LECTURES ON HONG KONG ENGLISH
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ABSTRACTS OF LECTURES

LECTURE 1.1: Introduction
This is a brief introduction to the history of English in Hong Kong: how it was first
established as an official language when Hong Kong was annexed by Britain in 1842,
how it took root in government, education, commerce etc., and how it has continued to
play a central role in post-handover Hong Kong (after 1997), in a society that aspires to
retain its international status and to be bi-literate and tri-lingual.

LECTURE 1.2: HK English Phonology (i)
This lecture analyses the vowel system of HKE, and compares it with that of standard
British English. It is found that HKE (in common with most other 'New Englishes') has
a much simpler vowel system, with most speakers exhibiting only 6 to 7 vowel contrasts
(as opposed to 12 in British RP). Basically, this is due to the lack of tense/lax or
long/short contrasts between vowels, resulting in identical-sounding vowels in pairs of
words like *beat/bit, bat/bet, food/foot, caught/cot*. HKE has diphthongs which are similar
to RP, but they undergo reduction to simple vowels when followed by a stop consonant
(as in *cake, joke, coin, town*, etc.)

LECTURE 1.3: HK English Phonology (ii)
The consonant system of HKE is analysed and described. As in the vowel system, the
number of consonant phonemes in HKE is also smaller than in standard varieties of
English. In particular, there is a lack of voiced vs. voiceless contrasts in fricatives, which
results in the non-existence of the voiced fricatives [v], [z], [λ□□ □□□ in HKE. Among
other phonological features of HKE consonants is the apparent interchangeability of [l]
and [n] in syllable-initial position.

LECTURE 1.4: HK English Phonology (iii)
This lecture deals with the supra-segmental features of HKE. In general, HKE has
somewhat different word and sentence stress patterns from standard British English, not
to mention intonation. With respect to word stress, HKE does not have the same stress
assignment rules as BE, which (in the case of suffixed words at least) is based on the type
of suffix (e.g. 'stress the syllable immediately preceding the suffixes *–ic, -ity,* etc.') In
HKE, the number of syllables in the word is also a determining factor. With respect to
rhythm and sentence stress, HKE is clearly syllable-timed, where every syllable occupies
more or less equal time, rather than the intervals between stressed syllables.

LECTURE 2.1: Lexical Features of HK English
HKE has its own innovative vocabulary items which are not generally found in other
varieties of English. These include words borrowed from Cantonese (e.g. *kwailo*
(foreigner, esp. Caucasian) and *laisee* (red packet)), and newly coined expressions with
unique meanings (e.g. *astronaut* (a Hongkonger who has migrated overseas but returns to

work in HK, leaving his family behind) and *abode seeker* (a mainland Chinese seeking permanent abode in HK by virtue of his/her parents' being permanent residents)).

LECTURE 2.2: HK English Grammar (i)
HKE grammar clearly shows the influence of Cantonese, the first language of the overwhelming majority of HKE speakers. It may be considered an 'interlanguage' with many sub-standard features and fossilized errors. The present lecture deals with nouns and noun phrases in HKE and their role as subjects. Among noun and noun phrase features are the omission or redundant use of articles, and the form of the relative clause (without a relative pronoun). Subjects may be missing or may lack subject-verb agreement. The concept of the passive construction seems particularly problematic, and is probably related to subject omission in HKE, resulting in sentences like 'Freedom should grant to the citizens', where 'freedom' is merely the topic and not the subject of the sentence, and where the real subject ('one' or 'the government' or whatever) is understood and therefore omitted.

LECTURE 2.3: HK English Grammar (ii)
This lecture deals with the many problematic features associated with verbs in HKE, including problems with Tense, Aspect, Modality, Voice and Transitivity. The finite vs. non-finite distinction (marked by tense) is not clear-cut or always present, and the use of auxiliaries to mark aspect is not always correct. While there exists a transitive vs. intransitive distinction, it is not always correctly observed.

LECTURE 2.4: HK English Grammar (iii)
This lectures deals with clause and sentence structure in HKE. There are non-standard features of coordination and subordination, specifically: the lack of overt coordinating conjunctions to join two or more main clauses, the lack of subordinators to join subordinate clauses to main clauses, the occasional lack of predicators (verbs) in the predicate, and the peculiar form of the existential construction (e.g. 'There are many people travel abroad').

LECTURES 3.1-3.4: English as a Global Language: Implications for Teaching

In this lecture, it is argued that, with the coming of age of English as a global language in the 21st century, with many new varieties taking root in different parts of the world (including Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, India, etc.), and with English being used more and more as a tool of communication between people who speak English as a second or foreign language, we should look at the issue of 'international intelligibility' not from the viewpoint of speakers of traditional (or 'old') varieties of English, but from a truly international perspective. For purposes of teaching, a genuinely pragmatic rather than 'purist' approach is called for. Rather than attempt to conform to a 'native' accent of English (be it British RP, General American or whatever), the author recommends accepting the educated local variety of English as a *basis* to build on, supplemented or modified by additional sounds or features only where they are truly important for international intelligibility. Some criteria for deciding on these are proposed, i.e. (i) the functional value and (ii) frequency of the sound or feature in

question, balanced against (iii) the difficulty and (iv) appropriateness of such a sound or feature for our learners.