



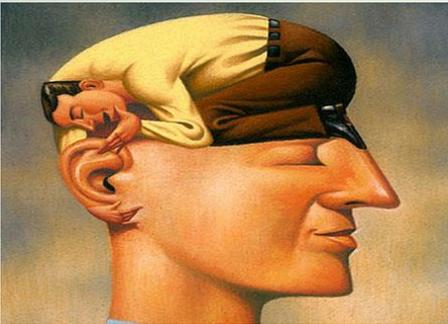
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Hearing the Inner Voices of Asian English Poets

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Abstract: When we read a poem, especially in English, today's world confronts us with the question of the accent that manifested in the poet's mind while composing. When a Hong Kong child writes her heart out, is she to be silenced into a British accent where her rhymes break down and the tonal melodies of her English reduced to binary contrasts of stress? The scale enlarges to the whole territory's literary voices, and to Singapore, India, and Philippines. The case holds wherever English is introduced and *de facto* indigenized, despite the authority's constant yet otherwise inclined efforts.

This paper demonstrates the tonality of Hong Kong English which gives it a prosody profile quite unlike its antecedent languages such as Cantonese or British English. The systematicity of the tonal patterns precludes the dismissal of Hong Kong English as sub-standard. By apprehending these patterns, we enable the inner voices of a community and its literary youths that would otherwise have been silenced by blind aspiration to language models that are effectively foreign, which also puts the spotlight on the need to understand linguistics for a meaningful grasp of literature.

We also hope to trigger more thoughts on the consequences of treating Asian varieties of English as *the* English in terms of social identity and cultural cohesiveness. The impact of such treatment would resonate through the language and educational policies as well as the social fabric of each community that claims English as a language.

As of English, in the advent of the popularity of Standard Chinese, we might continue to be threatened by the tyranny phonological distortion unless one learns, through linguistics, how to hear the inner voices of the poets.

About the authors:

Lian-Hee Wee's research is on phonological patterns, particularly the tonal properties found in Singapore and Hong Kong Englishes, and on the tone sandhi patterns of Chinese languages. His curiosity in tone also led his explorations to issues on the relationship between linguistic tones and their manifestation in songs. He is (co-)author/editor of six books and numerous articles/book chapters. His latest book project is *Phonological Tone*.

Yang V. Liu's interest in sounds and their connections with literature and translation launched her professional career at a phonology laboratory. Unfolding the world of phonetics and phonology, this journey of discovery also refreshes her perspective on notions such as gender. Also a freelance translator, she has a recent rendition of *Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck.