

The Integration of English Loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese

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1. INTRODUCTION

- English and Cantonese are typologically distinct languages but this in no way impedes mutual borrowing.
- Historical contact between English and Cantonese began in the late 17th century when British traders came to Canton to buy Chinese tea and porcelain.
- English loanwords are documented in the first English-Cantonese, Cantonese-English dictionary published in 1828.

- Three methods by which English words have been borrowed into Cantonese:
 - (1) phonetic transliteration
 - e.g. 士多 si6 do1 'store'
 - (2) semantic translation
 - e.g. 跛腳鴨 bai1 goek3 aap3 'lame duck'
 - (3) the combination of these two
 - e.g. 蛋撻 daan6 taat1 'egg tart'
- We have limited our database to borrowings of (1) and (3).

2. DATABASE OF ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN HONG KONG CANTONESE

- Our database of English loanwords comprises about 650 lexical entries.
- 85% include only phonetically-transliterated syllables.
- 15% are made up of at least one phonetically-transliterated syllable and at least one Cantonese morphosyllable which bears some semantic relationship to the loanword.

Table 1

Loanword Syntactic Categories

Category	Percentage %
Nouns	80.58
Verbs	11.65
Attributives	5.47
Classifiers	1.29
Fixed Expressions	0.58
Adverbs	0.43

Table 2

Loanword Semantic Categories

Category	%	Category	%
Food	11.40	Music	3.65
Recreation	10.03	Verbs	3.65
Academic environment	7.60	Finance, Business	3.34
Language (descriptive/social)	6.69	Chemicals, medicines, drug	3.19
Mechanical instruments and materials	6.38	Police jargon	2.58
Fashion	5.78	Office environment	2.13
Technology	5.62	Address terms	1.98
Daily Life	5.17	Household	1.82
Units of Measurement	4.71	Garments	1.67
Drinks	4.10	Transportation	1.52
Occupations	3.78	Brand names	1.37
		Fabrics	1.22
		Animals and plants	0.46

3. INTEGRATION OF LOANWORDS IN CANTONESE

- 3.1 Written Representation of Loanwords
- 3.2 Morpho-syntactic Processes
- 3.3 Change of Syntactic Categories
- 3.4 Clipping
- 3.5 Productivity
- 3.6 Semantic Transfer and Semantic Change in Loanwords
- 3.7 Acceptability

3.1 Written Representation of Loanwords

- One measure of loanword integration in Cantonese is the sizeable number of loanwords which are conventionally written with Chinese characters.
- In Robert Morrison's Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect, the world's first English-Cantonese, Cantonese-English dictionary published in 1828, the following English words were listed as having been borrowed into Cantonese:

- *arack* 亞叻酒 aa3 lik1 zau2

- *brandy* 罷蘭地酒 baa6 laan4 di6 zau2

- *chocolate* 知古辣 zi1 gu2/1 laat6/1

- *couch* 勾子床 ngau1 zi2 cong4

- *flannel* 佛嚨仁 fat6 laan4 jan4

- *ball* 波球 bo1 kau4

- *beer* 卑酒 be1 zau2

- *cheese* 支士 zi1 si6

- *coffee* 架啡 gaa3 fi1

- *liqueur* 利哥酒 li6 go1 zau2

Table 3 Loanwords with Written Representations

Written Form	Romanization	English Origin	Written Form	Romanization	English Origin
巴士	baa1 si6/2	'bus'	啤酒	be1 zau2	'beer'
餐屎	caan1 si6/2	'chance'	打令	daa2/1 ling6/2	'darling'
的士	dik1 si6/2	'taxi'	多士	do1 si6/2	'toast'
菲林	fei1 lam4/2	'film'	科文	fo1 man4/2	'foreman'
卡士	kaa1 si6/2	'cast'	冧巴	lam1 baa2	'number'
孖展	maa1 zin2	'margin'	柯打	o1 daa2	'order'
柯崙	o1 leon4/2	'orlon'	阿華田	o1 waa4 tin4	'Ovaltine'
安士	on1 si6/2	'ounce'	柯化	ou1 faa3/2	'over'
拍檔	paat1 naa4/2	'partner'	泡打粉	paau1 daa2 fan2	'baking powder'
批	pai1	'pie'	啤牌	pe1 paai4/2	'playing cards'
甫士	pou1 si6/2	'pose'	沙紙	saa1 zi2	'certificate'
沙展	saa1 zin2	'sergeant'	士的	si6 dik1	'stick'
士多	si6 do1	'store'	士多啤梨	si6 do1 be1 lei6/2	'strawberry'
新地	san1 dei2	'sundae'	梳打	sou1 daa2	'soda'
T恤	ti1 seot1	'T-shirt'	威化餅	wai1 faa3	'wafer'
威乎	wai1 fu4	'wife'	威也	wai1 jaa5/2	'wire'
威士忌	wai1 si6 gei6/2	'whiskey'	窩夫	wo1 fu1	'waffle'

3.2 Morpho-syntactic Processes

- If a loanword shares the same morpho-syntactic features of native Cantonese lexical items, it is a clear indication that the loanword has been integrated into the Cantonese language system.
- The following morpho-syntactic structures are found among English loanwords:
 - -㗎 -dei2 construction
 - -咗 -zo2 suffixed to verbs
 - -仔 -zai2 suffixed to nouns
 - 好 / 咁 hou2 / gam3 modifying stative verbs
 - ‘A-not-A’ construction

-咁地 -dei2 construction

- The Cantonese suffix -咁地 -dei2 is added to reduplicated monosyllabic stative verbs to mean 'having some quality of the stative verb', such as 藍 laam4 *blue* becomes 藍藍咁地 laam4 laam4/2 dei2 'with a shade of blue'
 - (1) *high* hai1 becomes hai1 hai1 dei2 ('a little excited')
 - (2) *cute* kiu1 becomes kiu1 kiu1 dei2 ('quite cute')
 - (3) *coffee* gaa3 fe1 becomes fe1 fe1 dei2 sik1 ('a little coffee in colour')
 - (4) *short circuit* becomes sot1 sot1 dei2 ('a little crazy')

-咗 -zo2 suffixed to verbs

➤ Another very common suffix for Cantonese verbs is the Cantonese aspectual marker 咗 zo2.

- (5) *check* cek1 becomes cek1 zo2 ('have checked')
- (6) *double* dak1 bou4 becomes dak1 bou4 zo2 ('have doubled in amount').

-仔 -zai2 suffixed to nouns

- Cantonese nouns can be suffixed with the diminutive 仔 zai2. So can some English loanwords:
 - (7) *baby* bi4 bi1 嗶嗶 is suffixed by zai2 仔 to form 嗶嗶仔 bi4 bi1 zai2 ('small babies')
 - (8) *cadet* ket6 det1 is suffixed by zai2 仔 to form ket6 det1 zai2 ('a cadet guy')
 - (9) *ecstasy* is borrowed into Cantonese as an abbreviation 'E'. It is suffixed by zai2 仔 and this drug is called 'E 仔' ji1 zai2 in Cantonese.
 - (10) Similarly, *ketamine* is borrowed as an abbreviation 'K'. It is then suffixed by the diminutive zai2 仔 to form 'K 仔' kei1 zai2.

好 / 咁 hou2 / gam3 modifying stative verbs

- Most Cantonese stative verbs share the property of being able to be modified by the intensifiers 好 hou2 ‘very’, or 咁 gam3 ‘so’, such as 好靚 hou2 leng3 ‘very pretty’, 好醒 hou2 sing2 ‘very smart’, 咁靚 gam3 leng3 ‘so pretty’, 咁醒 gam3 sing2 ‘so smart’.
- (11) *high* hai1 becomes 好high hou2 hai1 (‘very high’), 咁 hai1 gam3 hai1 (‘so high’)
 - (12) *fit* fit1 becomes 好fit hou2 fit1 (‘very fit’, which is not acceptable in standard English), 咁 fit1 (‘so fit’).
 - (13) *pro* pou6 becomes 好pro hou2 pou6 (‘very professional’), 咁 pou6 gam3 pou6 (‘so professional’).

The “A-not-A” Construction

- A prevalent syntactic operation in Cantonese is the ‘A-not-A’ construction.
 - 冲凉 cung1 loeng4 (‘to take a bath’) → 冲唔冲凉 cung1 m4 cung1 loeng4 (‘To take a bath or not?’).
 - 辛苦 san1 fu2 (‘having a hard time’) → 辛唔辛苦 san1 m4 san1 fu2 (‘Having a hard time?’)
 - (14) *happy* hep1 pi2 → hep1 唔 hep1 pi2? (‘Happy?’)
 - (15) *understand* → an1 → 你 un 唔 un 呀? nei5 an1 m4 an1 aa3? (‘Do you understand?’)

3.3 Change of Syntactic Categories

Origin	Loanword	Change	Example	English Gloss
<i>man</i>	men1	N → Stative V	hou2 men1 men1 men1 dei2	'very manly' 'with some manly quality'
<i>friend</i>	fen1	N → Stative V	keoi5 tung4 ngo5 hou2 fen1	'he and I are good friends'
<i>beer</i>	be1 zau2	N → V	be1 jat1 be1	'let's go and have a beer'
<i>taxi</i>	di1 si2	N → V	dik1 heoi3 laa1	'take a taxi to get there'
<i>okay</i>	ou1 kei1	Exp → Adv	ou1 kei1 naan4	'moderately difficult'
<i>mug</i>	mak1	N → Clf	jat1 mak1 mai5	'a mug of rice'
<i>car</i>	kaa1	N → Clf	loeng5 kaa1 fo3	'two cars of cargo'
<i>pound</i>	bong2	Unit → N	go3 bong2	'the scale'
	bong6	Unit → V	bong6 haa5 di1 mai5	'let's weigh the rice'
<i>bye-bye</i>	baai1 baai3	Exp → V	nei5 tung4 aan1 ti4 baai1 baai3 zo2 mei6 aa3	'Have you said goodbye to Auntie?'
<i>cyber</i>	sai1 baa4	N → Stative V	nei1 go3 di6 saain1 hou2 sai1 baa4	'this design has a very cyber feel'
<i>soft</i>	so1 fu4	Adj → V	heoi3 bin1 dou6 so1 fu4?	'Where shall we go to enjoy ourselves?'

3.4 Clipping

- In everyday Cantonese, lengthy expressions are normally abbreviated or clipped to become shorter ones. The same is found in loanwords.
- One area in which clipping is very prolific is among academic subjects:
 - *accounting* → aa6 kaang1 (for 'account');
 - *biology* → bai6 o1 (for bio);
 - *chemistry* → kem1 (for 'chem');
 - *computing* → kam6 piu1 (for 'compute');
 - *economics* → ji6 kon1 (for 'econ');
 - *English literature* → ing1 lit1 (for 'Eng lit');
 - *geography* → zok1 gaa2 (for 'geogra').

- Other examples include:
- an1 ('un') from 'understand'
 - fek1 from 'fax'
 - ji1 from 'email'
 - kon1 from 'contact lens'
 - dik1 from 'taxi'
 - fe1 from 'coffee'
 - pou6 from 'professional'
 - so6 lit1 from 'solicitor'
 - tiu6 to1 from 'tutorial'

3.5 Productivity

- A loanword can generate new words:
 - *Rolex* lou1 → 金撈 gam1 lou1 ‘gold Rolex’, 鑽撈 zyun3 lou1 ‘diamond Rolex’, and 鋼撈 gong3 lou1 ‘stainless steel Rolex’.
 - *bus* baa1 si2 → 大巴 daai6 baa1 ‘public buses’, 小巴 siu2 baa1 ‘mini buses’, 飛巴 fei1 baa1 ‘mini buses that speed’.
- New idiomatic expressions can be formed by loanwords:
 - *Tchaikovsky*, the famous composer, is borrowed as caai4 ho2 fu1 si1 gei1; the first three syllables caai4 ho2 fu1 now means ‘the chauffeur’ because the last two syllables si1 kei1 is the regular Cantonese word for ‘chauffeur’!

- While both 'ball' and 'boot' have their respective native terms (球 for 'ball' and 靴 for 'boot'), these two native terms are not used. Instead of using the Cantonese words 球靴 to refer to 'ball boots', the loanword 'ball boot' bo1 but1 is used.
- From the adjective 'cute', the phrase Q 版 is created to refer to a cartoon-like version.
- A more recent creation is the term 咪咀 mai1 zeoi2, which comes from the loanword 'microphone' and refers to 'lip synchrony'.

3.6 Semantic Transfer and Semantic Change in Loanwords

- The meanings of some loanwords can undergo change by becoming narrower or more specific in relation to the meanings of the original English words.
 - aa3 soe4 (from 'sir')
 - an address term for male teachers and police officers can also be used as a noun to mean male teachers and police officers
 - gei6 lim4/1 (from 'cream')
 - *used only in the context of cake, such as gei6 lim4/1 daan6 gou1 'cream cake'.*
 - *Cantonese has actually borrowed English cream twice, first as gei6 lim1 and then later as kwim1 which can mean either face cream or the drinkable cream made from whole milk.*

- foem1 (from '*firm*')
 - *only used in reference to one's muscles*
- gin3 bot1 (from '*board*')
 - means 'to attend an interview for promotion in the police force or civil service'.
- ou1 faa3/2 (from '*offer*')
 - only used in walkie-talkie or short-wave radio exchanges to indicate that the speaker has finished his/her utterance and is indicating that it is the turn of the other party to speak.
- sot1 (from '*short circuit*')
 - originally used in referring to electricity short circuit; now used to refer to someone who's 'crazy', an analogy to electricity malfunction.

3.7 Acceptability

- Many English letters have been accepted in Cantonese.
- Most common: M and X because of bus routes.
- Bus routes that end in an M indicate that the bus terminates at a subway station (the subway in Hong Kong is called MTR) while X stands for an 'express' bus route.
- The letters M and X are also found in a lot of loanwords such as MC, MP3, MV, SM, XO, X 光 (for X-ray).
- Other English letters used in Cantonese include:
 - C (as in PVC, MC),
 - K (as in OK, K 仔, OK 便利店),
 - O (as in OK, OL, O 記),
 - R (as in RPG),
 - T (as in T-恤, T-back, T 字位),
 - V (as in VCD, MV, V-領, PVC, UV, VIP).
 - G (as in 3G, NG, RPG),
 - N (as in N 年前, NG),
 - P (as in P 場, MP3, PVC, RPG),
 - S (as in SM),
 - U (as in CU, BU, UV),

4. CONCLUSION

- The integration of loanwords has been analyzed according to several aspects: the writing system, the morpho-syntactic structure, word formation processes, semantic feature, and social acceptability.
- The evidence is clear that many English loanwords have been fully integrated into the Cantonese language.
- More recently borrowed items tend to show fewer of the above features, indicating that the integration process takes time and it is an ongoing one.

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