

(1) Paper title

The Integration of English Loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese

(2) Sub-field

language contact

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Abstract

Borrowing from English into Cantonese has been the catalyst for change in the Cantonese phonological system and lexicon. Many English loanwords have become fully integrated into Hong Kong Cantonese as demonstrated in this paper. Our research team has compiled a database comprising about 650 English loanwords, most of which are nouns.

The integration of loanwords has been analyzed according to four criteria: (1) frequency of use, (2) native-language synonym displacement, (3) morphophonemic and/or syntactic integration, and (4) acceptability (Poplack and Sankoff, 1984:103-104). This paper presents data on the integration of English loanwords into Cantonese in terms of several morphological and syntactic features.

Suffixation:

Cantonese suffix [tɛi] is added to reduplicated monosyllabic stative verbs to mean 'having some quality of the stative verb', such as [lam] *blue* becomes [lam lam tɛi] 'with a shade of blue'. Some English loans undergo the same process: *high* becomes [hai hai tɛi] 'a little excited', and [k^hiu] *cute* becomes [k^hiu k^hiu tɛi] 'quite cute'. Many English loanwords can take the Cantonese aspectual marker [tso]: *check* [ts^hɛk] becomes [ts^hɛk tso] 'have checked'; *double* [tɛk pou] becomes [tɛk pou tso] 'have doubled' (in amount).

Change of Syntactic Categories:

Upon being borrowed into Cantonese some loanwords change their syntactic categories. The noun *man* becomes the stative verb [mɛn] 'manly' as in [hou mɛn] 'very manly' and [mɛn mɛn tɛi] 'with some manly quality'. The noun *friend* becomes the stative verb [fɛn] 'friendly', as in [k^hɛi t^hoŋ ŋo hou fɛn] 'he and I are good friends'. *Beer* is [pɛ tsau], and the first syllable [pɛ] functions as a verb in [pɛ jɛt pɛ] 'let's go and have a beer'. *Taxi* is borrowed as [tik si] as a noun, and [tik] becomes the verb "to take a taxi". *Okay* [ou k^hɛi] can modify other stative verbs to mean "moderately", as in [ou k^hɛi nan] "moderately difficult". *Mug* [mɛk] and *car* [k^ha] (a railway carriage) function as both nouns and classifiers in Cantonese.

Productivity:

A loanword can generate new words as demonstrated by *Rolex* [lou] as in [kɛm lou] 'gold Rolex' [tsyn lou] 'diamond Rolex', and [koŋ lou] 'stainless steel Rolex'. New idiomatic expressions can be formed by loanwords. *Tchaikovsky*, the famous composer, is borrowed as [ts^hai ho fu si kei]; the first three syllables [ts^hai ho fu] now mean 'the chauffeur' because the last two syllables [si kei] is the regular Cantonese word 'chauffeur'!

Acceptability:

Some English loanwords have become so integrated into Cantonese that speakers who know no English assume they are ordinary Cantonese words.

These and other features provide solid evidence that many English loanwords have become thoroughly integrated into Cantonese.

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