

# THE INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN HONG KONG CANTONESE<sup>1</sup>

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## 0 Abstract

Borrowing from English into Cantonese has been the catalyst for change in the Cantonese phonological system and lexicon. Many English loanwords have become fully integrated into Hong Kong Cantonese as demonstrated in this paper. Our research team has compiled a database comprising around 700 English loanwords. This paper presents data demonstrating how extensive has been the integration of English loanwords into Cantonese in terms of the following linguistic features:

(a) Suffixation: The Cantonese suffix 咁 dei2 is added to reduplicated monosyllabic stative verbs to mean 'having some quality of the stative verb'. Some English loanwords undergo the same process: HIGH haai1 'high' becomes HIGH HIGH 咁 hai1 hai1 dei2 'a little excited'. Many English loanwords can take the Cantonese aspectual marker 咗 zo2: CHECK cek1 'check' becomes CHECK 咗 cek1 zo2 'have checked'.

(b) Change of Syntactic Categories: Upon being borrowed into Cantonese, some loanwords change their syntactic categories. The noun *man* becomes the stative verb MAN men1 'manly' as in 好 MAN hou2 men1 'very manly' and MAN MAN 咁 men1 men1 dei2 'with some manly quality'.

(c) Productivity: A loanword may be incorporated into the Cantonese grammatical structure to generate new lexical items as demonstrated by 撈 lou1 'Rolex' as in 金撈 gam1 lou1 'gold Rolex' and 鑽撈 zyun3 lou1 'diamond Rolex'.

(d) Acceptability: Some English loanwords have become so integrated into Cantonese that speakers who know no English assume they are ordinary Cantonese words such as 巴士 baa1 si6/2 'bus'.

These features provide solid evidence that many English loanwords have become thoroughly integrated into Cantonese.

## 1 Introduction

Linguistic borrowing is one of the most salient consequences of language contact. English and Cantonese are typologically distinct languages, yet the differences between them have in no way impeded mutual borrowing. Historical contact between English and Cantonese

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began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century when British traders came to Canton to buy Chinese tea and porcelain and has continued to the present. English loanwords are documented in the first English-Cantonese, Cantonese-English dictionary *A Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect* authored by Robert Morrison and published in 1828.

Borrowing from English into Cantonese has been a catalyst for change in the Cantonese phonological system and lexicon (Bauer, 2006; Bauer and Benedict, 1997; Chan and Kwok, 1982, 1986; Wong, 2006). From our observations it is clear that many English loanwords have become fully integrated into the Hong Kong Cantonese lexicon. Our research team has compiled a database comprising about 700 English loanwords, most of which are nouns. In our study of loanwords we have been concerned with their phonological, syntactic, and semantic aspects; in Bauer and Wong (2009 to appear) we have examined the impact that loanwords have had on the phonological system with the formation of new rimes and syllables in the Cantonese syllabary, while in this paper we have focused on the syntactic and semantic features of loanwords.

There are three methods by which English words have been borrowed into Cantonese: (1) semantic translation in which the English lexical item is translated into Cantonese and the phonetic form of the word bears no relationship to the source word, for example, the English phrase *lame duck* has been translated into 跛腳鴨 *bai1 goek3 aap3* (literally 'lame', and 'duck') in Cantonese; (2) phonetic transliteration in which the phonetic composition of the 'borrowed' English lexical item is transliterated into Cantonese, for example, the English word *store* is transliterated as 士多 *si6 do1* in Cantonese; and (3) the combination of these two, for example, English *egg tart* is 蛋撻 *daan6 taat1* with the first syllable borrowed through semantic translation and the second syllable represented through phonetic transliteration.

It may sometimes be difficult to determine if a semantically-translated loanword has come directly into Cantonese or via standard Chinese; for this reason our database has excluded all borrowings of this type, and we have limited our collection of loanwords borrowed into Cantonese based on the second and third methods mentioned above: phonetically transliterated items and items that have combined at least one phonetically transliterated syllable with one or more Cantonese morphosyllables. Since the sound systems of standard Chinese (i.e., Mandarin or Putonghua) and Cantonese are quite different, it is usually not difficult to decide whether or not phonetically transliterated items have been directly borrowed into Cantonese.

## 2 Database of English Loanwords in Hong Kong Cantonese

Our database of English loanwords comprises about 700 lexical entries. According to our analysis of this database, 85% of our lexical entries are words which include only phonetically-transliterated syllables, while 15% are made up of at least one phonetically-transliterated syllable and at least one Cantonese morphosyllable which bears some semantic relationship to the loanword.

In the process of compiling our database of loanwords we have paid close attention to the syntactic categories and semantic areas to which the loanwords belong. We have classified loanwords according to six syntactic categories and 24 semantic categories. In Table 1 below the six syntactic categories are listed in the descending order of the percentages of loanwords that belong to these categories:

**Table 1:** *Distribution of loanwords by syntactic categories.*

Syntactic category:	%
Nouns	80.5
Verbs	11.7
Attributives	5.5
Classifiers	1.3
Fixed expressions	0.6
Adverbs	0.4

As we see in the above table, the vast majority of loanwords in Cantonese are nouns, with the next largest group being verbs; the two smallest syntactic categories are fixed expressions and adverbs.

Table 2 below presents the distribution of loanwords according to their semantic categorization in the descending order of percentages of loanwords belonging to the categories. As indicated, the two largest semantic categories are Food (11.4%) and Recreation (10.0%).

**Table 2:** *Distribution of loanwords by semantic categories.*

Semantic category:	%	Semantic category:	%
Food	11.4	Activities & states	3.7
Recreation	10.0	Finance & business	3.3
Academic environment	7.6	Chemicals, medicines, & drugs	3.2
Language (descriptive/social)	6.7	Police jargon	2.6
Mechanical instruments & materials	6.4	Office environment	2.1
Fashion	5.8	Address terms	2.0
Technology	5.6	Household	1.8
Daily life	5.2	Garments	1.7
Units of measurement	4.7	Transportation	1.5
Drinks	4.1	Brand names	1.4
Occupations	3.8	Fabrics	1.2
Music	3.7	Animals & plants	0.5

As for the written representation of English loanwords, we have observed that 61% have written Chinese characters associated with them, while 35% are not represented by any Chinese characters.

### 3 Integration of Loanwords into Cantonese

The integration of loanwords into Cantonese can be analyzed according to four criteria: (1) frequency of use, (2) native-language synonym displacement, (3) morphophonemic and/or syntactic integration, and (4) acceptability (Poplack and Sankoff, 1984:103-104). This paper presents data on the integration of English loanwords into Cantonese in terms of their morpho-syntactic and semantic features, as well as their acceptability as reflected by their written representations and productivity. We first examine the written representations associated with English loanwords.

### 3.1 Written Representation of Loanwords

One measure of loanword integration in Cantonese is the sizeable number of loanwords which are conventionally written with Chinese characters. Table 3 below lists some commonly occurring loanwords that belong to this category. We may note that both 巴士 *baa1 si6/2*<sup>2</sup> 'bus' and 的士 *dik1 si6/2* 'taxi' have an official status in Hong Kong, as the first item is painted on road surfaces to mark bus stops, and the second is written on taxis and signs.

**Table 3:** Examples of loanwords written with standard Chinese and Cantonese characters.

Written form:	Romanized form:	English source:	Written form:	Romanized form:	English source:
巴士	<i>baa1 si6/2</i>	<i>bus</i>	啤酒	<i>be1 zau2</i>	<i>beer</i>
餐屎	<i>caan1 si6/2</i>	<i>chance</i>	打令	<i>daa2/1 ling6/2</i>	<i>darling</i>
的士	<i>dik1 si6/2</i>	<i>taxi</i>	多士	<i>do1 si6/2</i>	<i>toast</i>
菲林	<i>fei1 lam4/2</i>	<i>film</i>	科文	<i>fo1 man4/2</i>	<i>foreman</i>
卡士	<i>kaa1 si6/2</i>	<i>cast</i>	蒜巴	<i>lam1 baa1/2</i>	<i>number</i>
孖展	<i>maai zin2</i>	<i>margin</i>	柯打	<i>ol daa2</i>	<i>order</i>
柯崙	<i>ol leon4/2</i>	<i>orlon</i>	阿華田	<i>ol waa4 tin4</i>	<i>Ovaltine</i>
安士	<i>on1 si6/2</i>	<i>ounce</i>	柯化	<i>oul faa3/4</i>	<i>over</i>
拍檔	<i>paat1 naa2</i>	<i>partner</i>	泡打粉	<i>paau1 daa2 fan2</i>	<i>baking powder</i>
批	<i>pai1</i>	<i>pie</i>	啤牌	<i>pe1 paai4/2</i>	<i>playing cards</i>
甫士	<i>pou1 si6/2</i>	<i>pose</i>	沙紙	<i>saa1 zi2</i>	<i>certificate</i>
沙展	<i>saal zin2</i>	<i>sergeant</i>	士的	<i>si6 dik1</i>	<i>stick</i>
士多	<i>si6 do1</i>	<i>store</i>	士多啤梨	<i>si6 do1 be1 lei4/2</i>	<i>strawberry</i>
新地	<i>san1 dei6/2</i>	<i>sundae</i>	梳打	<i>sol daa2</i>	<i>soda</i>
T恤	<i>til seot1</i>	<i>T-shirt</i>	威化餅	<i>wai1 faa3 beng2</i>	<i>wafer</i>
威乎	<i>wai1 fu4</i>	<i>wife</i>	威也	<i>wai1 jaa5/2</i>	<i>wire</i>
威士忌	<i>wai1 si6 gei6/2</i>	<i>whiskey</i>	窩夫	<i>wol ful</i>	<i>waffle</i>

In contrast, that a loanword is a recent borrowing may be indicated by its lack of Chinese characters as its written form, and the convention is to write it with the word's original English spelling. Examples of these include CYBER<sup>3</sup> *saa1 baa2* from *cyber*,

<sup>2</sup> The Cantonese pronunciations of English loanwords have been transcribed in the Jyut Ping romanization system devised by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong. Although the rimes of some loanword syllables do not occur in the standard Cantonese syllabary, the syllables can be still romanized, for example the rime *-en* is a colloquial rime and occurs in the loanword MAN 'manly' as *men1*. When a romanized syllable is accompanied by two numbers separated by a slash, it indicates a tone change. For example, the character 士 *si6* originally has tone 6 but is pronounced with tone 2 in the loanword 巴士 *baa1 si2* 'bus' so the second syllable is romanized as *si6/2*.

<sup>3</sup> If a loanword is normally represented by English spelling in written Cantonese, we will show the written representation of the loanword in capital letters to differentiate it from the English gloss.

FORM fom1 from *form*, FIRM foem1 from *firm*, SAMPLE saam1 pou2 from *sample*, WORK week1 from *work*, WARM wom1 from *warm*.

As for the historical documentation of loanwords in Cantonese, we have attempted to identify the occurrence of Cantonese loanwords in early publications, and we have observed that some loanwords were being written with Chinese characters not long after they had been borrowed into Cantonese. In Robert Morrison's *A Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect*, the world's first English-Cantonese, Cantonese-English dictionary published in 1828, the following English words were listed as having been borrowed into Cantonese (the romanizations reflect the Cantonese pronunciation of that time): *arack* 亞叻酒 aa3 lik1 zau2, *ball* 波球 bo1 kau4, *beer* 卑酒 be1 zau2, *brandy* 罷蘭地酒 baa6 laan4 di6 zau2, *cheese* 支士 zi1 si6, *chocolate* 知古辣 zi1 gu2/1 laat6/1, *coffee* 架啡 gaa3 fi1, *couch* 勾子床 ngau1 zi2 cong4, *flannel* 佛蘭仁 fat6 laan4 jan4, *liqueur* 利哥酒 li6 go1 zau2.

The fact that many of these loanwords do have their respective written representations with Chinese characters indicates the high level of their acceptance in Cantonese – as even some native colloquial Cantonese lexical items do not have written representation with Chinese characters.

### 3.2 Morpho-syntactic Processes

If a loanword exhibits the same morpho-syntactic features of native Cantonese lexical items, it is an unambiguous indication that the loanword has been integrated into the Cantonese grammatical system. From our database, we have found a number of loanwords which demonstrate such features.

First, when we examine suffixation, we find that many English loanwords are found to behave like Cantonese words. For example, the Cantonese suffix 哋 dei2 is added to reduplicated monosyllabic stative verbs to mean 'having some quality of the stative verb'; 藍 laam4 'blue' becomes 藍藍哋 laam4 laam4 dei2 'with a shade of blue'. Some English loanwords undergo the same process:

- (1) HIGH haai1 'high' becomes HIGH HIGH 哋 haai1 haai1 dei2 'a little excited'
- (2) Q kiu1 'cute' becomes QQ 哋 kiu1 kiu1 dei2 'quite cute'
- (3) 啡 fei1 'brown' (from 咖啡 gaa3 fei1 'coffee') becomes 啡啡哋色 fei1 fei1 dei2 sik1 'brownish'
- (4) SHORT sot1 'crazy' or 'malfunctioning' (from 'short circuit') becomes SHORT SHORT sot1 sot1 dei2<sup>4</sup> 'somewhat crazy' or 'somewhat malfunctioning'

Another very common suffix for Cantonese verbs is the Cantonese aspectual marker of completion 咗 zo2. Many English loan verbs can also take 咗 zo2 as shown in the following examples:

- (5) CHECK cek1 'check' becomes CHECK 咗 cek1 zo2 'have checked'
- (6) DOUBLE dap1 bou4 'double' becomes DOUBLE 咗 dap1 bou4 zo2 'have doubled' (in quantity)

Cantonese nouns, on the other hand, can be suffixed with diminutive 仔 zai2, and it also occurs with some English loanwords:

- (7) 嗲 bi4 bi1 'baby' becomes 嗲嗲仔 bi4 bi1 zai2 'small babies'
- (8) CADET ket6 det1 'cadet' becomes CADET 仔 ket6 det1 zai2 'a cadet guy'

<sup>4</sup> This loanword originally kept the English meaning which refers to an electric short circuit. It is now more often used metaphorically to refer to someone who is crazy, or to something that has malfunctioned.

(9) E 仔 jil zai2 'ecstasy (the drug)' is formed by the abbreviation of ecstasy 'E' plus 仔 zai2

(10) K keil from *ketamine* becomes 'K 仔' keil zai2 'ketamine'

That such morphological features combined with English loanwords well illustrates how many English loanwords have become fully integrated into Cantonese.

In addition to the above morphological characteristics, the syntactic properties manifested by English loanwords also clearly indicate the extent to which English loanwords have been integrated into Cantonese. Most Cantonese stative verbs can be modified by the intensifiers 好 hou2 'very', or 咁 gam3 'so', as in 好靚 hou2 leng3 'very pretty', 咁靚 gam3 leng3 'so pretty', 好醒 hou2 sing2 'very smart', 咁醒 gam3 sing2 'so smart'. The intensifiers 好 hou2 and 咁 gam3 are found being used in some English loanwords as follows:

(11) HIGH haai1 'high' becomes 好 HIGH hou2 haai1 'very high in spirit', or 咁 HIGH gam3 haai1 'so high in spirit'

(12) FIT fit1 'fit' becomes 好 FIT hou2 fit1 'very fit' or 咁 FIT gam3 fit1 'so fit'

(13) PRO pou6 'professional' becomes 好 PRO hou2 pou6 'very professional', or 咁 PRO gam3 pou6 'so professional'

A prevalent syntactic operation in forming interrogative sentences in Cantonese is the 'A-not-A' construction. To form this 'A-not-A' structure, the first syllable of a verb is reduplicated, and the negative morpheme 唔 m4 is inserted. In the case of 冲凉 cung1 loeng4 'to take a bath', for example, the 'A-not-A' structure turns it into a Yes-No question, 你冲唔冲凉 nei5 cung1 m4 cung1 loeng4 'Do you want to take a bath?' The 'A-not-A' construction can also be applied to stative verbs such as 辛苦 san1 fu2 'having a hard time', for example, 辛唔辛苦 san1 m4 san1 fu2 'Having a hard time?' That English loanwords can also share the 'A-not-A' construction provides further evidence that these loanwords have been fully integrated into Cantonese, as in the following examples:

(14) HAPPY hep1 pi2 'happy' becomes HAP 唔 HAPPY hep1 m4 hep1 pi2 'Are you happy?'

(15) *understand* is clipped to its first syllable UN an1 as the loanword: 你 UN 唔 UN 呀? nei5 an1 m4 an1 aa3? 'Do you understand?'

The above morpho-syntactic features associated with many English loanwords are summarized in Table 4 below.

**Table 4:** Summary of morpho-syntactic features.

English source:	Loanword:	Examples:	English gloss:
<b>-嘞 -dei2 stative verb suffix:</b>			
<i>high</i>	HIGH haai1	HIGH HIGH 嘞 haai1 haai1 dei2	'a little excited'
<i>cute</i>	Q kiu1	QQ 嘞 Kiu1 kiu1 dei2	'quite cute'
<i>coffee</i>	咖啡 gaa4 fe1	啡啡嘞色 fe1 fe1 dei2 sik1	'a shade of coffee'
<i>short circuit</i>	SHORT sot1	SHORT SHORT 嘞 sot1 sot1 dei2	'somewhat crazy'
<b>-咗 -zo2 verb marker of completed actions:</b>			
<i>check</i>	CHECK cek1	CHECK 咗 cek1 zo2	'have checked'
<i>double</i>	DOUBLE dap1 bou4	DOUBLE 咗 dap1 bou4 zo2	'have doubled (in quantity)'
<b>-仔 -zai2 noun suffix:</b>			
<i>baby</i>	嗲嗲 bi4 bi1	嗲嗲仔 bi4 bi1 zai2	'small babies'
<i>cadet</i>	CADET ket6 det1	CADET 仔 ket6 det1 zai2	'a cadet guy'
<i>ecstasy</i>	E 仔 ji1 zai2	E 仔 ji1 zai2	'ecstasy (the drug)'
<i>ketamine</i>	K 仔 kei1 zai2	K 仔 kei1 zai2	'ketamine'
<b>好 hou2 / 咁 gam3 stative verb modifiers:</b>			
<i>high</i>	HIGH haai1	好 / 咁 HIGH hou2 / gam3 haai1	'very / so high'
<i>fit</i>	FIT fit1	好 / 咁 FIT hou2 / gam3 fit1	'very / so fit'
<i>professional</i>	PRO pou6	好 / 咁 PRO hou2 / gam3 pou6	'very / so professional'
<b>A 唔 A 'A-not-A' construction:</b>			
<i>happy</i>	HAPPY hep1 pi2	HAP 唔 HAPPY hep1 m4 hep1 pi2	"Are you happy?"
<i>understand</i>	UN an1	你 UN 唔 UN 呀 nei5 an1 m4 an1 aa3?	"Do you understand?"

### 3.3 Change of Syntactic Categories

Upon being borrowed into Cantonese, some loanwords may change their syntactic categories. The noun *man* changes to the stative verb MAN men1 'manly' as in 佢 MAN咗好多 keoi5 men1 zo2 hou2 do1 'he has now become very manly' and MAN MAN

哋 men1 men1 dei2 'with some manly quality'. The noun *friend* also becomes the stative verb FRIEND fen1 'friendly', as in 佢同我好 FRIEND keoi5 tung4 ngo5 hou2 fen1 'he and I are good friends'. The first syllable of 啤酒 bel1 zau2 can function as a verb in 啤一啤 bel1 jat1 bel1 'Let's go and have a beer'. *Taxi* is borrowed as 的士 dik1 si6/2, but the first syllable of the noun 的 dik1 becomes the verb 'to take a taxi' in 我哋的去啦 ngo5 dei6 dik1 heoi5 laa1 'Let's take a taxi!'. *Okay* OK ou1 kei1 can modify other stative verbs to mean 'moderately', as in OK 難 ou1 kei1 naan4 'moderately difficult'. *Mug* 嚟 mak1 and *car* 卡 kaa1 'a railway carriage' function as both nouns and classifiers in Cantonese. The unit of measuring weight *pound* can be used as a noun to refer to the scale (磅 bong2) and also the verb meaning 'to weigh' (磅 bong6). The vocative expression 拜拜 baai3/1 baai3 'bye-bye' can be used as a verb in Cantonese, as in 你同 AUNTIE 拜拜咗未呀? nei5 tung4 aan1 ti4 baai3/1 baai3 zo2 mei6 aa3 'Have you said goodbye to Auntie?' The noun *cyber* can be used as a stative verb in Cantonese, as in 呢個 DESIGN 好 CYBER ni1 go3 di6 saai1 hou2 saai1 baa4 'This design has a cyber feel.' English *soft* becomes the verb 梳芙 sol fu4 'to enjoy oneself' in Cantonese: 佢放咗假去曼谷梳芙 keoi5 fong3 zo2 gaa3 heoi3 maan6 guk1 sol fu4 'He is on vacation and is enjoying himself in Bangkok.'

The syntactic adaptation of loanwords described above further demonstrates how they have become fully and intimately integrated into the Cantonese grammatical system. Table 5 below lists and summarizes these example loanwords.

**Table 5:** Examples of loanwords with changed syntactic category.

English source:	Loanword:	Change in syntactic category <sup>5</sup> :	Example:	English gloss:
<i>man</i>	MAN men1	N → SV	好 MAN hou2 men1 MAN MAN 哋 men1 men1 dei2	'very manly'  'with some manly quality'
<i>friend</i>	FRIEND fen1	N → SV	佢同我好 FRIEND keoi5 tung4 ngo5 hou2 fen1	'He and I are good friends'
<i>beer</i>	啤酒 bel1 zau2	N → V	啤一啤 bel1 jat1 bel1	'Let's go and have a beer'
<i>taxi</i>	的士 dik1 si6/2	N → V	我哋的去啦 ngo5 dei6 dik1 heoi3 laa1	'Let's take a taxi!'
<i>okay</i>	OK ou1 kei1	Adj → Adv	OK 難 ou1 kei1 naan4	'moderately difficult'
<i>mug</i>	嚟 mak1	N → Clf	一嚟米 jat1 mak1 mai5	'a mug of rice'
<i>car</i>	卡 kaa1	N → Clf	兩卡貨 loeng5 kaa1 fo3	'two cars of cargo'
<i>pound</i>	磅 bong2	M → N	個磅 go3 bong2	'the scale'
	磅 bong6	M → V	磅吓啲米 bong6 haa5 di1 mai5	'Let's weigh the rice'

<sup>5</sup> Adj=adjective; Adv=adverb; Clf=classifier; Exp=fixed expression; M=measure; N=noun; SV=stative verb; V=verb.



bye-bye	拜拜 baai3/1 baai3	Exp → V	你同 AUNTIE 拜拜咗未呀? nei5 tung4 aan1 ti4 baai3/1 baai3 zo2 mei6 aa3	'Have you said goodbye to Auntie?'
cyber	CYBER sai1 baa4	N → SV	呢個 DESIGN 好 CYBER ni1 go3 di6 saai1 hou2 sai1 baa4	'This design has a very cyber feel'
soft	梳芙 so1 fu4	Adj → V	去邊度梳芙? heoi3 bin1 dou6 so1 fu4?	'Where shall we go to enjoy ourselves?'

### 3.4 Clipping

In daily Cantonese speech, long expressions tend to be shortened or clipped. For example, 消費者委員會 *siu1 fai3 ze2 wai2 jyun4 wui2* the 'Consumer Council' is abbreviated to 消委會 *siu1 wai2 wui2*. Clipping also occurs with English loanwords: a polysyllabic source word is reduced to a monosyllabic or disyllabic loanword. One prominent area affected by this process is academic subjects. *Accounting* is aa6 kaang1 (for 'account'); *biology* is bai6 o1 (for 'bio'); *chemistry* is kem1 (for 'chem'); *computing* is kam6 piu1 (for 'comput' with loss of -t ending, since -iut is not a possible rime in Cantonese); *economics* is ji6 kon1 (for 'econ'); *electrical engineering* is ji6 lek1 (for 'elec'); *English literature* is ing1 lit1 (for 'Eng lit'); *geography* is zok1 gaa2 (for 'geogra'), etc. Other examples which are not names of academic subjects include: *fax* is fek1 (from fek1 si2 for 'fax'), *contact lens* is kon1 (for 'con'), *taxi* is dik1 (from dik1 si2 for 'taxi'), *coffee* is fel (from kaa3 fel for 'coffee'), *professional* is pou6 (for 'pro'), *solicitor* is so6 lit1 (for 'soli'), *tutorial* is tiu6 to1 (for 'tuto'), *promotion* is pou6 mou1 (for 'promo'), etc.

In previous sections we have provided numerous examples showing how English loanwords have integrated into the Cantonese morpho-syntactic system. In the next section, we examine how some loanwords generate additional new lexical items in Cantonese, which we consider to be another piece of evidence indicating that these loanwords have become integrated into Cantonese.

### 3.5 Productivity

Like any native Cantonese lexical item, a loanword can generate new expressions. For example, the *Rolex* brand name of the wristwatches is transliterated as 撈 lou1 in Cantonese. From this one loanword, terms for different types of Rolexes are now found in Cantonese, such as 金撈 gam1 lou1 'gold Rolex', 鑽撈 zyün3 lou1 'diamond Rolex', and 鋼撈 gong3 lou1 'stainless steel Rolex'. Similarly, from 巴士 baa1 si6/2 'bus' have come 大巴 daai6 baa1, literally 'big bus', which refers to 'public buses'; 小巴 siu2 baa1, literally 'small bus', which refers to 'mini buses'; 飛巴 fei1 baa1, literally 'flying bus', which refers to 'mini buses that usually exceed the speed limit'. These very creative examples show that some loanwords have been successfully accepted into the Cantonese lexicon and that they produce new lexical items in the same way that native Cantonese words do.

Another example is 波砵 bo1 but1 'sports boots'. While both 'ball' and 'boot' have their respective native terms (球, 靴) but these two native terms are not combined to refer to 'sports boots'. Instead, the loanwords 波 bo1 'ball' and 砵 but1 'boot' are used to form a new lexical item 波砵 bo1 but1 'sports boots'. One more example to show the productivity of English loanwords in Cantonese is the adjective 'cute'. The phrase Q版 *kiu1 baan2* is formed by adding the loanword Q *kiu1* (from English *cute*) to the native Cantonese word 版 *baan2* (which means 'a version of') to refer to a cartoon-like version. A more recent creation is the term 咪咀 *mai1 zeoi2*, the first part of which comes from the loanword 咪

mail (from English *microphone*). The loanword is then combined with the native word 咀 zeoi2 'mouth' to refer to 'lip synchrony'.

New idiomatic expressions are also created based on loanwords. For example, the famous composer *Tchaikovsky* is transliterated as 柴可夫斯基 caai4 ho2 ful sil gei1; the first three syllables 柴可夫 caai4 ho2 ful now mean 'the chauffeur' because the last two syllables 斯基 sil gei1 is homophonous with the regular Cantonese word for 'chauffeur' 司機 sil gei1!

The above examples show that some loanwords have been so integrated into Cantonese that they can produce new lexical items the same way as any native Cantonese word. Such productivity is clear evidence that these loanwords have been fully integrated into Cantonese. In the next section, we examine the semantic extension of some English loanwords, which further verifies the integration of these borrowed items in Cantonese.

### 3.6 Semantic Transfer and Semantic Change in Loanwords

When English words are borrowed into Cantonese, the meanings of the loanwords usually remain the same as those of the source words, for example, 極力子 gik6 lik6/1 zi2 'clutch', ACCOUNT aa6 kaang1 'account', 'accountancy', APARTMENT aa6 paat1 man4 'apartment', IDEA aai6 di1 aa4 'idea', AUNTIE aan1 ti4 'auntie', UNCLE ang1 kou4 'uncle', 奄列 am1 lit6 'omelette', etc.

However, in contrast to this general pattern of meaning transfer, we also observe that the meanings of some loanwords can undergo change by becoming narrower or more specific in relation to the meanings of the original English words as indicated by the following items extracted from our database:

#### (16) 阿蛇 aa3 soe4

This is the Cantonese borrowing of English *sir* which is originally a polite address term for men. Cantonese 阿 aa3 is the vocative prefix; while 蛇 soe4 has taken on a more specific reference in Cantonese where it is an address term for male teachers and police officers. It can also be used as a common noun to mean male teachers and police officers; and for male teachers it also serves as a term of self reference.

#### (17) FIRM foem1

This is the Cantonese borrowing of English *firm*, but it is only used in reference to one's muscles as shown in the example sentence 做咗運動幾個禮拜小腹 FIRM 咗 zou6 zo2 wan6 dung6 gei2 go3 lai5 baai3 siu2 fuk1 foem1 zo2 'The abdominal muscles have got firmer after having exercised for several weeks'.

#### (18) 忌廉 gei6 lim1

This means 'cream' but is only used in the context of cake, such as 忌廉蛋糕 gei6 lim4/1 daan6 gou1 'cream cake'. However, Cantonese has actually borrowed English *cream* twice, first as 忌廉 gei6 lim1, and then later on as CREAM kwim1 which can mean either 'face cream' or 'drinkable cream made from whole milk'. Cantonese has also borrowed English *creamy* as kwim1 mi4 and the meaning is essentially the same as in English.

#### (19) 見 BOARD gin3 bot1

Cantonese 見 gin3 means 'to see', and BOARD bot1 is the Cantonese borrowing of English *board* as in 'an interview board that comprises several members'. 見 BOARD gin3 bot1 means 'to attend an interview for promotion in the police force or civil service'. The following sentence illustrates the use of this item: 你下個禮拜見 BOARD

喎, 緊唔緊張呀? nei5 haa6 go3 lai5 baai3 gin3 bot1 wo3, gan2 m4 gan2 zoengl aa3?  
 'You will have an interview for promotion next week. Are you nervous?'

(20) 柯化 *oul faa3/4*

This is the Cantonese borrowing of *over* which is only used in walkie-talkie or short-wave radio exchanges just as in English to indicate that the speaker has finished his/her utterance and is indicating that it is the turn of the other party to speak.

(21) SHORT *sot1*

This term originally referred to an electric short circuit. After it was borrowed into Cantonese, its meaning has been extended to refer to someone who is crazy, as an analogy to an electric malfunction.

The semantic narrowing or extension exemplified in the above clearly illustrates how English loanwords are being adapted into Cantonese.

### 3.7 Acceptability

Some English loanwords have become so integrated into Cantonese that speakers who know no English assume they are native Cantonese words because very often there are no Cantonese equivalents. For example, the loanword for *bus* is 巴士 *baa1 si6/2* and this is the only Cantonese term for 'bus'. Even the bus companies use this term in their company names: 九龍巴士公司 *gau2 lung4 baa1 si6/2 gung1 sil* 'The Kowloon Motor Bus Company'. The phrase 巴士站 *baa1 si6/2 zaam6* 'bus stop' is painted on Hong Kong's streets to mark their location.

Another example of the integration of English loanwords into the Cantonese language is the widespread use of individual English letters in many Hong Kong Cantonese expressions. The ease of adaptation of English letters into the Cantonese lexicon may be closely related to the monosyllabic pronunciations of most letters and the primacy of the mono-morphosyllable in the Cantonese phonological system. The Cantonese pronunciations of the English letters and the English meanings of the abbreviations and words in which they occur are listed in Table 6 below.

The two English letters most commonly found in Cantonese are M and X, one reason being that many of the bus routes employ these letters. Bus routes that end in M indicate that the buses terminate at a subway station (the subway system in Hong Kong is called the MTR, the 'Mass Transit Railway'); X stands for 'express' bus routes. The letters M and X are also found in many loanwords such as MC, MP3, MTR, MV, SMS, XO, X光 (for 'X-ray'). The first 10 or so letters in the English alphabet are also very popular because many housing estates use these letters to name the flats and blocks (i.e. buildings). For example, instead of being named after the Chinese ordering system 甲 *gaap3*, 乙 *jyut3*, 丙 *bing2*, 丁 *ding1*, etc., the flats or blocks are called Flat A, B, C, D or Block A, B, C, D, etc. In restaurants, set meals are also termed as A/B/C/D 餐 *eil/bil/sil/dil caan1*, rather than 甲/乙/丙/丁餐 *gaap3/jyut3/bing2/ding1 caan1*. Other commonly used English letters in Cantonese include G (as in 3G, NG, RPG), K (as in OK, K 仔, 14K, 24K, OK 便利店), L (as in OL, LC), N (as in N 年前, NG), O (as in OK, OL, O 記), P (as in P 場, MP3, PVC, RPG), Q (as in Q 版, 孖 Q), R (as in 3R, RPG), S (as in SMS), T (as in T-恤, T-back, T 字位, TB, OT), U (as in CU, BU, UV), V (as in VCD, MV, V-領, PVC, UV, VIP).

**Table 6:** *Use of English letters in loanwords.*

Letter:	Usage:	English gloss:
<i>A</i> eil	AA 制 eil eil zai3	'to go Dutch (usually in paying the bill for a meal)'
	A 座 eil zo6	'Flat A' or 'Block A'
	A 餐 eil caan1	'set A (one of the set meals on a menu)'
	維他命 A waai4 taal ming6 eil	'Vitamin A'
<i>B</i> bil	BB 仔 bi4 bil zai2	'small babies'
	阿 B aa3 bil	'someone who is called 'B' (probably a nickname)'
	BU bil ju1	'abbreviation for Baptist University'
	TB ti1 bil	'tomboy / tuberculosis'
	B 座 bil zo6	'Flat B' or 'Block B'
	B 餐 bil caan1	'set B (one of the set meals on a menu)'
	維他命 B waai4 taal ming6 bil	'Vitamin B'
<i>C</i> sil	PVC pi1 wi1 si1	'poly-vinyl chloride'
	MC em1 si1	'Master of Ceremonies'
	CU si1 ju1	'abbreviation for Chinese University'
	MCC em1 si1 si1	'woolly, befuddled' (from the abbreviation of the Cantonese expression 懵查查 'mong cha cha')
	C 座 sil zo6	'Flat C' or 'Block C'
	C 餐 sil caan1	'set C (one of the set meals on a menu)'
	維他命 C waai4 taal ming6 si1	'Vitamin C'
	CID si1 aai1 di1	'Criminal Investigation Division'
<i>D</i> di1	落 D lok6 di1	'to go to the disco'
	DDT di1 di1 ti1	'a poisonous chemical for killing insects'
	DJ di1 ze1	'disc jockey'
	D 座 di1 zo6	'Flat D' or 'Block D'
	D 餐 di1 caan1	'set D (one of the set meals on a menu)'
<i>E</i> ji1	E 座 ji1 zo6	'Flat E' or 'Block E'
	E 餐 ji1 caan1	'set E (one of the set meals on a menu)'
	維他命 E waai4 taal ming6 ji1	'Vitamin E'
<i>F</i> et1 fu4	F 座 et1 fu4 zo6	'Flat F' or 'Block F'
	F 餐 et1 fu4 caan1	'set F (one of the set meals on a menu)'
<i>G</i> zi1	3G fi1 zi1	'the third generation (cellphone)'
	NG en1 zi1	'no good (in movie shooting)'
	RPG aal lou4 pi1 zi1	'role playing games (video games)'
	G 座 zi1 zo6	'Flat G' or 'Block G'
<i>H</i> ik1 cyu4	H 座 ik1 cyu4	'Flat H' or 'Block H'

K kei1	OK ou1 kei1	'okay'
	K 仔 kei1 zai2	'ketamine (illegal soft drug)'
	OK 便利店 ou1 kei1 bin6 lei6 dim3	'Circle K', name of a local convenience store
	14K sap6 sei3 kei1	'14K' name of a triad society
	24K jaa6 sei3 kei1	'24 karat gold'
	K 座 kei1 zo6	'Flat K' or 'Block K'
L e1 lou4	OL ou1 e1 lou4	'office lady'
	LC e1 lou4 si1	'letter of credit'
	L 座 e1 lou4 zo6	'Flat L' or 'Block L'
M em1	70M cat1 sap6 em1	'Bus route number 70M which terminates at a subway (MTR) station'
	MTR em1 ti1 aa1 lou4	'Mass Transit Railway'
	MC em1 si1	'Master of Ceremonies'
	MP3 em1 pil fi1	'MP3'
	MV em1 wil	'music video'
	SMS e1 si4 em1 e1 si4	'short message service'
	維他命 M waai4 taa1 ming6 em1	'Vitamin M' (a humorous way to refer to 'money')
N en1 zi1	N 年前 en1 nin4 cin4	'many many years ago' ('n'=an indefinite number)
	NG en1 zi1	'no good (in movie shooting)'
O ou1	OK ou1 kei1	'okay'
	OL ou1 e1 lou4	'office lady'
	O 記 ou1 gei3	'The Organized Crime and Triad Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force'
	O 字腳 ou1 zi6 goek3	'bow-legged'
	開 OT hoil ou1 ti1	'to work overtime'
	XO ik1 si4 ou1	'extra-old (brandy)'
P pil	P 場 pil coeng4	'party venue'
	開 P hoil pil	'to hold a party'
	MP3 em1 pil fi1	'MP3'
	PVC pil wil si1	'poly-vinyl chloride'
	RPG aa1 lou4 pil zi1	'role playing games (video games)'
Q kiu1	QQ 哋 kiu1 kiu1 dei2	'quite cute'
	孖 Q maal kiu1	'twin quinella'
R aa1 lou4	RPG aa1 lou4 pil zi1	'role playing games (video games)'
	3R saam1 aa1 lou4	'3R (size of photo)'
S e1 si4	SMS e1 si4 em1 e1 si4	'short message service'

T til	T-恤 til seot1	'T-shirt'
	T-back til bek1	'T-back'
	T 字位 til zi6 wai2	'the area on the face including the forehead and the nose'
	TB til bil	'tomboy / tuberculosis'
	開 OT hoi1 ou1 til	'to work overtime'
	DDT dil di1 til	'a poisonous chemical for killing insects'
U jul	CU si1 jul	'abbreviation for Chinese University of Hong Kong'
	BU bil jul	'abbreviation for Baptist University of Hong Kong'
	U 記 jul gei3	'university (student jargon)'
	UV jul wil	'ultra-violet'
V wil	VCD wil si1 di1	'video disc'
	MV em1 wil	'music video'
	V-領 wil leng5	'V-neck'
	PVC pi1 wil si1	'poly-vinyl chloride'
	UV jul wil	'ultra-violet'
	VIP wil ai1 pi1	'very important person'
X ik1 si4	70X cat1 sap6 ik1 si4	'Bus route number 70X, an express bus'
	XO ik1 si4 ou1	'extra-old (brandy)'
	X 光 ik1 si4 gwong1	'X-ray'

Most loanword items cited above are sometimes abbreviations which came originally from English, for example, VCD, VIP, etc; however, some are local creations, such as CU, O 記, P 場, etc. The use of the English letters has become so prevalent that even monolinguals quite readily utter them in their daily speech. We should note here that the incorporation of letters of the English alphabet into Hong Kong Cantonese is not unique to this Chinese speech community; quite similar developments have been occurring in Taiwan (and also China) as indicated by Hansell (1994) in his detailed analysis of the features associated with the use of the alphabet in Taiwan and its adoption and integration into the Chinese writing system there; to reflect these developments he has coined the term "Sino-alphabet".

#### 4 Conclusion

In this paper we have examined from several different perspectives how English loanwords have been borrowed into Hong Kòng Cantonese and have demonstrated how they have become fully integrated into Cantonese grammar. First, we have observed how the written representations with Chinese characters are commonly found in many English loanwords. Second, some morphological and syntactic processes are commonly applied to English loanwords. Third, loanwords can change their semantic properties. Fourth, loanwords are highly productive. And, fifth, individual English letters and sets of letters as abbreviations have been conveniently borrowed into written Cantonese and read with appropriate Cantonese syllables.

All of these above features taken together provide solid evidence that many English loanwords have become thoroughly integrated into the Cantonese lexicon. However, at least two issues concerning the extent of acceptance of these items among Hong Kong

Cantonese speakers remain for further study. Are some speakers aware that these are originally loanwords, and are not native Cantonese words? Another question is: How consistent are the pronunciations and meanings of loanwords across the Hong Kong Cantonese speech community? These questions naturally merit thorough investigation, and we are now considering how best to organize this kind of sociolinguistic study in the future.

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