

# *Issues to Consider When Supporting the Acceptance of China English*

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**Abstract:** Against the background that World English is so popular, this article begins with a discussion of whether or not "China English" should be accepted in the English curricula in Chinese school? According to previous studies and theories, we can conclude that it is necessary and important for Chinese people to learn and use it. However, there are three issues which people have to consider in order to spread the concept "China English" as well as its usage better. The first one is to distinguish the two terminologies "China English" and "Chinglish" accurately which can avoid feeling of shame from people due to misunderstanding. The second one is to avoid making pragma linguistic errors because of the lack of local cultural knowledge or implications. The last issue is to appeal to government agency or educational apartment for making codification of China English so that people will know it better. The study benefits a lot to Chinese people who learn English as a second language.

## **1. Introduction**

In today's globalized world, the use of English to communicate is becoming more and more important, even with people's whole life. English has become a compulsory subject from Primary Three in China since 2003 and is gradually being introduced even earlier into the curriculum in many schools (Grace, 2016). The policy of introducing the subject English in China's elementary education highlights the official importance of English in Chinese education system and society. If we were to do a rough calculation to work out, every college student who enters college has taken at least ten years of English courses, including basic English courses, intermediate English courses and even advanced English courses.

Some Chinese researchers believe that while learning international languages, the widespread use of China English could be promoted to protect local culture from being eroded by foreign cultures. But others insist that standard English should be learned. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the attitudes of Chinese students and teachers towards China English: Should we use China English? To what extent can it be used? Are students willing to accept China English as part of their English curricula? How can we standardize China English and promote its usage better? This study is very important and necessary, because Chinese students need to have a clear cognition towards China English, but a large variety of them know nothing about it. The body paragraphs divides its content into three sections. The first section introduces a few previous studies and theories raised by researchers in China and foreign countries which express their attitude towards China English and

World Englishes. The next section describes the general phenomenon in Chinglish translation from Chinese students. The last part illustrates three different issues if we want to enhance China English's acceptance by people which are terminologies, pragmalinguistic errors and codification.

## **2. Previous Studies and Theories**

### **2.1 Different Variety of Word Englishes**

There are many varieties of English forms that exist in the world. Following Kachru's theory of the three concentric circles of overlapping Englishes, many scholars from different countries have begun to think about the relative position of their own variety of English (Kachru, 1985). Thanks to their efforts, some of the new Englishes have been recognized both at home and abroad, such as Indian English and Singapore English and Singlish. However, English from the expansion circle, such as China English and Japan English, is still at an unacceptable stage (Chen and Hu, 2006). As "a national variety of performance", China English is the most populous language in the world. It has its own characteristics and has attracted the attention of linguists at home and abroad (Xi and Xue, 2011). There are some opinions put forward by researchers.

### **2.2 The Attitude Towards China English Abroad**

David C.S. & Hes (2009) did an empirical research on language attitude towards "China English". They took non-English majors and teachers from college English at four different mainland Chinese universities as participants, and use questionnaire as well as interview for data collection. In their findings, the preferred teaching model of college English in mainland Chinese classrooms is still the so-called Standard English (American English or Received English); however, the attitudes of mainland Chinese non-English majors and English teachers have been shifting to accepting "China English" as a legitimate variety. Besides, salient linguistic features of "China English" are not seen as a source of embarrassment but a resource of empowerment. Kingsley (2000) not only summarized the linguistic features about Hong Kong English but previsions its future development as well. According to Kingsley, the notion of a distinct variety rests not only on the recognition of language features, but also on the acceptance of a new space or spaces for the discourses. To conclude, most researchers hold a positive attitude towards the use of China English.

### **2.3 The Attitude Towards China English At Home**

Many people have different opinions about whether we should systematically study China English. The researcher Fang (2011) argues that in today's international environment, English has developed into a global language, and its hegemony effects pose a threat to the existence of many other languages. He indicates that China should develop Chinglish into China English, which is a new variety of English that is highly comprehensible in a global context and rich in local language and culture. Only then can China prevent its English learners from acquiring a global language at the expense of their native language and culture. The author Hu (2004) also raised the same point. She questions the need for English in China to conform to any of the existing standard varieties, arguing that this objective is both undesirable and virtually unattainable, especially in respect to pronunciation, and that Chinese learners should therefore be learning "China English". However, according to her survey of more than 1000 Chinese students at her university, the vast majority had never heard of World English or China English, and instead aimed to become proficient in standard American or British English (Hu, 2004). This shows students' pursuit of standard English learning and their rejection of China English. The same phenomenon has been seen in studies by other

researchers. In Han's report in 2015, the students' acceptance of individual China English expressions is low, mainly due to the lack of understanding of world English and "China English" and the low degree of discrimination between China English and Chinglish.

### 3. Chinglish Translation from Chinese Students

The CET-4 and CET-6 are the tests that every college student must take in the four years of college. I was the assistant of the college English translation teacher, and sometimes I helped her to correct students' homework. In order to help us pass the CET-4 and CET-6 tests more successfully, she made a set of exam books for students to do exercises in daily life. After finishing every five exercises, she would ask us to hand in the exercise books and correct them for us. As her assistant, I would go to the office to assist her in this work. In this process, we found a lot of funny Chinglish expressions, these improper translation is very unprofessional and may cause misunderstanding. For example, someone translates "funeral" as "the party of death", "boiled water" as "open water". What is more, some students transferred "younger female cousin" into "watch sister", "herbal medicine" translated into "grass medicine", "read magazine" translated into "watch magazine" which are quite nonsensical. How can foreigners accept such translation? Is the word "boiled" connected with the word "open" or the word "watch" means "cousin"? This kind of rigid translation is not desirable and make reader feel ironic. "Boiled water" is better translated as "hot water" than "open water". This translation is completely illogical, and no matter how it evolves, it will not be accepted by foreigners.

In my translation teacher's opinion, most students are learning English before they have fully mastered the Chinese grammar and have the basic knowledge of Chinese culture, their language and thinking habits have also been relatively fixed. They are obviously not confident by their mother tongue in mastering phonetic grammar or practicing skills of listening, reading, speaking, writing and translating, as well as thinking and communicating in English. When they begin to learn English, they will follow the rules of Chinese to understand English. If they come across English grammar that is completely inconsistent with Chinese, they still want to assimilate it at first.

### 4. The Analysis of Three Issues

From the above we can know that the use and study of China English should be encouraged, but many Chinese students mistakenly use Chinglish instead of China English. Thus, there are three problems that we must consider if we want to promote the use of China English and enhance its acceptance by the masses. In the first place, people may feel ashamed or have a kind of resistance when something involves Chinlish due to the confusion and ambiguity between China English and Chinglish, which also results in a lack of relevant research (Zhang, 2020). Thus, it is vital for people to distinguish the relationship between the terminologies of China English and Chinglish. Secondly, in order to standardize the use of China English systematically, we need to make this language variety official and consider the issue of codification. Last but not least, we should hold a comprehensive consideration when using China English that can help us avoid making pragmalinguistic errors.

#### 4.1 Terminologies of China English and Chinglish

China English and Chinglish are two completely different concepts. The concept China English was first put forward in 1980 (Ge, 1980), it refers to standard English with Chinese characteristics, mainly appearing in Chinese-English translation (Zhang, 2020). To be specific, "China English" refers to those English expressions that reflect Chinese habits of thinking, have English norms, and

are unique to Chinese customs and culture. It is a variant of English with local characteristics like other countries' English, such as Indian English, Singapore English or Australian English (Ju, 2018). It can be said that China English is a "localized" English expression. "Chinglish" refers to spoken or written forms of English that do not conform to the norms of English expression due to the cultural differences between the two countries. Zhu (2019) believes that Chinglish is "the non-standard English created by Chinese English learners under the Chinese thinking because they do not learn enough English, which is not in line with English habits and English culture. Therefore, the former is regarded as a recognized variety and has made a great contribution to the enrichment of English. The latter is not commonly used and may lead to communication barriers or misunderstandings. However, Qiu (2020) put forward with a theory of "negative language transfer". Language transfer refers to the influence of the first language on the learning of the second language when learning a foreign language. It can be divided into positive transfer and negative transfer. Negative language transfer means that when the rules of the mother tongue are different from those of the foreign language, the learner will transfer the rules of the mother tongue to the foreign language, which will interfere with the learning of the foreign language. She believes the key to distinguishing China English from Chinglish is whether the expression is acceptable to English speakers.

Some people reject to use China English or Chinglish. This is due to negative connotations, perhaps started with the work of Pinkham (2000) who dubbed translation errors as "Chinglish". He and Li (2009) argue that this term reflects "social stigma" which involves a sense of discrimination. There are some examples which representing China English and Chinglish in the following table.

A brief explanation of phrases	A marriage that does not involve material things, like houses, cars, wedding ceremony, even rings.	A time we want to cheer for someone when he is taking part in a race	A medicine made from plants and used to prevent or treat disease or promote health
China English	Simplistic marriage	Cheer for someone	herbal medicine
Chinglish	Naked-marriage	Add oil	grass medicine

Actually, some Chinglish description has already accepted by foreigners, such as moo shu pork (fried pork with scrambled eggs and fungus), jiaozi (dumplings), Tai Chi Chuan (shadowboxing) and so on. The successful export of Chinglish shows foreigners' appreciation of Chinese culture and the recognition of China, which is also a reflection of China's growing influence and voice on the international stage. However, we should not be blindly confident, regardless of practical factors, no technical content of word-to-word translation. Those Chinglish can neither be understood by foreigners nor represent Chinese culture (Lin, 2020).

#### 4.2 Avoid Making Pragmalinguistic Errors

Pragmatics has been defined in various ways in literature, both culturally and linguistically. Pragmatics is often described as the study of people's understanding and production of "linguistic acts in context" (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3). Pragmatics is also the interpretation of people's intentions in a specific context (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics is both culture-specific and language-specific. When cultural/social norms are concerned, pragmatics is culturally specific. Pragmatics is language-specific when cross-linguistic rules are concerned. Therefore, Thomas (1983) divides pragmatics into pragmatic linguistics and social pragmatics. Pragmatic linguistics refers to the language resources of a language from which the speaker can choose to form speech acts (Yusuf, 2017).

There are two possible causes of pragmatic linguistic errors, one is not understanding the cultural

connotation and cultural implication of traditional Chinese culture, the other is the lack of domestic historical or political cultural knowledge. Learners usually focus on grammar rules, vocabulary, grammar and semantics while neglecting practical knowledge, which is equally important. If practical knowledge is lacking, it may lead to communication errors (Yusuf, 2017). Shim (1999) said that we need to also consider the cultural implications of using a foreign language. For example, when some Chinese students address their teacher, they usually use the phrases such as “my dear professor” and “I’m sorry to take up your valuable time” to express their modesty. Their characteristic in reality is not shy, even openness and directness. Therefore, one thing people need to notice when using different varieties of Englishes is to avoid making pragmatic linguistic errors.

There is an example which may cause pragmatic linguistic errors due to the lack of Chinese historical knowledge. The Chinese phrase “Dayuejin”(Great Leap Forward) refers to the national movement happening from 1958 to 1960, when the yield of steel surged in China, greatly influencing the national economy, so it represents the special period in China’s long history. Literal translation is adopted in China English, based on the literal or superficial meaning of the source language rather than on the reference. No material in target language is equivalent to the source language, because “Great Leap Forward” is the unique historical product in the time of China. So, it is difficult to realize the target language style (Zhang, 2020). Another example is that the translation of phrase “Hongcha” into English is “black tea”. But the Chinese word “Hong” must be translated as “red”. I mean if people are not attentive to this tea culture, then he will make a pragmatic linguistic mistake.

### 4.3 The Issue of Codification

Codification, which usually refers to the government-sponsored production of school-based textbooks as a means of “formalizing” language variants, this approach may be too simple. In order to spread China English better, we need to consider societal codification (Baratta, 2019), which not only includes the production of academic textbooks but also take advantage of social media (Li, 2010; Warshauer, Black and Chou, 2010; Meriläinen, 2017) There is an evidence of “traditional” codification, as seen in high school materials in Korea (Shim, 1999), such as day by day meaning “daily”.

He and Zhang (2010) discusses whether the mother tongue should be retained in English teaching when English becomes the world’s English. According to their survey of more than 500 students, it shows that Chinese English can be successfully popularized under the premise of careful compilation. Similarly, Ma and Xu (2017) discussed issues critical to the future sustainable development of China English, in particular the continued codification of Chinese characteristics, the distinction between language innovation and error, as well as the importance of incorporating the localization model into English. However, according to Bamgbose’s view in 1998, as a prerequisite for the acceptance of ESL (English as a second language) norms, the systematic identification and codification of the salient linguistic features of China English will be a laborious process, which may be the direction of future research.

The issue of codification should be put on the agenda as soon as possible by government agency or national education department. Because only by regulating the use of China English at its root and compiling its formal usage into books or other reading materials will people pay attention to it and it will be beneficial and conducive to the popularization of China English.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the questions I raised in the beginning, there is a relatively clear answer through the elaboration of this article. On the basis of some research reports by some researchers, it is really



beneficial for people to localize English. Learning China English not only makes people understand English knowledge from a new angle, but also carry forward the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture more and more. However, people should pay attention to the difference between China English and Chinglish and use China English depending on proper meaning, sentence pattern, grammar and social cultural context to avoid making pragmalinguistic errors. Many people feel a sense of shame when the term China English once comes into their view which means that government agency and the education department should popularize the concept of “China English” and promote its usage like making a codification of China English, applying it in school English textbooks or spreading it widely on social media.

There are also some shortcomings and limitations in this article. In today’s English teaching in China, because there is no school has actually included China English in their curriculum due to all kinds of concerns and respect for standard English, we are unable to assess students’ feelings and thoughts after learning Chinese English. Thus, we don’t learn any lesson from that. I hope that China English will be recognized and used by more and more people both at home and abroad in the near future.

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