

# An Overview of the Status quo and Development of Chinglish

Wang Zheng

Tan Kah Kee College, Xiamen University

**Keywords:** Chinglish; status quo; development;

**Abstract:** Chinglish refers to spoken or written English language that is influenced by Chinese language. As English language learning becomes a hot issue in China, linguists in China are becoming increasingly interested in Chinese-influenced English or Chinglish. Chinglish is an incorrect form of English. The words are ungrammatically strung together, with often inappropriate lexis or literally translated into awkward English. And in Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong and Guangxi, the term "Chinglish" refers mainly to Cantonese-influenced English. This paper explores the historical background of Chinglish, the typical features of Chinglish and the reasons of its existence in order to further shed light on its implication on English teaching and learning.

## 1. Historic Background of Chinglish

Definition. Widdowson (2003) maintains that "the very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it". Making a similar claim is Crystal (2003), who argues that "if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global language, it is that nobody owns it any more" and that "everyone who has learned it now owns it ... and has the right to use it in the way they want" Crystal,2003:2). Numerous scholars (e.g. Crystal 2003; Widdowson 2003) have argued that English belongs to nonnative speakers because English is widely used as an international language and because there are more nonnative speakers than native speakers. The degree to which a Chinese variety of English exists or can be considered legitimate is disputed [1-2].

In China, the term "Chinglish" refers mainly to Chinese-influenced English or literally, "Chinese-style English". This term is commonly applied to ungrammatical or nonsensical English in Chinese contexts, and may have pejorative or deprecating connotations [3]. Other terms used to describe the phenomenon include "Chinese English", and "Sinicized English" [4].

Chinglish can be compared with other varieties of English, such as Britalian (from Italian), Denglisch (German), Franglais (French), , Runglish (Russian), Spanglish (Spanish), Swenglish (Swedish), Konglish (Korean), Singlish (in Singapore) and Tenglish (Thai), to name just a few.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun and adjective form of Chinglish as follows [5].

A. n. A mixture of Chinese and English; esp. a variety of English used by speakers of Chinese or a bilingual Chinese and English context, typically incorporating some Chinese vocabulary or constructions, or English terms specific to a Chinese context.

B. adj. Of or relating to Chinglish; expressed in Chinglish.

## 2. Typical Features of Chinglish

Chinglish is the combination of the Chinese culture and the English language. Chinglish is an incorrect form of English. The words are ungrammatically strung together, with often inappropriate lexis or literally translated into awkward English. Chinese-style English has linguistic characteristics that are different from the normative or standard English in all linguistic levels, including phonology, lexicon, syntax, and discourse.

### 2.1 Phonological Features of Chinglish.

At the phonological level, Chinglish does not differentiate between various vowel qualities, for example: long vowels and short vowels, because they don't exist in Chinese. As a result, there is no

contrast between the two sounds for Chinglish speakers. For example, 'seek' and 'sick' would be the same pronunciation. Chinglish speakers use Chinese phonological units to speak English, and retain the syllable timing of Chinese in place of the stress timing of English which together gives them a notable accent. In addition, as for an English word ending with a consonant, its ending consonant is usually overstressed and over-pronounced. Chinese speakers tend to optionally add a vowel to the consonant. For example, the word "kind" is mispronounced as "kinder" and the word "but" is mispronounced as "butter". Another commonly-found mistake in pronunciation is that if a word ends with a consonant, this consonant is often wrongly unpronounced by many Chinese speakers. They always optionally omit the final consonant, as "d" in "find" and "good".

## **2.2 Lexical Features of Chinglish.**

At the lexical level, China English manifests itself through many ways such as literal translation and loan translations. Literal translation has brought many interesting words and expressions from the Chinese language into English. Speakers are able to merge the two because of pinyin, a Latin alphabet used to write Chinese. A large amount of Chinglish is already accepted in the local communication, such as kowtow, tofu, kung fu; however, these do not guarantee a green light for these words to be accepted as Standard English. In loan translations, Chinese words have been translated directly into English. This phenomenon can be found in a lot of compound words like red bean, bean curd, and teapot. The other way that loan translations are made is when speakers translate Chinese terms into English. These words come from the Chinese culture and are ideas, thoughts, or expressions that do not exist in English. For example, 'spring rolls' or "milk tea" would otherwise not have meaning in English if not for Chinglish speakers making it a loan translation to describe the food. As Chinese grammar does not distinguish between definite and indefinite articles, Chinese speakers struggle with when to use or not use the English definite article "the".

## **2.3 Syntactic Features of Chinglish.**

At the syntactic level, Chinese thinking has influenced Chinglish speakers to utilize a different word sequence and order to make sentences. For English speakers, a common sequence is subject → predicate → object → adverbial. On the other hand, the Chinese sequence is subject → adverbial → predicate → object. Chinese speakers tend to leave the most important information at the back of the sentence, while English speakers present it at the front.

Chinglish reflects the influence of Chinese syntax and grammar. For instance, there is no equivalent article for English "the" in Chinese, which can create awkward translations. In addition, Chinese speakers also tend to exhibit copula absence in their speech. Examples include "Because I am ill, so I can't go to school" and "The dress beautiful." Because sentences in classical Chinese contain no "copula". Copula absence is grammatically acceptable in Chinese.

## **2.4 Discourse Features of Chinglish.**

In terms of discourse features of Chinglish, some loan translation from Chinese-style English is close enough not to pose much of a problem; there may be some syntactic and grammatical differences attributable to the influence of Chinese; In Chinglish, "I know" is generally used instead of the term "I see", when used to tell others that you understand what they said. The same phenomena can be found in the use of "speak", "say", and "talk" For Chinglish speakers, the expression "Can you say Chinese?" means "Do you speak Chinese?".

Another misuse is "to turn on/off" and "open/close". Chinese speakers use "close" to refer to turning off things like electrical appliances or to close a door or window. Accordingly, a Chinglish speaker would say "close the light" instead of "turn off the light". In the same way, they would say "open the TV" instead of "turn on the TV".

Chinglish may have influenced some English expressions that are loan translations from Chinese-style English, for instance, "lose face" derives from "diūliǎn" or "be humiliated". Some sources claim "long time no see" is a Chinglish from "hǎojiǔbújiàn" [7].

### 3. Development Trend of Modern Chinglish

Today's English-language publishers and teachers in China are passing on obsolete translations and incorrect rules of language to students. In turn, Chinglish gets duplicated across society, particularly now during today's period of rapid opening to the outside world and the widespread use of English. Certain expressions from Chinese English have made their way into colloquial English, a process called semantic translation. The Global Language Monitor predicts Chinglish will thrive, and estimates that roughly 20 percent of new English words derive from Chinglish, for instance, "Shanzhai" meaning "counterfeit consumer goods", "long time no see" meaning "we have not seen each other in a long time". A large amount of China English is already accepted in the dialectal variety, such as kowtow, tofu, kung fu; however, these do not guarantee a green light for China English to be one of sub-variety of Standard English [8]. The resultant flood of Chinglish will perpetuate unless it is corrected now.

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