

## The “ins and outs” of English Loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese

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This paper reports on a study investigating the usage of English loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese.

One of the unique features of Hong Kong Cantonese is its richness in incorporating English loanwords in its lexicon. Loanwords such as 士多 *si6do1* (from English “store”) and 多士 *do1si6* (from English “toast”) have become so nativized that Cantonese speakers may not realize they are loanwords from English. Recent studies on loanwords in Cantonese (Bauer, 2006; Luke & Lau, 2008; Wong, Bauer, & Lam, 2009) have examined the phonetic, phonological and morphosyntactic adaptation of English loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese. The present study intends to examine the sociolinguistic aspect in terms of two criteria proposed by Poplack and Sankoff (1984:103-104) in analyzing the integration of loanwords into a native language: frequency of use and native-language synonym displacement. Two research questions were asked: (1) How frequently is a particular English loanword used by Cantonese speakers in spontaneous speech? (2) Does age make a difference?

A set of 80 English loanwords were selected for the study. Six sets of pictures which contain these 80 items were used to elicit spontaneous speech data. 40 subjects of two age groups were interviewed individually by a research assistant. The age range of the younger group is 20-30 years old while that of the older group is 50-60. In the interview, each subject was asked to describe the six sets of pictures carefully. The responses of the subjects were then analyzed in terms of how the target items were produced: whether loanwords were used or not.

Results show that on average the younger group used loanwords more frequently than the older group. The responses of the 40 subjects also reveal that the loanwords show very different patterns of usage. Some items are so fully integrated into Cantonese that almost all the subjects used the loanwords (e.g. 士多啤梨 *si6do1be1lei2* for “strawberry”). Other items appear to have become obsolete (e.g. 燕梳 *jin3so1* has been replaced by 保險 *bou2him2* for “insurance”).

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