17)

The combination of “搞好” and quantifier “个” is unique to Hong Kong Chinese. It does not exist in mainland mandarin. This kind of special expression also belongs to “huayong”.

Conclusion

Tang Zhi-xiang (2003) points out that “mandarin widely absorbs Hong Kong and Taiwan words, which fully shows that Chinese society has become more diversified and open up”. The integration of mandarin and Hong Kong Chinese also testifies to the diverse interactions and integration within Chinese society.

In terms of the factors of integration, it contains politics, economics and cultures. The Internet and new media bring great convenience of cultural communication. It breaks through the limitations of time and space. In the mean time, more and more people are eager to experience a different culture, which also promotes cultural and language exchanges. What is more, integration of language could enrich the vocabulary of existing system. It also improves the vitality and creativity of language. For example, the introduce of “搞定” helps mandarin to communicate complex concepts while still maintaining a richness that helps express a deeper meaning.

It can be predicted that the interactions of Hong Kong Chinese and mandarin will be more frequent, which is coinciding with the integration of Global Chinese. “Gao” may be more widely used, the functions and combining forms related to “gao” may be more complex.

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