Language Centre English Seminar

Variation and Acceptability in Hong Kong English Phonology
Presented by

Dr. Andrew Sewell
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Date : Monday, September 27, 2010
Time : 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.
Venue : OEM1018, 10/F, OEN Hall (Main)
Ho Sin Hang Campus, HKBU

Abstract
This seminar begins by considering a paradox: if a majority of local people believe that they speak ‘their own English’, i.e. Hong Kong English, why do so many of them see it as being inferior? This ‘linguistic schizophrenia’ is especially contradictory in the area of phonology, where the near-inevitability of a local accent collides with a strong preference for British or American models.

The research data presented in this seminar attempts to resolve this paradox by taking a variationist, features-based approach to the phonology of Hong Kong English. Firstly, inter-speaker variation is discussed with reference to an implicational scale of phonological features. Secondly, the effects of phonological features on listener ratings of acceptability are considered.

The findings of this study suggest that the type of Hong Kong English accent used in research is a crucial determinant of attitudes. It is further argued that certain phonological features exert a strong influence on audience reactions. The study may have implications for the teaching of English pronunciation in Hong Kong, as well as contributing to an understanding of attitudes towards English accents.

Bio-data
Andrew Sewell recently completed a PhD in English at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, where he also teaches courses on English phonetics and phonology. He has taught English as a foreign language in China, South Korea, Macau and the United Kingdom. His current research interests include several topics related to World Englishes and English as an International Language, such as variation, language attitudes, international intelligibility, and the teaching and learning of English pronunciation.

All are welcome!

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