

The Englishization of Chinese in computer-mediated communication

The Englishization of Mandarin Chinese in offline contexts in Taiwan has been documented (e.g., Hsu 1994a, 1994b). This paper examines the impact from English on Chinese in computer-mediated communication in mainland China, which is usually conducted in a Chinese-English bilingual code (Gao 2003). The paper argues that with electronic communication becoming more pervasive in China, the convergence of Chinese towards English may become more robust, which, consequently, may have implications for the change in the Chinese language.

The Englishization of Chinese not only occurs on the lexical but also on the syntactic and discursive level. On the lexical level, plentiful online Chinese words originate from English, such as the word 猫 ('modem') and the now almost hackneyed usage 伊妹儿 ('e-mail'). Not to mention the letter words such as DVD, WTO, and BP 机 ('beeper'). Moreover, Chinese netizens model on English in the creation and use of certain lexical items, such as the abbreviations MM ('sister,' from *meimei*) and BT ('abnormal,' from *biantai*). On the syntactic level, both the part of speech of some words and the word order in some sentences have been changed, which can both be attributed to the influence from English. For example, in 1), the noun 电话 is used as a verb. In 2), the adverbial time phrase 明年 is moved from before the verb phrases 去美国 to after it.

- 1) 有空电话我。 ('Call me if you have time.')
- 2) 我去美国明年。 ('I am going to the US the next year.')

On the discursive and pragmatic level, Internet usages show that Chinese netizens are more ready to express and accept compliments when online than when offline, among other things.

The data analyzed in this study were collected primarily from five Internet situations – online BBS's, chatrooms, Internet literatures, which are original novels recently written particularly for online publication, personal e-mails, and other types of posting at the public website, such as news and advertisements. Among these sources, BBS's and Internet relay chatrooms are the major ones. The data collection started in February 2001 and is still in progress presently.

Computers as a medium of communication have far-reaching effect on the evolution of human language (Baron 2000, Crystal 2001). In examining the Englishization of Chinese in Internet communication, which affects Chinese lexicon, syntax, and discourse, this paper highlights the role of the Internet in the change in progress in Chinese. Furthermore, as the paper documents, the Internet initializes a new type of language contact, one without the physical proximity of speakers of contact languages as a precondition.

References

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