



**Rules and Constraints of the Code-mixing
Patterns in Hong Kong Cantonese**

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Introduction

- Hong Kong – a multilingual and multicultural city
- Code-mixing phenomenon

- 你屋企有無**printer** ?

*nei5 uk1 kei5 jau5 mou4 **printer**?*

Do (you) have a **printer** at home?

- 你識唔識打**tennis** ?

*nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 daa2 **tennis** ga3?*

Do you know how to play **tennis**?

Literature Review

Luke (1998)

- **Expedient mixing**
 - “the type of language mixing in which expedience and pragmatic needs are the primary motivation”.
 - E.g. the use of English words such as “**program**”, “**pizza**” and “**vocab**”.
- **Oriental mixing**
 - “the type of language mixing in which ‘identification with the better educated’ and ‘a western outlook’ are the primary motivations” (Luke 1998; 148-149).
- Luke explored the issue of code mixing in pragmatic (expedient mixing) and sociolinguistic aspect (orientational mixing).

Literature Review

Li (1998)

- **Principle of Economy**

- The choice of code mixing is “often determined by which expression is syntactically simpler, less complex, or less marked”

(1) 打 **collect call**

daa2 collect call

To dial **a collect call**

(2) 打一個由對方付款的長途電話。

daa2 jat1go3 jau4 deoi3fong1 fu6fun2 ge3 coeng4tou4 din6waa2.

To dial **a toll call which is paid by the receiver** (collect call)

Hypothesis

- We argue that simplification and convenience is the reason for code mixing, our hypothesis is that code mixing takes place when the phonology of English word is simpler than its Cantonese counterpart i.e. there are fewer number of syllables in the English word than its Cantonese counterpart. We found that the matrix rule of the choice of lexicons is the number of syllables of a word. The one containing fewer syllables will be chosen.
- We expect that Cantonese speakers prefer to use the noun phrase in the language which has a fewer number of syllables. If the number of syllables is the same in both languages, they will use both the Cantonese and the English terms equally often.
- people will say “to have a tea” in 食(sik6) tea instead of 食下午茶 (sik6 haa6ng5caa4). The English lexicon “tea” contains only one syllable but “haa6ng5caa4” contains 3 syllables. The English lexicon “notebook” is also adopted in conversation instead of the Cantonese lexicon “手提電腦” (sau2tai4 din6nou5) as the English lexicon has only 2 syllables comparing to 4 in Cantonese.
- On the other hand, if the Cantonese lexicon has fewer syllables than its equivalence in English, code mixing will not occur.
- If the equivalent lexicon of both Cantonese and English contains the same number of syllables, there is half chance of code mixing. For example, Cantonese “網球” (mong5kau4) and English “tennis” are equally used in conversation. However, “part-time” is preferred instead of “兼職” (gim1zik1) while “早餐” (zou2caan1) is preferred rather than “breakfast”. In these cases, although we propose that there is half chance of code mixing, other factors such as input or difficulty in pronunciation will affect the code choice of the people.
- There is an additional rule for the occurrence of code mixing in our findings. It is the clipping of words. If either the Cantonese or the English words can be clipped, the number of syllables after clipping will be considered. For example, “contact lens” can be clipped into “con” in English, and it is adopted in conversation instead of using “隱形眼鏡” (jan2jing4 ngaan5geng2). Code mixing occurs in this way. Clipping also applies in Cantonese lexicon. “Scholarship” is clipped to “船” (syun4) because of the suffix “-ship” (syun4 means ship) of “scholarship”. Therefore people say “syun4” but not “scholarship” in conversation due to our hypothesis. Code mixing does not occur in this case.

Methodology

- **Questionnaire study**
- **Subjects**
 - 50 students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong
- **Choice of Lexical Items**
 - Non-jargon noun phrases
 - e.g. computer, breakfast, lunch, tennis, printer

Choice of Lexical items

- Nouns which have both Chinese and English equivalents.
- Conditions:
 - 1) the Chinese and English counterparts contain the same number of syllables,
 - 2) the Chinese counterparts contain more syllables than the English counterparts and
 - 3) the English counterparts contain more syllables than the Chinese counterparts.
 - 4) If there exists a short form for the noun in its Chinese or English equivalent, their short forms will be included in the questionnaire also.

Items used in the questionnaire

Items which has the same number of syllables in **Cantonese** and **English**

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
1	晏 <i>ngaan3</i>	1	Lunch	1
16	書 <i>syu1</i>	1	book	1
2	早餐 <i>zou2caan1</i>	2	Breakfast	2
3	晚飯 <i>maan5faan6</i>	2	Dinner	2
9	網球 <i>mong5kau4</i>	2	Tennis	2
15	飯堂 <i>faan6tong4</i>	2	Canteen	2
25	兼職 <i>gim1zik1</i>	2	Part-time	2
19	英文 <i>jing1man2</i>	2	English	2

Items used in the questionnaire

Items which have fewer syllables in the **Cantonese** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
12	教授 <i>gaau3sau6</i>	2	professor	3
14	電腦 <i>din6nou5</i>	2	Computer	3
22	功課 <i>gung1fo3</i>	2	Assignment	3
22	功課 <i>gung1fo3</i>	2	Assignment	3
8	乒乓球 <i>bing1bam1bo1</i>	3	Table tennis	4

Items used in the questionnaire

Items which have fewer syllables in the **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
7	教會 <i>gaau3wui2</i>	2	Church	1
10	逸夫 <i>jat6fu1</i>	2	Shaw	1
4	下午茶 <i>haa6m5caa4</i>	3	Tea	1
5	儲物櫃 <i>cyu5mat6gwai6</i>	3	Locker	2
6	基督徒 <i>gei1duk1tou4</i>	3	Christian	2
11	打印機 <i>daa2jan3gei1</i>	3	Printer	2
13	手提電腦 <i>sau2tai4din6nou5</i>	4	Notebook	2

Items used in the questionnaire

Items which short forms in either the **Cantonese** or **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
17	宿 <i>suk1</i>	1	Hall	1
	宿舍 <i>suk1se5</i>	2		
18	心理學 <i>sam1lei5hok6</i>	3	Psycho	2
			Psychology	4
20	獎學金 <i>zoeng2hok6gam1</i>	3	Scholarship	3
	船 <i>syun4</i>	1	Scholar	2
21	大學 <i>daai6hok6</i>	2	U	1
23	主席 <i>zyu2zik6</i>	2	President	3
			P	1

Items used in the questionnaire

Items which short forms in either the **Cantonese** or **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
24	隱形眼鏡 <i>jan2jing4ngaan5geng2</i>	4	Contact lens	3
			Contact	2
			Con	1
26	港大 <i>gong2daai6</i>	2	Hong Kong U	3
			Kong U	2
27	學會 <i>hok6wui2</i>	2	Society	3
			Soc	1

Design of the Questionnaire

- Rank the frequency of use of those items in 27 sets of sentences.
- Real life conversation
 - E.g. “Do you wear **contact lens**?”

	Never (0)	Seldom (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
1a 你有冇戴 Contact Lens ?					
1b 你有冇戴 Contact ?					
1c 你有冇戴 Con ?					
1d 你有冇戴 隱形眼鏡 ?					

Design of the Questionnaire

- Reason for code-mixing:
 - 1) There are no corresponding lexical items in Cantonese
 - 2) Code-mixing make the atmosphere less formal
 - 3) Code-mixing is a natural way of talking
 - 4) Easy and convenience
 - 5) Code-mixing give them a feeling of 'Westernization'

Results

Items which fewer syllables in the **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
7	教會 <i>gaau3wui2</i>	2 (3.92)	Church	1 (2.46)
10	逸夫 <i>jat6fu1</i>	2 (1.96)	Shaw	1 (4.46)
4	下午茶 <i>haa6m5caa4</i>	3 (2.54)	Tea	1 (4.10)
5	儲物櫃 <i>cyu5mat6gwai6</i>	3 (1.62)	Locker	2 (4.30)
6	基督徒 <i>gei1duk1tou4</i>	3 (3.60)	Christian	2 (2.64)
11	打印機 <i>daa2jan3gei1</i>	3 (1.50)	Printer	2 (4.60)
13	手提電腦 <i>sau2tai4din6nou5</i>	4 (1.72)	Notebook	2 (4.28)

Results

Items which fewer syllables in the **Cantonese** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
12	教授 <i>gaau3sau6</i>	2 (2.44)	professor	3 (4.06)
14	電腦 <i>din6nou5</i>	2 (4.28)	Computer	3 (1.74)
22	功課 <i>gung1fo3</i>	2 (3.54)	Assignment	3 (3.82)
8	乒乓球 <i>bing1bam1bo1</i>	3 (4.08)	Table tennis	4 (1.52)

Results

Items which has the same number of syllables in **Cantonese** and **English**

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
1	晏 <i>ngaan3</i>	1 (2.98)	Lunch	1 (3.36)
16	書 <i>syu1</i>	1 (4.32)	Book	1 (1.26)
2	早餐 <i>zou2caan1</i>	2 (4.10)	Breakfast	2 (1.34)
3	晚飯 <i>maan5faan6</i>	2 (3.36)	Dinner	2 (2.04)
9	網球 <i>mong5kau4</i>	2 (3.20)	Tennis	2 (3.12)
25	兼職 <i>gim1zik1</i>	2 (2.70)	Part-time	2 (4.44)
19	英文 <i>jing1man2</i>	2 (4.26)	English	2 (1.52)

Results

Items which short forms in either the **Cantonese** or **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
17	宿 <i>suk1</i>	1 (4.20)	Hall	1 (4.18)
	宿舍 <i>suk1se5</i>	2 (2.50)		
18	心理學 <i>sam1lei5hok6</i>	3 (2.30)	Psycho	2 (4.32)
			Psychology	4 (1.92)
20	獎學金 <i>zoeng2hok6gam1</i>	3 (2.98)	Scholarship	3 (3.24)
	船 <i>syun4</i>	1 (3.22)	Scholar	2 (1.46)
21	大學 <i>daai6hok6</i>	2 (3.20)	U	1 (3.80)
23	主席 <i>zyu2zik6</i>	2 (2.72)	President	3 (1.44)
			P	1 (3.94)

Results

Items which short forms in either the **Cantonese** or **English** counterpart

No.	Cantonese items	No. of syllables	English items	No. of syllables
24	隱形眼鏡 <i>jan2jing4ngaan5geng2</i>	4 (2.78)	Contact lens	3 (1.82)
			Contact	2 (1.40)
			Con	1 (4.56)
26	港大 <i>gong2daai6</i>	2 (3.22)	Hong Kong U	3 (2.42)
			Kong U	2 (4.24)
27	學會 <i>hok6wui2</i>	2 (2.52)	Society	3 (1.80)
			Soc	1 (4.22)

Results

- Reasons of code-mixing
 - 74% A natural way of talking
 - 50% More convenient
 - 32% No corresponding items in Cantonese
 - 26% The atmosphere is more casual when they code-mix.
 - 2% It gives them a feeling of ‘Westernization’.
- Other reasons:
 - A university culture
 - Code mixing and the use of the clippings make it an in-group common language for them to communicate with each other.

Discussion

- For the lexical item ‘breakfast’ and its Cantonese counterpart “早餐” (*zou2can1*), although both of them consist of 2 syllables, the English counterpart has a mean score with 0.34, which is very close to 0. There are 2 reasons to account for this phenomenon. First of all, many university students don’t have the habit of eating breakfast in the morning. Even when they have the habit of eating breakfast, they will usually have it alone or with their family, which they will mention the lexical word in Cantonese instead. The second reason is about the pronunciation of ‘breakfast’ in English. There is a consonant cluster ‘st’ in the second syllable. Since Cantonese phonology doesn’t allow consonant clusters, the students will choose the Cantonese counterpart when they have a choice between the two as it is easier for them to pronounce.
- We can use the same reason to explain for the preference of “英文” (*ying1man2*) over ‘English’. In the first syllable, [ɪŋ] is a little bit difficult for Cantonese speakers to pronounce because it is not allowed in the Cantonese phonology in syllable initial position. In Cantonese, a glide [j] is usually added to the initial position of the above syllable. Moreover, there is a consonant cluster [gl] in the initial position of the second syllable which make it more difficult to pronounce. Therefore students will choose the Cantonese counterpart instead when they want to mention that word.

Discussion

- The lexical item ‘professor’ and its Cantonese counterpart “教授” (gaau3sau6) also contradict our rules of simplicity. ‘Professor’ is a 3-syllable word while its Cantonese counterpart ‘gaau3sau6’ is a 2-syllable word. According to our hypothesis, students should use the Cantonese counterpart more, but the result is the opposite. Our reason is that there is an input influence on the choice of this word. For almost all other sets of words, the students already hear both the Cantonese and English counterparts frequently in their daily life. However, they do not hear the words ‘gaau3sau6’ and ‘professor’ very often until they enter university. They will use the term “先生” (sin1saang1) or ‘ah Sir/Miss’ instead when they want to mention their teachers. When they enter the university, what they usually hear is ‘professor’ instead of ‘gaau3sau6’. Therefore, the input influence may interfere with the factor of simplicity and convenience.
- For the items concerning scholarship, we propose that students will use the term “船” (syun4) because of the suffix “-ship” (syun4 means ship) of “scholarship”. However, we find that people we use the term “Scholarship” and “獎學金” (zoeng2hok6gam1) as often as “船” (syun4) although the 2 words are 3-syllable words. In our study, 18% of the students say that they will never use the term “船” (syun4). This may mean that some of them actually haven’t come across with this short form before. Therefore it is not surprising that the terms “Scholarship” and “獎學金” (zoeng2hok6gam1) are still in the main trend.
- For the items concerning religion, students show a preference towards the Cantonese counterparts in spite of the fact that they have more syllables in their words. This may be due to the fact that not all of the students who received the questionnaires are Christians. Therefore, those non-Christians tend to use the words (both Cantonese and English) much fewer than the Christians. When they mention the words, they tend to use the Cantonese equivalent. For the students who are Christians, they may use the English equivalent more since they will mention the words more frequently than others. However, since we do not include their religious background in the questionnaire, we cannot make a conclusion for this point. Further analysis should be carried out to verify this point.

Conclusion

- Hong Kong is such a rush city that efficiency is essential in the society. It can also be reflected in language and communication. Therefore, we suggest that code mixing is a result of the need of convenience.
- This paper has come across the issue in phonology aspect. We found that something similar to the Principle of Economy suggested by Li applied in our research. We suggested that the choice of lexicon is often determined by which one is phonologically simpler.
- Principle of Economy → Universal?
 - Test in Singapore, Malaysia, Vancouver etc...

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