

# The Penetration of English into Chinese—Taking Buzzwords from 2011-2015 for Example

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**Abstract**—Globalization has brought about the frequent contacts between China and the world. Accordingly, English as the tool of international communication has been inevitably interacting with Chinese language. In the process of language contacts, modern Chinese has changed strikingly in morphology, syntax, grammar, vocabularies and so on showing the evidence of English penetration, which has attracted the attention of scholars both in China and overseas. Early in 1950s, Chinese linguist Wang Li elaborated the Europeanized Chinese grammar from certain aspects. Some scholars in Hong Kong and Macau lay much emphasis on the loanwords from English into Cantonese. Meanwhile, researchers also focus on the regularity in the origin and development of language contacts between these two languages. Buzzwords as the dynamic part of a language enable researchers to observe the changes of the language. Though not as formal as written language, it also exposes the lingual and grammatical development with salient features due to the great population of users and the wideness of transmission. Hence, this paper explores the proof of English penetration into Chinese through the buzzwords in recent years; moreover, the merits and demerits of English penetration into Chinese are discussed to provide a two-sided perspective on this phenomenon.

**Index Terms**—penetration, English, Chinese, buzzwords

## I. INTRODUCTION

Viewed globally, communications have created great changes of the world in many aspects. As the tool of communication, languages contact dynamically with each other which unavoidably generates the influence of one language on another. It is pointed out that English has been taken as mother tongue by over one hundred countries; and more than seventy nations have taken it as the official language (Guo, 2007).

However, Glanville Price (2007) called English as “killer language” or “language murder” because of its spreading scale and speed, under the influence of which many languages are negatively impacted. Taking Indian language for example, there were at least 2200 kinds of these language families in the history of the United State. However, there are 155 kinds left now (Zhao, 2009), due to the Only English Movement in America and the number of Indian speakers still keeps decreasing. Hence, most Indian people would like to learn English instead of a language out of main stream.

It is observed similarly that Chinese also has changed a lot as a result of frequent contacts with English over decades in morphology, syntax, grammar and so on. Under this circumstance, many linguists studied the changes and tried to summarize the phenomenon as “Europeanization” or “Englishization”.

Wang, the initiative researcher of Europeanized Chinese, points out that “People, who are influenced deeply by western cultures will use some western language structures unconsciously or by purpose”. In his *Theory of Chinese Grammar* (1954), he devotes a chapter to the discussion of the “Europeanized Grammar” in modern Chinese (which refers to the Chinese language after the May Fourth Movement), where 6 categories of it are illustrated as follows:

- 1) The creation of polysyllables in words
- 2) The frequent use of subjects and copulas
- 3) The extension of sentence length
- 4) The frequent use of modal verbs, passive voice and some signs
- 5) The Europeanized connectives
- 6) New means of expressing digits and using pronouns

The study of Wang has greatly invigorated the relevant studies on Europeanized Chinese both in China and abroad.

Cornelius C (1985) studies the fact of Europeanized Chinese through the comparison of two different versions of *Home* by Ba Jin.

Zhu (1987) points out that the increase of subjects in Modern Chinese is influenced by the widespread use of English.

Xie (1990/2001) describes the influence of English on Chinese in morphology and sentence structure in *The Summary of Europeanized Grammar in Modern Chinese* in 1990 and *A Review of Europeanized Grammar in Chinese* in 2001.

Wang (2002) explains the sentence patterns imitating those in English through means of transliteration and liberal translation. And he further analyzes the penetration of English into Chinese syntax from three aspects:

- 1) The increasingly frequent use of passive voice;
- 2) The more complicated sentences;

### 3) The more flexible word orders.

In recent years, Guo (2003) depicts English as a powerful language which has influenced Modern Chinese not only in the increase of loan words but in words formation and syntax as well. By analyzing the language in *Beijing Evening News*, *China Daily* and other corpus, he arrives at a conclusion that English has greatly influenced Chinese in morphology including affixation, morphemization and the wide use of Latin letters. Meanwhile, English has imposed much upon Chinese word categories conversion.

Other scholars, such as He (2008) and Hou (2010), explore Europeanized Chinese in morphology and syntax by comparing diachronically sentence structures and words in literature works.

Huang (2012) studies the popular employment of English letters and Internet buzzwords in Chinese people's daily lives. She illustrates the creation of Chinese-styled acronyms for the sake of euphemism such as NB instead of “牛逼”.

Many linguists focus on the description of the written language in Englishized Chinese. However as the popular vocabularies rapidly and broadly transmitted by the public, buzzwords are worth being taken as a good example to study the English penetration into Chinese.

According to the previous study by Wang Li, the penetration of English into Chinese tends to be discussed mainly from two aspects. The first is morphology, including the affixation and the frequent use of English letters. There is a tendency that Chinese people use a lot of English words and letters to facilitate their daily communication. The other is syntax. Due to the imitation of English syntax, Chinese sentence structures have become more and more complicated with more connectives, subjects, copulas and so on.

## II. THE PENETRATION OF ENGLISH INTO CHINESE

As the first to discuss, morphology generally refers to the study of inner structure of words and the word-formation rules in a language. Comparatively, syntax is the set of rules, principles, and processes that govern the structure of sentences in a given language, especially word order. Therefore, these two aspects could be able to demonstrate the grammatical reality of a certain language.

### A. Morphological Penetration

Morphology “is a terminology coined by J. W Goethe to refer to the study of form and structure of living organism which was taken up by linguistics in the 19th century as a cover term for inflection and word formation.” (Hadumod Bussman, 2000: 314). This paper confines morphology as the knowledge on the principles of words composition and the application of letters. Exactly, the use of affixation and English letters in Chinese.

#### 1 Affixation

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (2004), affix refers to a letter or a group of letters added to the beginning or the end of a word to change its meaning, such as the prefix un- in *unhappy* and the suffix -less in *careless*.

In fact, both English and Chinese have affixes. However, there are more affixes in English than those in Chinese. As a result, the point that affixation in Chinese is influenced by English is discussed by many linguists.

Thomson (1981) points out that Chinese is an isolated language without affixation or with few affixes and affixation in Chinese is influenced by English. By analyzing Europeanized grammar in modern Chinese, Xie (2001) claims that the most obvious impact of English on Chinese is the frequent use of affixes.

However, many other linguists argue that affixation in Modern Chinese is not caused by English. Wu (2001) regards affixation as a tendency of language development caused by internal factors of language.

It is no doubt that classical Chinese have many affixes before its contacts with English. For example, “子(zi)”, “儿子(son)”, “女子(woman)”, “男子(man)” and so on. However, a proliferation of Chinese buzzwords is observed to bear affixes, which are applied freely and frequently in Modern Chinese.

There are some high-frequency affixes:

1) “控(kon)”, which comes from the pronunciation of com- in complex in Japanese, meaning somebody is keen on something. Nowadays, “控(kon)” has been added to the end of many nouns, for example “手机控(phone freak)”, “电脑控(computer freak)”, “长发控(long hair freak)”, etc.

2) “达人(talent)”, which was spread from Taiwan through the Internet, describes a person who is pretty professional in a certain field, such as “理财达人(financial management talent)”, “网络达人(network talents)”, “校园达人(campus talents)”, etc.

3) “哒(a modal particle)” is an inflection of “的(De)” in Chinese which is used to magnify the speaker himself or other people's cuteness. For example, “萌萌哒(cute)” instead of “萌萌的”, “美美哒(beautiful)” instead of “美美的”, “棒棒哒(awesome)” instead of “棒棒的”, etc.

4) The original meaning of “帝” is the ruler of a feudal society or an emperor, while now means that somebody is pretty good at doing something. For example, “表情帝” means somebody who shows dynamic emotions, “体操帝” is someone good at gymnastics, etc.

From the examples mentioned above, it can be found that affixes sometimes in Chinese buzzwords do not change the

meaning of a word, such as “哒( just a modal particle)” and the addition of affixes just enhances the expressive power of a word, thus a comfortable atmosphere of communication is created.

## 2 The Widespread Use of English Letters

Dong (2001) did a study on two newspapers --- *China Reading Weekly* and *China Daily* issued on December 13, 2000, which showed exactly the widespread use of English letters in Chinese besides some English people's names, geographic names and book names. For example, there are “MD 桥 (MD Bridge), WTO (World Trade Organization), 4U 书店 (4U bookstore), MBA (Master of Business Administration), etc.” on *China Reading Weekly* and “IP 技术 (IP technology), WTO (World Trade Organization), IC (Integrated circuit), etc.” on *China Daily*. Actually, English letters and words appear with a high frequency in Chinese newspapers, magazines, commercials and so on. Some of these words have been absorbed by *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*.

According to Cuo and Zhou (2003), English letters enter into Chinese in 9 forms:

- 1) Using English letters directly: NB, A, X, etc.
- 2) Chinese morphemes (means morphemes coming from classic Chinese) + English letters: Q 版, E 时代, M 计, VIP 房, 唱 K, etc.
- 3) Borrowed words' morphemes (means morphemes from other languages introduced into Chinese) + English letters: 维 C, 维 D, etc.
- 4) Chinese morphemes + English words: 摇滚 Show, Hold 住, 最 In, etc.
- 5) Chinese morphemes + English clipped words: IT 业, SOHO 族, etc.
- 6) English clipped words: APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), CEO (Chief Executive Officer), DIY (Do It Yourself), etc.
- 7) English letters originated from Chinese: CCTV (China Central Television), CBA (China Basketball Association), CET-6 (College English Test -6), etc.
- 8) English words: Office, Cool, Hi, IPAD, etc.
- 9) Figures + English letters: iPhone 6, CET-4, MP4, etc.

To some extent, English letters and words are applied and understood more conveniently than Chinese which explains why Chinese people prefer applying them to daily expression.

## 3 Anglo-Chinese Style Expression

It is evidently discovered that many expressions in one language are borrowed from another language as a result of language contacts. Similarly, Chinese borrowed and are borrowing a lot of English words so that a great number of English loan words have become pet phrases in Chinese. Some examples collected from the buzzwords are as follows:

- 1) “Hold 住”, coming from an entertainment program of Taiwan, means taking control of something or somebody. Nowadays, this word has been a way to encourage somebody to deal with difficulties. For example, when one feels nervous in delivering a speech, his or her friends will say “hold 住” to comfort him or her.
- 2) “Out”, means being out of fashion or failing to catch up with fashion. For example, “iPhone 4 已经 out 了! (iPhone 4 has been out of fashion!)”, “你都 out 了! (You should keep up with the trend!)”
- 3) “So easy” comes from a commercial advertisement “爸爸再也不用担心我的学习了! So easy! (My father does not have to worry about my study anymore because the textbooks are so easy to me with the help of the Bubugao electronic reading machine!)”. Nowadays, this word is widely applied into Chinese people's daily utterance.

Besides the blended use of Anglo expressions with Chinese ones, English morphological rules have also been borrowed by Chinese buzzwords. Compared with English verbs, Chinese ones cannot show the tense by morphological changes. However, Chinese speakers are using English tenses to express themselves.

- 1) 郁闷 ing!——郁闷着。  
I am upset now!
- 2) 开心 ing!——开心着。  
I am happy now!
- 3) 吃饭 ed.——吃饭了。  
I have taken lunch.

According to the mentioned examples, “ing” is equal to “着” and “ed” is equal to “了”. But people tend not to use “郁闷着” to describe their mood which is considered less fashionable. Meanwhile, it should be realized that these expressions are mainly used by the young generation who are more actively inclined to create new things.

## B. Syntax Penetration

Still according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (2004), syntax is the way that words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language or the rules of grammar for this, or the rules that state how words and phrases must be used in a computer language. And this paper mainly explores syntax from the aspect of sentence structures.

### 1 The Increasing Use of Subjects

It is believed that Chinese sentences can do without subjects because of its parataxis feature. That is, the connection

of sentences in Chinese is by context and logic. A complete sentence does not need the structure of subject, which can be regarded as a significant feature of Chinese language (Zhu, 1999:127). However, the connection of sentences in English is by grammatical relationships of subjects, predicates, objects, connectives and so on through which the meanings of sentences are acquired by audiences.

Nevertheless, the frequent use of subjects in Chinese is easily seen.

There are some examples.

- 1) 你这么牛，你家里人知道吗？——你这么牛，家里人知道吗？/ 这么牛，你家里人知道吗？  
(Do your families know that you are so great?)
- 2) 我和我的小伙伴们都惊呆了。——我和小伙伴们都惊呆了。/ 我们都惊呆了。  
(My friends and I are shocked.)
- 3) 待我长发及腰，少年你娶我可好？——待长发及腰，少年娶我可好？  
(Are you still willing to marry me as days go by?)
- 4) 我只想安静地做个美男子。——只想安静地做个美男子。  
(I just want to be a handsome man without any bothering.)

It is not hard to discover that the omission of subjects in examples (1) to (5) do not change the meaning of the sentence which as well can shorten sentence length and simplify sentence structures. On the contrary, the subject is a necessary part in every English sentence without which the sentence structure would be ungrammatical. Hence, it seems a paradox that in Chinese buzzwords, sentences embody a great number of subjects which definitely causes the inconvenience of speakers who tend to get away from the linguistic mechanism they have been accustomed to.

## 2 The Addition of Copula ---“是(shi)”

A copula or a linking verb is the same as *be* or *become* that connects a subject with the adjective or noun (called the COMPLEMENT) to describe it (*Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, 2004). There are many linking verbs in English language, in which “be” is the most commonly used one. Generally, “be” in English is equal to Chinese “是 (shi)” though there are many differences between them in many situations. And this paper just discusses “be” when it is equal to “是(shi)”.

Wang believes it quite mistaken to add “是 (shi)” as a copula in a common descriptive sentence according to Chinese grammar(1990). However, influenced by English syntax, Chinese people would like to use more judgment sentences than descriptive sentences: that is, they would like to add the linking verb “是(shi)” when it is unnecessary.

Some examples taken from the recent five years' buzzwords are listed below:

我爸是李刚，我叔是金国友。——我爸李刚，我叔金国友。

(My father is Li Gang and my uncle is Jin Guoyou.)

- 1) 有钱就是任性。——有钱就任性。  
(Rich and Bitch.)
- 2) 你也是蛮拼的。——你也蛮拼的。  
(You are pretty strenuous.)
- 3) 贱人就是矫情。——贱人，矫情。  
(A cheap girl is always cheap.)
- 4) 我也是醉了。——我也醉了。  
(Are you kidding me?)

Examples (1) to (4) show that the linking verb “是(shi)” could be omitted in the Chinese versions which is absolutely necessary when translated into English. The addition of “是(shi)” as a result of translationese, makes a complete sentence redundant and lengthened.

## 3 Word Categories Conversion --- Nominalization

In terms of language typology, English is categorized as a language with static tendency because of the nominalization in its sentences, while Chinese sentences comparatively bear more verbs than English so that it is defined as a language with dynamic tendency. This is caused by many factors, one of which is cognitive differences between English-speaking people and Chinese people. Nevertheless, more nouns appear in Modern Chinese than before.

Zhuo (1979) thinks that the tendency of nominalization in Modern Chinese is influenced by English. Hu (1995) also believes transforming verbs and adjectives into nouns is a kind of Europeanized grammar. Yet word categories conversion, mainly nominalization is also discovered as a distinctive feature of Chinese buzzwords.

Some examples are given below.

- 1) “颜值” is a noun describing appearance of a person. Therefore, “颜值高” instead of “漂亮” is to show one's beauty. For example, “她颜值很高” means she is very beautiful.
- 2) 花美男 as a noun means a handsome man. In classic Chinese, adjectives “俊” or “帅” are used to describe a good-looking man, while now “他是个花美男” is a common expression.
- 3) “女汉子” usually refers to a girl who is manlike. Chinese people used to say “她很像爷们儿”, while now they use “女汉子” to express this meaning.

4) “高富帅” is a noun to describe a wealthy man who is tall and handsome. Traditionally, Chinese people use adjectives “又高又富又帅” to express this meaning.

It could be seen that nominalization brings new expressions into modern Chinese, which as a result enriches the language and broaden the thinking pattern of language users. Meanwhile, the use of nouns in high frequency does impact the pattern of expression of Chinese people especially the young generation who are the main recipients and conveyors of buzzwords.

#### 4 The Use of Passive Voice

In classical Chinese, passive voice is used to express an event in which something unfortunate has happened. Wang (1985) believes that “For beneficial events in an objective sense was not expressed with passive sentences”. However, pleasant events are commonly expressed with passive voice in English. And it has been observed that the number of passive voice constructions not expressing bad is increasing under the influence of English.

In the discussion of Europeanization, Xie (2001) points out that the most obvious phenomenon in syntax is the universal application of “被”, which is no longer limited to unpleasant or unwanted situations.

Some examples are as follows:

- 1) 你被@了。——有人@你!  
(You are @ by somebody.)
- 2) 被赞了! ——有人赞了你!  
(Somebody's idea or something is approved by others.)

Passive voice has become a common expression not only describing unpleasant things in Chinese people's daily lives.

### III. THE CAUSES OF ENGLISH PENETRATION INTO CHINESE

The process of English penetration into Chinese language has been proved to be long and slow which has impacted Chinese in morphology, syntax and so on. Actually, since the Opium War, English words and expressions has emerged in Chinese by means of direct and indirect contacts. This paper mainly discusses the ways of English penetration into Chinese from four aspects --- colonization, translation, education and information transmission.

#### A. *The Influence of British Colonization*

English colonial expansion began with the colonization of Newfoundland in 1583. By 1900, Britain had built up a big empire, “on which the sun never set.”

In 1842, Treaty of Nanjing was concluded by the government of Qing Dynasty, which ceded Hong Kong to Britain, due to which English from then on became its official language. Since then, the language policy in Hong Kong was Bi-literacy and Tri-lingualism which means Chinese and English are both legalized as the written languages while Mandarin, Cantonese and English are the spoken languages. Therefore, many English loan words and expressions merged with Cantonese, like “巴士(bus)”, “香波(shampoo)” and so on. Meanwhile, Guang Zhou as an important port adjacent to Hong Kong was also impacted by the colonial activities of Britain. Inevitably, Cantonese absorbed a lot of English expressions and spread them nationwide. Furthermore, Chinese Mandarin spoken by Cantonese was also greatly influenced by English both in vocabularies and in grammar, such as “我有吃过早饭。(I have taken breakfast.)”, “这个是很好的。(That is very good.)” which certainly influenced the expressive way of people who were apt to learn from those coming from a more prosperous place.

#### B. *The Influence of Translation*

Since the 19th century, the invasion of western powers awakened a group of patriotic Chinese intellectuals who suddenly realized the potential crisis of being partitioned all over China. In order to defend the country, they proposed to learn from western culture and technologies. Due to this, western works on philosophy, science and technologies were introduced and translated into Chinese.

At that moment, vernacular Chinese could not meet the need of expressing complicated thoughts and things from the west. Therefore, transliteration was utilized by which many newly created words appeared in Chinese according to their English pronunciations. And transliteration and other translating methods are efficient ways which contribute a lot to Chinese vocabularies and definitely encourage the proliferation of more and more new expressions in the future.

#### C. *Nationwide English Education in China*

In 1978, English teaching was written into the education plan of primary schools and middle schools in China which later became compulsory courses in Chinese education system. In 2003, China set up the New English Curriculum Criteria which divided students' English ability into 9 levels. Due to this rule, students must reach the second level when they graduate from primary schools and the fifth level when they leave from junior high schools and the seventh level when they graduate from senior high schools. College students have to pass the College English Test Band 4 or Band 6, if they want to graduate from universities and find satisfactory jobs. In society, English is a trump card for adults to get better jobs or quick promotions. Consequently, Chinese people start to learn English when they are

children. According to *the Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development Plan*, English learning is still the focus of school education. Hence, the popularity of English learning boosts the use of English by Chinese that reasonably explains the transfer from English into Chinese.

#### D. *The Influence of Information Transmission*

According to Chen Chuanli (2011), one third of newspapers worldwide are published and issued by English-spoken countries, which have great circulation and impact on the world. In 1994, about 45% broadcasts and programs were produced and presented by English-spoken countries.

Meanwhile, the widespread American and Britain movies and television programs popularize English in non-English-spoken countries including China. Therefore, the large scale of information transmission provides an external environment for English penetration into Chinese language. Besides, when the buzzwords are coined, it is transmitted more widely and rapidly with the aid of the Internet which is described by some linguists as virus-like.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

On the one hand, English benefits Chinese in many aspects. Firstly, it conveys western concepts and information to China, which accelerates the pace of China in catching up with developed countries. Secondly, English penetration in morphology and syntax enables Chinese to express themselves in more ways. For example, English acronyms simplify the expression of technical terms, such as ATM (Automatic Teller Machine), DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) and so on. Additionally, the wide use of English also promotes cultural exchanges all over the world, which enhances the foundation of mutual understanding on the earth.

On the other hand, English penetration lays many negative effects on Chinese language. Actually, the over-use of English does damages to another language. For instance, the frequent use of subjects and copulas in Chinese sentences causes complicated and lengthened sentence structures, which is contradictory against Chinese language mechanism. And the use of more English letters instead of Chinese characters in the media is bound to weaken the significance of Chinese characters as well as traditional culture which is embodied by the language.

A Chinese writer Wang Meng reported at the Culture Summit Forum in 2004 that Chinese has been suffering from unprecedented damage because of the wide spread of English in China. Besides, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television has ordered a national ban on the use of English words and acronyms in non-English channels, which for instance appointed the expression “中国男子职业篮球联赛” instead of “CBA” and “美国职业篮球联赛” instead of “NBA” in CCTV-5(Sports Channel).

It is pointed by some scholars that English penetration has affected the purity of Chinese, but it is unreasonable to totally give up English learning. Faced with a world which calls for competition and cooperation, more rational measures should be taken to both protect the healthy development of a language to improve people's awareness of traditional culture and to absorb advantages from other nations and their languages.

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