

The Ideological Construction of Standard English: Power, Orthography, and the Marginalization of CPE in 19th-Century Canton

Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) emerged as a contact language in response to cross-cultural trade in the 18th-century Canton. Understanding CPE and its underlying language ideology among the Cantonese-speaking population can potentially fill the gap regarding how CPE was made marginalized in the 19th-century Canton and its subsequent disappearance within the complex colonial context in modern Chinese history. While existing sociolinguistic research often attributes the decline of CPE to the rise of missionary schools and the shift of trade centers from Canton to other ports, such explanations may over-simplify the complicated sociohistorical environment of language death. Therefore, this study investigates the decline of CPE through the lens of social perception and language ideology during the second half of the 19th century.

Using discourse analysis, this research compares two instructional materials: the anonymous *Hongmao tongyong fanhua* (红毛通用番话, 富桂堂版) (*The Redhaired Glossary*, c. 1850s) and *Yingyu jiquan* (英语集全) (*The Instructor*, 1862), compiled by the social elite Tang Tingshu (唐廷枢). Both texts utilize Cantonese orthographic representation to simulate English sounds but stem from different sociolinguistic backgrounds. By viewing the two materials as discursive constructions that reflect attitudes and ideologies towards CPE, the language ideology and its underlying power relations between different social groups in that period can be analyzed. The findings indicate that while *The Instructor* maintained some orthographic continuity, it sought institutional normalization by employing more detailed phonological representations. Furthermore, the analysis uncovers a potent “standard language ideology.” The author explicitly differentiates “proper” English from the “Canton Jargon” (*Guangdong fanhua*) in both the preface and the main text. This study argues that for 19th-century Chinese intellectuals, the pursuit of standard English was not merely a personal asset but a response to national anxiety following the Opium Wars. Under the elites’ promotion of a more “standard” English, CPE was potentially left with little space to be acquired or spread in Canton, thus becoming marginalized and relegated to the working class. This essay re-examines the disappearance of a contact language variety, and provides a deep investigation into the ideological influence and power structure underlying this demise. It not only explores the linguistic changes themselves but also discusses how social and cultural forces can shape the status of a contact language.