EXPEDIENT AND ORIENTATIONAL LANGUAGE MIXING IN HONG KONG

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Language mixing in Hong Kong typically involves the insertion of isolated English lexical items, usually substantives but not necessarily so, into an essentially Cantonese syntactic frame consisting of mostly Cantonese words. Some common examples include:

Ngo-go warrant seung-min go date hai luk-baat nin a
my warrant on CLASSIFIER date is sixty-eight year PARTICLE
'The date on my warrant is 68.'

M-goi check check hoi gei-dim
please check check depart what-time
'Can you tell me the departure time, please?'

Cho van heui la
sit van go PARTICLE
'Take a van to go there.'

Various phenomena related to language mixing in Hong Kong have been noticed and discussed before. Apart from a study of loan words (Chan & Kwok, 1982), most studies in the past tended to centre around university students. (Kwok et al, 1972; Gibbons, 1979a, b) So far, there has been an obvious need for more investigation into the 'mixing behaviour' of other social groups.

The linguistic characteristics and social significance of language mixing have also received some attention, and various suggestions have been offered concerning the significance of mixing. Chan and Kwok (1982) suggest that while most people in Hong Kong, especially among the younger generations, are not totally Chinese, neither are they uncomprisingly Western, and the linguistic correlate of this 'nowhere land' may well be 'Chinglish' (Chinese-English mix). In a similar vein, Gibbons (1983) reports on the findings of a matched-guise experiment aimed at investigating university students' attitudes towards English, Cantonese, and U-gay-wa (University students' jargon) and suggests that the special campus version of Chinese-English mix may be interpreted as a code that enables them to avoid total commitment to the Chinese tradition and culture, while at the same time allowing them to avoid sounding too Western.

Following on from these studies, I wish in this paper to look beyond the university campuses and study language mixing and some related phenomena in the wider community, and in so doing, develop a wider perspective where isolated descriptions of occupationally specific modes of mixing and borrowing can be related to the central theme of code choice. In addition, I wish to

sharpen the focus on that particular choice which we call code-mixing and give an account of the factors that go into the choice.

I will limit my lexical analysis to words of English origin which are widely used and widely understood in the speech of people in Hong Kong, which, in spite of varying degrees of phonological modification, remain essentially English words in the sense that (1) they have no accepted Chinese characters in writing; (2) there are norms that prevent them from entering 'pure' Cantonese speech; and (3) they are generally perceived, unlike full-fledged loan words, as English words. Words such as heung bun (champagne), sik si fung (saxophone), ba si (bus), dik si (taxi) will not be treated as instances of mixing: they have been Sinicized to such an extent that they must now be treated as Chinese lexical items. However, words such as 'school cert' (Certificate of Education), 'Matric' (Matriculation), 'banking', trading', 'invoice', etc. will be included in my analysis as instances of English lexical items being 'mixed' in Cantonese speech.[1]

Linguistic Repertoire and Social Grouping

The linguistic repertoire of the contemporary society of Hong Kong consists of a large set of means of communication, including, as it does, Cantonese as the primary lingua franca, a number of Chinese dialects, English, and various other languages. For the purposes of this paper, I shall limit my discussion to Cantonese and English and such forms of language as would involve an interaction between the two. From this point of view, the community's linguistic repertoire would include at least six alternative means of communication, namely, 'high' Cantonese, 'low' Cantonese, expedient mixing, orientational mixing, code-switching, and English. This scheme looks considerably more complicated than any previous account but it will be demonstrated below that this is the simplest scheme one would need in order to understand language mixing and its social significance.

In contrast to the usual account which takes Cantonese to be one unitary variety, I find it useful to distinguish (for the purposes of this paper) at least two varieties of Cantonese, one which is more formal, 'sounds' more educated, and is used typically for such functions as public announcements, news broadcasts, formal speeches and lectures and the like, and another which is used in such informal domains as home, friendship and neighbourhood. The ability to actively use 'high' Cantonese does presuppose a fair amount of education and a good knowledge of standard (written) Chinese, whereas 'low' Cantonese is the variety that an overwhelming majority of the population speak either as their first language or as their primary language of social interaction (if their first language is some other Chinese dialects). Knowledge of 'low' Cantonese does not presuppose any educational background, as it is never formally learnt.[2]

Formally, 'high' Cantonese is characterized phonologically by a greater concentration and consistency in the use of such 'conservative' variants as initial n, kw, k'w and the high-falling tone; grammatically by the use of such 'classical' constructions as 'yi + N wai + N', 'yi bin + V', 'biu si + V/ADJ', 'naan yi + V', etc.; and lexically by the use of 'classical' form words (xu-zi) such as wong, heung, si fu, dang, and 'literary' words such as

cha seun, saak cheui, as well as a much higher concentration of set phrases and idioms.

'Low' Cantonese, on the other hand, can be identified by the lack of those features as described above. Phonologically, there is higher degree of use of 'innovative' variants such as initial l, k, k' and the high-level tone; grammatically, such constructions as V + ha, yau dak + V, V + dak are prevalent; lexically, one notices the relative infrequency of use of 'classical' particles, set phrases and idioms.

In the same way, code-mixing has in previous studies been referred to as if it were one unitary phenomenon. Upon closer investigation, however, it becomes necessary to differentiate two kinds of code-mixing which are essentially different in nature. The reasons for this distinction will be discussed in the next section where an account will be given of two lexical paradigms which will be crucial for the recognition of these two kinds of code-mixing. For the moment, we shall simply refer to them as expedient mixing and orientational mixing.

The fifth means of communication is code-switching between Chinese and English, which involves the use of alternate segments of clause and sentence length from the two languages.

The last alternative to consider is English, which is, as observed above, not a common means of communication among the Chinese population in Hong Kong. Its use among the Chinese people is limited to a restricted set of well-defined situations such as university seminars, high-level meetings in the Government, etc. There are strong social sanctions against its use in a range of informal situations.

In relation to this pool of linguistic resources, an individual's speech repertoire will be a subset of the totality of his community's linguistic means. Individuals' speech repertoires will of course vary, but this in general will depend crucially on their age, level and type of education, and occupation, which are the key factors that determine their sociolinguistic group membership.

The society of Hong Kong consists essentially of two speech communities, Chinese and English. Within the Chinese speech community, it would be useful to further differentiate three sub-communities: the group of monolinguals, the group of semi-bilinguals, and the group of bilinguals. The monolinguals are typically China-born, old, educated, if at all, through the Chinese medium, who speak one Chinese dialect or other and whose knowledge of English is either non-existent or minimal. This group constitutes a not too small proportion of the Chinese speech community.

The semi-bilinguals are those who, regardless of age, have received some education and learnt some English either from school or other sources, and who have a small English vocabulary but insufficient competence in the language to enable them to sustain a conversation, although they are perhaps able to ask simple questions and give simple answers in English. While, unlike the monolinguals, they do have some knowledge of English, they are differentiated

from the bilinguals by their relative lack of exposure to the language and the rarity with which they have occasion to use the language, e.g. at work. There is every indication that the membership of this group has been on the increase, and forms probably the biggest of the three groups.

The inter-relations among these sub-groups and the English speaking community is best understood by conceptualizing the group of bilinguals as 'linguistic middlemen'. (Luke and Richards 1981) They are typically young, well-educated (tertiary or near tertiary) through a mixed medium of Chinese and English, either college or university students, or executives and senior white-collar workers, whose jobs involve frequent use of English. Their speech repertoire is generally 'richer' (in terms of the scheme of linguistic repertoire that has been set up) than those of the other groups. They would have at their disposal orientational mixing, code-switching and English, enabling them to utilize more fully the social meanings that are associated with code-choices in the community.

A recognition of this tripartite division within the Chinese speech community and the speech repertoires that are associated with them is a prerequisite to an understanding of language mixing in Hong Kong.

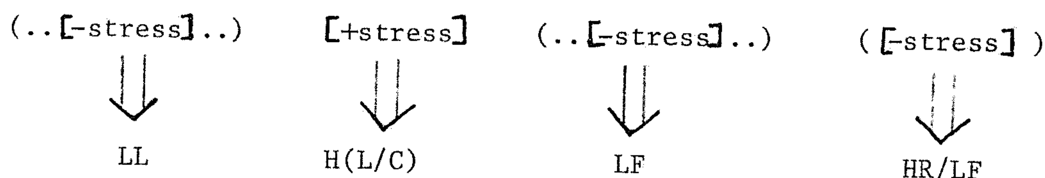
The Linguistic Features of Language Mixing

A brief description of the common features of the two kinds of mixing as well as their differences at various linguistic levels will be presented below.

1. Phonology

The phonetic values of segments show a great deal of variation from those which resemble the external norms of British and American English to those which show clear signs of influence from the Cantonese phonological system. 'Sorry', for instance, may be variably realized as [sɒri], [sɒwi], and [sɔ:li:], and possibly some other shapes. Some typical features at this level include the use of [ts'], an aspirated dental-alveolar affricate, in such words as [ts'ɛk] 'check' and [ts'ɔk] 'chalk', the dipthong [ou] in words like [stɛnsou] 'stencil' and [teibou] 'table', and the long open vowel [a] in [pauwa] 'power' and [k'wɔta] 'quarter'. While [ts'], [ou] and [a] can be attributed to the Cantonese phonological system, there are segments and sequences of segments which clearly must be attributed to the other contributing language, i.e. English. These include such phonemes as [r] ([rises]), [θ] ([θiəri]) and the consonant clusters [st] ([stensou]), [kl] ([klʌb]) and [tr] ([treɪ]).

The most interesting feature at the level of phonology, however, is a suprasegmental one. This can be stated roughly in terms of a 'rule' which assigns the high tone (level or checked, depending on whether the syllable is an open or close one) to that syllable of an English-origin word which receives primary stress; the low-level tone to all, if any, of the syllables that precede the stressed one; the high-rise or low-falling tone to the last syllable if it does not receive primary stress; and the low-falling tone to all the intervening syllables, if any, between the stressed syllable and the last syllable. In schematic form,



A few examples will serve the present purpose:

pa:t$_{HL}$		ti:$_{LF}$	'party'
treɪ$_{HL}$		dɪŋ$_{HR/LF}$	'trading'
kɛn$_{LL}$		ti:n$_{HL}$	'canteen'
a:$_{LL}$		ka:ŋ$_{HL}$	'account'
a:$_{LL}$	sis$_{HL}$	tʌn$_{HR/LF}$	'assistant'
sai$_{HL}$	jʌn$_{LF}$	si$_{HR/LF}$	'science'

There is also a preference for disyllabicity which is expressed in the modification of monosyllabic words, and the reduction of polysyllabic words, into disyllabic ones.

e.g.	lʌn ts'y	'lunch'
	wen tsai	'van' (+ a Cantonese dininutive particle)
	ts'ɔk fʌn	'chalk' (+ Cantonese 'powder')
	k'wɔ: li:	'qualification'
	mɛt trɪk	'matriculation'

It must be emphasized, however, that this is at best a 'preferred' pattern, and in no way an absolute rule. Witness such monosyllabic words as lɛb ('laboratory'), sɛk ('secretary'), ju: ('university') and ts'ɛk ('check').

While most of the phonological features mentioned above are shared by both expedient and orientational mixing, the former is characterized by a heavier use of such features, and the relatively rare occurrence of phonetic realizations towards the 'external-norms' end of the continuum.

2. Grammar

Convergence at the grammatical level typically takes the form of the juxtaposition of 'content-words' of English origin with Cantonese 'form-words' and grammatical particles which define the syntactic frame. Some common examples include:

keep jy	'keep' + imperfective marker	'to keep something for the time being'
quit jo	'quit' + perfective marker	'have quitted'
happy di	'happy' + comparative particle	'more happy'
try ha	'try' + momentaneous marker	'have a go'

Orientational mixing is characterized on the grammatical level by the greater use of such strategies as the 'splitting device', which reduplicates the first syllable of a polysyllabic word, separates it from the 'mother word' and places it into the appropriate grammatical slot in such constructions as the A-not-A construction.

e.g. pro m produce dou 'whether it can produce...'
fore m foresee dou 'whether one can foresee...'

Another grammatical feature typical of orientational mixing is the use of 'redundant constructions' which involve the use of a pre-phrasal element of English origin and a post-phrasal Cantonese equivalent in the same construction, or vice versa.

e.g. within yat-go-yut leui-min
within one-month within
'within one month'

after keui jau-jo ji-hau
after he/she left after
'after he/she left'

baak-fan-ji yi-sap-go percent
percent twenty percent
'twenty percent'

li-paai dou yau di commercial, which
recently also there-is some commercial which

ngo dou gei seung jip-juk ha di commercial
I also rather want contact ASP some commercial

'Recently, we have made some commercials as well, which I quite like to have a go at'

3. Semantics

At the semantic level, both kinds of mixing have in common the tendency to restrict the range of meanings of a word of English origin typically to one specific meaning, or, in some cases, to modify its meaning altogether. The word 'party' in the speech of the younger generations in Hong Kong is often used to refer to one particular kind of gathering, namely a dancing party. Similarly, 'tissue' is widely used in the community to refer to 'tissue paper', a special kind of soft paper packed in a particular way for use in cleaning and drying one's hands and face.

In many cases, however, such semantic changes can only be understood in relation to the specific group (occupational or otherwise) in which certain lexical items have greatest currency. The word 'sek', for example, is widely used in the commercial sector to refer to not necessarily a secretary in its original sense, but some (usually) female junior clerk or typist; whereas among student groups, the same item usually refers to the secretary of an interest group or association. Another example is 'misi' (from 'Miss'), which is used among students as a form of address for female teachers, but among most salesgirls in shops and department-stores as a form of address for any young female customer. Among civil servants, the word 'board' is restricted to the meaning 'board meeting', so that to 'cho board' (sit board) is to attend a board meeting.

4. Discourse Markers

One of the most salient features of orientational mixing is the frequency with which discourse markers are used. The most commonly used markers include 'and', 'but', 'otherwise', 'but then', 'and then', 'in a way', 'anyway' and 'after all'. There is a significant absence of these in expedient mixing.

Expedient Mixing and Orientational Mixing

By far the strongest justification for distinguishing between two kinds of mixing lies on the lexical level. A close investigation into the interrelationship between 'high' Cantonese, 'low' Cantonese and mixing reveals that parallel lexical items do not necessarily exist across the three categories. Briefly, two main patterns can be discerned when we attempt to construct lexical paradigms.

First, there is a pattern whereby we find a straight parallel across all the three categories such that a lexical item in 'high' Cantonese corresponds to another in 'low' Cantonese and a third in mixing. To illustrate,

	'high' Cantonese	'low' Cantonese	Mixing
'billiard'	cheuk kau	toi bo	billiard
'barbeque'	siu haau	siu ye sik	barbeque
'husband'	jeung fu	sinsaang/lou gung	husband
'hormone'	gik sou	ho yi mung	hormone
'sack'	gaai gwu	tsaau yau yu	fire/sack
'lunch'	ng faan	ngaan	lunch
'pancake'	bok jin beng	baan gik	pancake
'teacher'	lou si	sin saang	sir (Ah sir)
'staff room'	gaau yun sat	sinsaang fong	staff room
'pay deposit'	gaau ngon gam	lok deng	bei deposit
'thank you'	biu si gam je	m goi	thank you
'check'	faancha	cha	check

There is a second pattern, however, where parallel terms exist in the first and the third column, with no corresponding term in between (i.e. the 'low' Cantonese column).

	'high' Cantonese	'low' Cantonese	Mixing
'application form'	biu gaak	-	form
'consciousness'	yi sik ying taai	-	consciousness
'cushion'	yi jin	-	cushion
'margarine'	yan jou ngau yau	-	margarine
'computer program'	din nou ching jeui	-	program
'qualification'	ji lik	-	quali/ qualification
'vocabulary'	ji wui	-	vocab/ vocabulary

The use of an item from the column 'Mixing', therefore, may have two meanings. First, when the situation is defined as 'informal', the speaker will have a choice between column 2 ('low' Cantonese) and column 3 (mixing), but not column 1, which has the attribute [+ formal]. But when the corresponding term is missing from column 2, the 'choice' becomes not a real one. Of course this is not to say that the speaker who does not have in his speech repertoire mixing or 'high' Cantonese will then be unable to refer to that object or express that idea. There are always ways open to him, e.g. he can, despite the stylistic inappropriacy, choose to use the formal 'high' Cantonese term, or he can impromptu create a new term. More often, however, the speaker would use the term in the 3rd column to fill the stylistic gap. The difference between the two kinds of mixing is that while in expedient mixing a term in the mixing category is 'chosen' because it happens to be the only informal term in the formal-informal contrast, in orientational mixing, a term in the mixing category is chosen out of a two-term contrast between the 'mixing term' and its corresponding 'low' Cantonese term.

Lexical Choice

We are therefore dealing in the case of orientational mixing with a phenomenon which shows some affinities with the more familiar processes of phonological, morphological, and syntactic variation. Lexical variation within a variety is extremely difficult to study, as the constancy of referential meaning between two lexical variants is often hard to establish. The kind of lexical choice we are witnessing appears to be more amenable to study as it involves 'variants' across two language varieties. Although it would still be arguable whether two lexical items 'mean the same thing', nevertheless there does seem to be a much more convincing sense in which, for example, 'tennis' and 'mong kau' are referentially synonymous.

Further examples can be laid out in the following paradigm:

	'low' Cantonese	Mixing
'to wear contact lens'	daai yanying ngaangeng	daai kontak
'hi-fi'	cheunggei	hai fai
'tissue paper'	ji gan	ti su
'Down one' (in Bridge)	sy yat dung	daang wan
'Miss'	siu je	mi si
'cassette deck'	lukyam jo	dek

As can be seen from this table, orientational mixing involves a choice between two or more 'variant forms'. We can begin to understand the social significance of this code-choice when we observe that certain objects, institutions and ideas appear to be perceived as inherently more 'western' than others, and are more likely to be referred to by the term in mixing than that in 'low' Cantonese. For instance, one is struck by the fact that while it is common practice among the group of bilinguals to refer to contact lens as kontak, it is highly unlikely that glasses are referred to as 'glasses' or 'spectacles' instead of the Cantonese term ngaan geng. Similarly, tennis wokman (portable casette recorder), U (university), etc. are very widely and frequently used terms, while soccer, radio and restaurant, for example, are almost always referred to by their Cantonese names.

The factor which seems to be at work in all these cases may be called 'Westernism', which we can understand as a function of the individual's reaction, by virtue of his social group membership, to the forces of Westernization in Hong Kong. Orientational mixing would therefore seem to be a strategy which has a lot in common with 'trade' Dyula in the Ivory Coast which was characterized by Partmann as a 'symbol of modernism' (Manessy, 1977).

Discussion

The phoneomenon of language mixing in Hong Kong may look superficially unproblematic. After all, Hong Kong _is_ a modern metropolis, and one may very well expect people here to come into contact with 'things foreign' and find it inevitable to refer to these experiences by the names that come with them. Espinosa (1975) reports the case of Spanish-English mixing among some New Mexico inhabitants where the use of English words for elements of the intruding American culture is necessitated by the lack of a class of equivalent terms in Spanish. For them, therefore, mixing is largely a matter of convenience and necessity.

The same has been said about language mixing in Hong Kong, but this leaves an important part of the picture unaccounted for. As argued above, language mixing in Hong Kong is not merely a necessary way of 'talking about' new experiences, but, perhaps more importantly, the linguistic reflection of how different groups in the society respond to them. While there _are_ instances of mixing which are essentially 'gap-filling' in nature, there are equally those which are effected in spite of the existence of native equivalents. It is therefore suggested that the key to an understanding of this aspect of the linguistic behaviour of people in Hong Kong is to recognize two different kinds of mixing, and to examine the implications of this distinction in the wider context of code choice in the society.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cf. Chan and Kwok (1982)'s 'Pre-loan Stage' and 'First Stage of Integration' in lexical borrowing.

2. Whether this distinction between 'high' and 'low' Cantonese entails the descriptive label of 'diglossia' is an issue that is far too complicated to be discussed in this paper. Part of the complication has to do with written Chinese in Hong Kong, which is more often than not a mixture of standard written Chinese, classical Chinese and Cantonese dialectal features; which, in its turn, exerts considerable influence on some 'high' varieties of spoken Cantonese (as, for instance, in news reading). There is, in any case, some evidence that there is, to use Timm (1981)'s terminology, not only an inter-lingual diglossia between English and Chinese, but probably also an intra-lingual diglossia between 'high' and 'low' Cantonese.

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