

Another look at the prosody of English loanwords in Taiwan Mandarin – A case study of an online forum

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English loanwords in Mandarin have been a popular topic. However, previous loanword researches have been restricted to the standard transliteration (Guo 1999; Lin 2009; Miao 2005; Wang 2010; Wu 2006). It is important to examine the standard loanwords since they are the officially recognized forms. However, these loanwords were restricted by the frequency and the semantics of the available characters. For example, the company name Sony is *suǒnǐ* 索尼 (or *xīn-lì* 新力) in Mandarin. The form *sōu-nǐ* 搜你 has a better tonal adaptation with the high tone on the first syllable and the low tone on the second syllable, but it was not used due to the inappropriateness of the meanings of the characters (*sōu* 'search' & *nǐ* 'you') for a brand name. Furthermore, the standard forms are not necessarily used by the speakers. For example, the official transliteration of the popular brand Nike is *nai-ji* 耐吉. However, most of the Taiwan Mandarin speakers would rather code-switch and pronounce it as [naiki] even though [ki] is not a possible syllable in the writing system.

This study explores the English loanwords that were more likely to be spoken by the speakers. In this study, I examine the English loanwords, specifically the foreign Athletes' names, that were created by the users in one of the largest internet forums, 'ppt'. While some of the names were the same as the standard loanwords found in newspapers, many of the names were created by the users and became agreed forms on the message board. The result shows that without the restriction of the meanings of the characters, the users have more freedom to maintain the faithfulness of the stress in the donor language by assigning high or falling tone for stressed syllables, and low tone for unstressed syllables with higher rates. More importantly, this study finds an overwhelmingly preference for disyllabic names. Polysyllabic names were clipped into only first name, only last name, or the combination of the stressed syllables in both first and last names in order to create the disyllabicity. The preference of the disyllabicity is an important feature of the phonology of Mandarin Chinese (Duanmu 2007) but has never been discussed in the loanword phonology. This study demonstrates the importance to go beyond the written forms and to explore the forms that were more likely to be spoken.

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