

DOCTORAL THESIS

Early Cantonese transliterations as a phonological basis for modern Hong Kong English

Li, Yuting

Date of Award:
2019

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

ABSTRACT

The research question of this dissertation is whether the early Cantonese-English contact provides a phonological basis to the development of Hong Kong English (HKE henceforth). The dissertation provides an affirmative answer by studying four Cantonese-English bilingual dictionaries in the mid 19th and early 20th centuries.

The empirical evidence from the four bilingual dictionaries reveals three types of phenomena: inheritance, stabilization, and deviation. The phenomenon of inheritance refers to the phonological features discovered in the early Cantonese-English contact that have persisted in modern HKE. The phenomenon of stabilization includes the phonological features of the early Cantonese-English contact that are fortified and regularized in modern HKE. The phenomenon of deviation indicates certain phonological features of the early Cantonese-English contact differ from those of modern HKE.

The findings of the dissertation fill two research gaps in the literature of HKE. One research gap is the omission of the English acquisition patterns for average Hongkongers before mass English-language education was implemented in the 1970s. For the Hongkongers who had no access to formal schools, the Cantonese-English bilingual dictionaries were used as the learning materials in self-study or private schools. The other research gap is the lack of a historical perspective into the variations of modern HKE phonology. Most of the studies on HKE are synchronic in nature and fail to realize that the variations may be derived from the two different English acquisition patterns in history. This dissertation reveals that

the phonology of the functional bilinguals in HKE (the HKE speakers who could use English for various formal and informal needs) might be influenced by the phonological features of inheritance and stabilization discovered in the early Cantonese-English contact.

The findings establish the historical connections behind modern HKE phonology, enhancing the recognition of HKE as an autonomous New English Variety. This enables HKE to be the symbol of solidarity for Hongkongers. This dissertation investigates the historical data from the Cantonese-English bilingual dictionaries that remain largely unstudied for a long time. Transformed into a retrievable dataset, the historical data can be used for linguistic theorizing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Chapter One Introduction: Development of Hong Kong English.....	1
1.1 A New Perspective from Old Dictionaries.....	1
1.2 History of Hong Kong English	4
1.2.1 The Sociolinguistic Context of Colonial Hong Kong.....	4
1.2.2 Emergence of Chinese Pidgin English.....	11
1.2.3 From Chinese Pidgin English to Hong Kong English	14
1.3 Modern Hong Kong English Phonology	16
1.3.1 Phonological Features of Modern Hong Kong English.....	16
1.3.2 Variations and Hong Kong Identity	20
1.4 To Fill Research Gaps.....	23
1.5 Overview of the Dissertation Structure	27
Chapter Two English and Cantonese in Hong Kong.....	29
2.1 Hong Kong as a Multilingual Society	30
2.2 Modern Hong Kong Cantonese	33
2.2.1 Syllable Structure.....	34
2.2.2 Tonal System.....	35
2.2.3 Segmental Inventory	38

2.2.4 Rimes and Syllabary	44
2.3 Phonological Features of British English	47
2.3.1 Segmental Inventory	47
2.3.2 Syllable Structure.....	50
2.3.3 Influence from American Accent.....	53
2.4 Interim Summary	54
Chapter Three Cantonese-English Bilingual Dictionaries as Research Data	55
3.1 Cantonese-English Bilingual Dictionaries as Dataset	55
3.1.1 History of Bilingual Dictionary Compilation	55
3.1.2 Selection of Bilingual Dictionaries.....	60
3.1.3 Viability of the Bilingual Dictionary as Research Data.....	73
3.2 Decoding Bilingual Dictionaries	75
3.2.1 Structure of Dictionary Entries	75
3.2.2 English and Cantonese Pronunciations in the 19th Century.....	78
3.2.3 Reading the Cantonese Transliterations.....	80
3.2.4 Automatic Transcription of English Items.....	90
3.3 Comparison of English and Cantonese Transcriptions.....	92
3.4 Interim Summary	94
Chapter Four Inheritance and Stabilization	96
4.1 Inheritance	96

4.1.1 Realization of /v/.....	96
4.1.2 Realization of TH.....	101
4.1.3 /l/ Vocalization	104
4.1.4 Full Vowel Retainment	107
4.1.5 Lax-Tense Vowel Merger.....	110
4.1.6 Vowel Neutralization	112
4.1.7 Constrained Closed Syllables	113
4.1.8 Monosyllabic Words Bearing High Tone.....	115
4.2 Stabilization	117
4.2.1 Voice-Aspiration Mapping.....	117
4.2.2 Simplification of Coda Consonant Clusters	123
4.2.3 Stress-High Flat Tone Correspondence	131
4.3 Interim Summary	138
Chapter Five Deviation	140
5.1 /l/-/n/ Distinction.....	140
5.2 Stop-Nasal Correspondence.....	143
5.3 Realization of /r/	145
5.4 Vowel Contrast.....	149
5.5 Onset Consonant Cluster Epenthesis	152
5.6 Interim Summary	160

Chapter Six Discussion and Conclusion	162
6.1 Review of Main Findings	162
6.2 Development of HKE Revisited	164
6.3 Implications	170
6.3.1 Historicity of HKE.....	170
6.3.2 Establishment of HKE as a New English Variety.....	171
6.3.3 Linguistic Theorizing.....	172
6.4 Conclusion	176
REFERENCES	178
APPENDIX I	200
APPENDIX II.....	209
APPENDIX III.....	216