Hong Kong English: Pronunciation Features at a Glance

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10-March-2014
VariAMU Workshop
OUTLINE OF TALK

(1) Background

(2) The Sound System of English

(3) Segmental Features of Hong Kong English
   (A) Loss of voicing contrast
   (B) Final plosives and fricatives
   (C) The two ‘TH’ sounds
   (D) Final /l/-vocalisation
   (E) The /n/-/l/ merger
   (F) Consonant clusters simplification
   (G) Some merged vowels
   (H) Vowel length distinction not realized
   (I) Diphthongs shortening
   (J) ‘you’ pronounced as [ʧu]
   (K) /s/ → /ʃ/ before a rounded vowel

(4) Suprasegmental Features of Hong Kong English
   (L) Word Stress
   (M) Reduced Vowel

(5) Conclusion
Today’s talk is based on a survey of published research articles on HKE and some of my own research in this area.

The term “features” is used to indicate a more neutral stance.

Some of these features may NOT necessarily be errors because some native speakers of English also manifest such features.

From the point of view of “variations”, they will be compared with the “standard” varieties.
An Overview

- Segmental
  - Consonants (24)
  - Vowels (20 in British English)

- Suprasegmental
  - Word stress
  - Reduced Vowels
# 24 Consonants in English
(adapted from Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>labio-dental</th>
<th>dental</th>
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<tr>
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<td>r</td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
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</table>
12 English Monophthongs (Simple Vowels)

(from LLAS at University of Southampton
http://www.llas.ac.uk/materialsbank/mbo81/page_10.htm)
8 English Diphthongs (Complex Vowels)

Closing to the back
- au
- əu
- house
- no

Closing to the front
- əɪ
- ɪə
- eight
- five
- ɪə
- boy

Centering
- ɪə
- ɛə
- here
- ɛə
- hair
- ʊə
- sure

from https://sites.google.com/site/frufrusphonoweb/eng---chapters/vowels/english-vowel-system
(A) Loss of voicing contrast
- maintained in initial plosives and affricates: /p b/, /t d/, /k g/ & /ʧ dʒ/
- lost in final plosives and affricates:
  - final plosives, fricatives, and affricates tend to be voiceless:
    - (1) regard [t], mind [t], need [t], use /z/ → [s], clothe /ð/ → [θ], engage /ʤ/ → [ʧ], arrange /ʤ/ → [ʧ], strange /ʤ/ → [ʧ]...
- lost in all fricatives:
  - /f θ s ʃ h/ (Ụ /v ð z ʒ/ Ụ)
    - (2) while we arrive [ə'raɪf] we can see a very beautiful environment [ɛn'fəʊmən?] {09-HE:00:05}
    - (3) my dad usually ['juʃəli] drive his car and pick us up {01-HE:00:17}
(B) Final Plosives and Fricatives

- final plosives tend to be glottalized
  - so that the first word [wɔʔ] mat6 is similar
  - some places with my father at weekend [wiʔɛn]
  - while we arrive we can see a very beautiful environment [ɛn'fəʊmɛnʔ]
- final plosives sometimes are deleted
  - size /z/ → Ø
  - kind of [kaɪnØcf]
(C) The two ‘TH’ sounds

- /θ/ → [f]; /ð/ → [d]
  - (9) so there’s [dəəz] actually a path [paf] between those [dəʊs] two
  - (10) pass through [fru] it and then go north
  - (11) /ð/ → [d]: they, them, there, weather, though...
  - (12) /θ/ → [f]: think, three, theme, thirteen, something, youth, both, cloth, bath, thin...
SEGMENTAL FEATURES OF HKE (4)

- (D) Final /l/-vocalisation
  - (13) *I think until [∧ntio] I got to... primary school* {05-HE:06:23}
  - (14) final /l/ → [w]: feel, dull, call, cool, useful, fruitful, eventful,...
(E) The /n/-/l/ merger

- (15) or even *snake* [slaʔk]  
- (16) yes we are *not alone* [nəʔ ənən]  

- (17) /n/ → [l]: night, no, naked, number, need, not, net, now, nose, nine, name,...  
- (18) /l/ → [n]: line, lame, longing, lead, loose, loud, lower, lot, lake, leafing, long, low, leaf, let, leaving, light, leave, lumber...
(F) Consonant clusters simplification
  - initial CCs—one C deleted or modified
    - (19) I think until I got to... primary [p_aimri] school
    ![05-HE:06:23]
    - (20) and we play [p_ei] some er... small scale rides there
    ![10-HE:00:44]
    - (21) problem [prab_em], free [f_i], spleen [sp_in], spring [sp_in]
    - (22) English [ingwI], flow [fwo], Fred [fWed], freeze [flis],
  - final CCs—one or more C deleted or modified
    - (23) and we play some er... small scale rides [rais] there
    ![10-HE:00:44]
    - (24) er then you go east [is] ...
    ![09-MT:00:26]
    - (25) act [æ_t] [æʔt], boats [boʊ_s], leads [li_s] [lits],
      handful [hæn_fow] [hæntfow], mindful [maɪ_fow]
      [maɪtfow]
(G) Some merged vowels

- tends to be very similar to that of British English (HKE: p.28) with the following distinctive features:
  - /ɛ/ for both /e/ and /æ/
    - (26) hand [hɛnd], enactment [ɛ'nɛtmɛnt], had [hɛd], bat [bɛt]
• (H) Vowel length distinction not realized
  ○ long/short (tense/lax) distinction neutralized
    ▪ (27) I went there to visit ['vɪsɪt] her... because at that time it [ɪ?] was after graduation so I’ve got [ɡɔʔ] about three [θri] months’ holiday ['hɔlədeɪ] {08-HE:00:22}
    ▪ (28) and then can you see a rope bridge [brɪtʃ] {05-MT:04:46}
    ▪ (29) need [nid], heed & hid [hid], heat & hit [hit], caught & cot [kɔt],...
(I) Diphthongs shortening

- if a diphthong is followed by a consonant, 3 things may happen:
  - (i) both the D and C are kept
    - (30) *so there’s actually a path between those [dəus] two*
  - (ii) the D is kept but the C is deleted:
    - (31) *so we are at the starting point and do you see a diamond mine [məɪn]*
  - (iii) the diphthong may become a monophthong:
    - (32) *so we are at the starting point [pʊnt] and do you see a diamond mine*
    - (33) *or even snake [sliʔk]*
(J) ‘you’ pronounced as [ʧu]

(34) so um they... you [ʧu] wouldn’t believe their life

(35) cause I felt very embarrassed of you [ʧu] know not um knowing something that they said

(K) /s/ → /ʃ/ before a rounded vowel

(36) yeah quite like a zoo [ʃu]
(L) Word Stress

Below are some examples where HKE speakers put the primary stress differently:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>SHOULD STRESS</th>
<th>HKE STRESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>representative</td>
<td>repreSENtative</td>
<td>representATive</td>
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<tr>
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<td>conSULtative</td>
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<td>pedaGOgy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>horizon</td>
<td>hoRIzon</td>
<td>HOrizon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(M) Reduced Vowels

- The unstressed syllables in an English word are usually pronounced as a reduced vowel /ə/.
- One of the HKE features is to have this reduced vowel produced as a full vowel.
- The realization of these full vowels are very often related to the spelling of the English words.
**SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES OF HKE (3)**

- Examples of non-reduced vowels in HKE
Website on HKE Pronunciation Features

- Website “Pronunciation Features of Hong Kong English”
- http://funstuff.engl.polyu.edu.hk/hkepron/
SELECTED REFERENCES

THANK YOU!!

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