

MAJOR PECULIARITIES OF THE LANGUAGE  
SYSTEM OF HONG KONG ENGLISH

Today it is something of a traditional cliché that English is a global language, being no longer the property of Britain or the United States, which, according to McCrum's, is not one English language anymore, but there are many English languages. The effects of this paradigm shift have been felt in many societies where English enjoys the status of a second language or "outer circle" variety, including such Asian societies as India, Malaysia, Philippines, and Hong Kong.

Features of Hong Kong English may be assessed threefold – phonological, syntactic and lexical. Traditionally, the phonological feature refers to sounds; the syntactic feature refers to grammars; the lexical feature refers to vocabulary.

Given below, we may observe such features of Hong Kong English:

- The traditional omission of articles like *the* and *a*.
- The use of prepositions: *on*, *in* and *at* are often interchangeable.
- The Yes/No confusion: In Cantonese, *yes* represents an agreement, *no* represents a disagreement, whilst in English *yes* represents a positive answer, *no* represents a negative answer. For example: *She isn't pretty, is she?* might require the answer *No* when the native Cantonese speaker means 'I disagree, in my opinion she is pretty'.
- Confusion with agreement of singular or plural nouns and verb tenses, verb tenses are expressed with the use of a preposition or exclamation at the end of the sentence.

- The omission of plural forms: there are no plural forms in Chinese, so plural and singular forms tend to be confused.

- *Actually* (also *In fact*) is used much more frequently than in standard English.

- Using *bored* and *boring* interchangeably, e.g. *I am so boring!* (real meaning: 'I am so bored!'). In contrast, in Chinese there is just one word used to describe either state.

- The usage of *hear* instead of *listen*, e.g. *I hear the radio* (the actual meaning: 'I listen to the radio').

English is a major working language in Hong Kong, and is widely used in legal matters and commercial activities. Although the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred to the PRC by the United Kingdom in 1997, English remains one of the official languages in Hong Kong as it is enshrined in the Basic Law observed in Hong Kong.