

Unraveling Language Contact through Syntactic Dynamics of 'Also' in Hong Kong and Britain English

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Abstract : This article unveils an indicator of language contact between English and Cantonese in one of the Outer Circle Englishes, Hong Kong (HK) English, through an empirical investigation into 1000 tokens from the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus, employing frequency analysis and logistic regression analysis. It is perceived that Cantonese and general Chinese are contextually marked by an integral underlying thinking pattern. Chinese speakers exhibit a reliance on semantic context over syntactic rules and lexical forms. This linguistic trait carries over to their use of English, affording greater flexibility to formal elements in constructing English sentences. The study focuses on the syntactic positioning of the focusing subjunct 'also', a linguistic element used to add new or contrasting prominence to specific sentence constituents. The English language generally allows flexibility in the relative position of 'also', while there is a preference for close marking relationships. This article shifts attention to Hong Kong, where Cantonese and English converge, and 'also' finds counterparts in Cantonese 'jaa' and Mandarin 'ye'. Employing a corpus-based data-driven method, we investigate the syntactic position of 'also' in both HK and GB English. The study aims to ascertain whether HK English exhibits a greater 'syntactic freedom,' allowing for a more distant marking relationship with 'also' compared to GB English. The analysis involves a random extraction of 500 samples from both HK and GB English from the GloWbE corpus, forming a dataset (N=1000). Exclusions are made for cases where 'also' functions as an additive conjunct or serves as a copulative adverb, as well as sentences lacking sufficient indication that 'also' functions as a focusing particle. The final dataset comprises 820 tokens, with 416 for GB and 404 for HK, annotated according to the focused constituent and the relative position of 'also'. Frequency analysis reveals significant differences in the relative position of 'also' and marking relationships between HK and GB English. Regression analysis indicates a preference in HK English for a distant marking relationship between 'also' and its focused constituent. Notably, the subject and other constituents emerge as significant predictors of a distant position for 'also.' Together, these findings underscore the nuanced linguistic dynamics in HK English and contribute to our understanding of language contact. It suggests that future pedagogical practice should consider incorporating the syntactic variation within English varieties, facilitating learners' effective communication in diverse English-speaking environments and enhancing their intercultural communication competence.

Keywords : also, Cantonese, English, focus marker, frequency analysis, language contact, logistic regression analysis

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