Investigating culture through language: a corpus-based analysis of cultural conceptualizations from the domains of FAMILY and MONEY in HKE

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Abstract:
The rise of the World Englishes paradigm in the 1980s, the concomitant development of Cognitive Linguistics and corpus linguistic methods make up the perfect tools for the investigation of yet another variety of English: Hong Kong English (HKE). Hong Kong culture blends paradoxes: It shows that life and death, the real and the otherworld coexist in the traditions of its inhabitants, which eventually surface in language. This study takes a (socio)cognitive-linguistic perspective and – with the electronic corpus GloWbE containing roughly 40 million HKE tokens – examines collocational patterns in HKE from the domains of FAMILY and MONEY. Their conceptualizations in everyday life underlie a broader cultural cognition that is heterogeneously distributed in society (Sharifian 2003). The gathered data show that common core English terms undergo a semantic extension by being embedded into the Hong Kong culture, a culture based on ancient Chinese tradition, Confucian ideology paired with remnants of British colonial rule. Conceptual metaphors such as GHOSTS ARE HUMANS, ANCESTORS ARE PERSONS OF RESPECT AND AUTHORITY and PAPER OBJECTS ARE REAL OBJECTS IN THE OTHERWORLD surface in culturally constructed collocations like ‘hungry ghosts’, ‘worship ancestors’ and ‘hell money’ respectively. They are instances of the localized vocabulary of HKE and show how tightly culture and language are linked. In fact, culture and cultural changes are the factors that influence language and its development.

Bibliography (selection):


