

Original Paper

A Study on English and Chinese Languages

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Abstract

English and Chinese Languages, with the full title of A Guide to Conversation in the English and Chinese Languages for the Use of Americans and Chinese in California and Elsewhere, was compiled by Stanislas Hernisz and published in Boston in 1854. It is the first English Textbooks with the English Pronunciation Indicated in the Chinese Characters that was compiled and published in the United States to date. This book emulates the compilation style of early “Cantonese English” textbooks, using Canton dialects to mark English pronunciation, and arranges the content of the textbook in the order of phonetics, vocabulary, sentence patterns, and text. It integrates the characteristics of language teaching practices of China and the Western nations, and has had a profound impact on early English education and the compilation of English textbooks in China.

Keywords

English and Chinese Languages, Chinese character annotation, Cantonese English, content of the textbook, features of compilation, English textbooks

1. Introduction

The compilation of the Chinese-character phonetic English textbook in the United States is closely related to the background against the discovery of gold in California in the 1840s, which sparked a rush of Chinese immigrants to the region. For Chinese people who left their hometown for the United States, overcoming the English language barrier became their top priority for making a living in a foreign land. In 1854, an American named Stanislas compiled a book entitled *A Guide to Conversation in the English and Chinese Languages for the Use of Americans and Chinese in California and Elsewhere* (abbreviated as *English and Chinese Languages*), which was published in Boston. The book is currently held in the collections of the Munich Digitalization Center (MDZ) Library in Germany and the University of California Library in the United States. This is the first English-language textbook

with Chinese phonetic notation discovered to have been published overseas.

2. Stanislas Hernisz and the Compilation Background the of *English and Chinese Languages*

In the middle of the 19th century, the cultural and commercial relationship between China and the United States strengthened with the signing of Sino-Western treaties, the opening up of China's five ports for trade, and the discovery of gold mines in California, particularly after the implementation of the American Westward Expansion policy, which evoked high demand for inexpensive labor, providing broad prospects for Chinese people seeking livelihoods overseas. Many Chinese went to the United States for work opportunities. Historical records indicate that during the first four years of the "gold rush" in California, the number of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. significantly increased: 325 Chinese immigrants went to San Francisco in 1849 and by 1852, approximately 20,026 Chinese had moved to the U.S. for work. Most Chinese intended to work in the U.S. for a few years, earn money, and then return to China. In the 19th century, about 48% of Chinese returned to China (Barbara & Rebecca, 2008). Being in a foreign land, Chinese immigrants faced their primary issue, the language language barriers. Only a small proportion of them might have had the opportunity to receive formal English education at missionary schools, but most did not have this opportunity or condition. Self-learning through English textbooks with Chinese phonetic annotations became their primary choice. Under such circumstances, Stanislas Hernisz (M.D. 1805-1866) compiled *English and Chinese Languages* and published it in Boston in 1854.

Stanislas Hernisz was a Polish Jew, born into a merchant family in Warsaw. As a child, he attended a Hebrew-language school in Warsaw and mastered several foreign languages, including English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Chinese. In November 1830, Poland erupted in an uprising against the Russian Empire, to which he actively responded by establishing a Jewish volunteer battalion, despite opposition from the conservative Jewish faction. Following the failure of the uprising in 1831, he emigrated to France, where he primarily engaged in journalism. Soon after, he arrived in the United States as part of the entourage of the French ambassador to the U.S. and later became a naturalized American citizen. During his residence in the United States, Stanislas Hernisz pursued medical studies and earned a Doctor of Medicine degree. In 1842, he joined the American Oriental Society and traveled to China as a physician with an American missionary group. While in China, he diligently studied Chinese language and culture and developed a keen interest in the then-popular "Cantonese English". In 1846, he published an article titled *On the Chinese Language* in the Bulletin of the Proceedings of the National Institute for the Promotion of Science, earning him recognition as a "Sinologist of Jewish descent". The "gold rush" initiated in California in 1848 attracted millions of Chinese to make a living there, where language barriers became a tricky problem between the conversation across nations. Thus the *English and Chinese Languages* was compiled by Stanislas Hernisz, who pointed out in the preface the object of compiling the book "Heretofore the Chinese language was studied only for Missionary

purposes, or, as an object of mere curiosity, by a few philologists, whilst among the Chinese themselves, the study of the English or any other European language, did not possess even the interest of curiosity. The progress of events in the Celestial Empire, and in our own territories on the Pacific, has changed the relative importance of the two languages. The conclusion of treaties with western nations, the opening of the Five ports, and the discovery of gold In California, have caused a vast increase in the trade, more extensive intercourse, and closer relations with the “Central flowery people”. A knowledge of the Chinese language is no longer an object of mere curiosity to those whom business transactions bring into contact with the Chinese, whilst an acquaintance with the English language has become indispensable to a large number of the latter who have emigrated, or intend to emigrate, to California. To supply, on the one hand, to Americans some knowledge of the Chinese idiom, and on the other, to the Chinese, some elementary instruction in the English language (Hernisz, Stanislas, 1854).

3. The Compilation Style of *English and Chinese Languages*

The English and Chinese Languages consists of 215 pages, structured with both English and Chinese covers, an introduction, a section on learning English characters, and the main body entitled Practicing Chinese-English Conversations. This latter section is further divided into three parts.

The English cover has a dark green background with text arranged from left to right, detailing the title, author’s surname, publisher, and publication date. The Chinese cover follows traditional vertical alignment, divided into three columns: the right column lists the publication date, the middle displays the title, and the left column provides the publisher’s name in phonetic Chinese characters.

The “Introduction” part spans eight pages, discussing the purpose of the book, the English alphabet, the 214 Chinese character radicals, pronunciation, tones, and acknowledgments. Notably, the book uses romanized phonetic annotations for Chinese characters to facilitate English learning for Chinese speakers, presenting a novel approach to English education. Although the author states that the book uses Mandarin pronunciation, the text contains a significant number of Cantonese dialect words and pronunciations. This choice stems from the author’s reliance on other resources, including Morrison’s *Chinese-English Dictionary*, Bridgman’s *Chinese and English Common Words and Phrases*, Edkins’s *Introduction to Cantonese*, and Medhurst’s *Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect*, which incorporate Fujian and Cantonese phonetic notations.

The main body is divided into Learning English Characters and Practicing Chinese-English Conversations.

Learning English Characters includes question-and-answer exercises, the English alphabet, and numbers. Pages 1-4 contain brief dialogues for English study, followed by pages 4-5, which list the 26 English letters and letter combinations, annotated with Chinese characters to indicate pronunciation. Pages 6-31 provide 198 Chinese vocabulary terms with corresponding English meanings and phonetic guidance to help Chinese speakers master English word pronunciation. Pages 32-41 introduce

numerical expressions in English, along with phonetic notation.

The second part, Practicing Chinese-English Conversations, serves as an advanced exercise section. It is formatted separately from Learning English Characters, beginning on a new page. This section is divided into four parts: radicals, the first part, the second part, and the third part.

Pages 1-11 introduce the 214 Chinese radicals, annotated with English pronunciation and definitions. Pages 13-94 comprise the first part, Grammar. This section follows a structure-based approach, progressing from words to sentences and simple to complex constructions, focusing initially on five basic English sentence structures such as subject-verb and subject-verb-object, in various tenses, then moving to imperative sentences, general questions, choice questions, and relevant answers. It includes necessary vocabulary for sentence construction, covering possessive pronouns, interrogative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and vocabulary formed with these verbs. Finally, it covers adverbs, quantity words, adjectives, and sentences constructed with them.

Pages 95-151 contain the second part, with no explicit title. The content addresses grammar and short reading exercises based on the subject-predicate-complement sentence structure. This section is similar in style to the first part, listing vocabulary, followed by exercises that gradually build up sentence complexity. It includes intransitive verb-based sentences in various tenses, such as present, past, and future, and explores affirmative, negative, declarative, interrogative, and special question forms. From page 136, transitive and intransitive verbs are mixed for practice, known as “mixed exercises”, providing comprehensive training.

Pages 152-179 form the third part, consisting of eleven Q&A dialogues on topics like “Yes and No”, “To Speak”, “To Hear”, “To Understand”, “The Weather”, “To Drink”, “To Buy Clothes”, “Going to Market”, “Visit”, “About Age”, and “To Drink Tea”. This section includes practical phrases from daily life, structured in a question-answer format for English learners to grasp useful sentence patterns.

Overall, the textbook follows a structured English teaching approach, progressing from simple to complex and from basic to advanced, using grammar as a foundation to link words, sentences, and passages. Building on traditional Chinese phonetic-notation English textbooks, it introduces an innovative annotation method and organizes chapters with a format inspired by traditional Chinese serialized novels, making it one of the early modern English textbooks structured by chapters.

4. The Content and Features of *English and Chinese Languages*

Generally speaking, the content of *English and Chinese Languages* is composed of the following three categories: English pronunciation, English grammar, and English dialogues. As an English textbook tailored for Chinese laborers in America, it emphasizes foundational content of basic language.

4.1 The Use of Chinese Characters for English Phonetic Notation

In the compilation process, Stanislas referenced works by missionaries and linguists such as Robert Morrison, Walter Medhurst, Elijah Bridgman, and Samuel Wells Williams. He used “Mandarin”

Chinese characters to indicate the sounds of the 26 English letters, 47 common letter combinations, 200 frequently used words, and 55 numerals. Unlike other works, Stanislas provided pronunciation notations for each individual English letter in a word, rather than for entire words. For instance, each letter in the words of “United States”, “Philadelphia”, and “Washington” has its own Chinese character notation, corresponding precisely to each letter’s sound. This method, though painstaking, aimed to help Chinese learners master English letter sounds. However, if learners pronounced each letter independently, rather than following the word’s intended pronunciation, they would likely produce syllable-by-syllable reading, impeding their grasp of natural English pronunciation.

The vocabulary of 200 commonly used English words with Chinese phonetic annotations includes terms related to mining, food, daily necessities, kinship, animals, place names, and various verbs and adjectives. Compared to “Canton English” textbooks, *English and Chinese Languages* selects vocabulary more relevant to the everyday work and life of Chinese in the U.S., broadly reflecting the early period of the American West’s expansion.

4.2 Teaching English Dialogues through Gradual Grammar Structures

Recognizing the significant syntactic differences between Chinese and English, *English and Chinese Languages* presents English grammar in a gradual, layered fashion. It introduces basic sentence patterns such as SVO (subject-verb-object) and SVC (subject-verb-complement) and their transformations, such as simple present, past, and future tenses; affirmative, interrogative, and imperative forms, before gradually introducing modifiers for subjects, verbs, and objects to form increasingly complex sentences. This approach aims to help learners master words, then sentences and eventually passages.

For example, on page 13, the personal pronouns “I, Thou, He, We, You, They” are introduced as sentence subjects. On page 14, the subject-verb combinations “I have, Thou hast, He has, We have, You have, They have” are listed. Subsequently, nouns used as objects like “gold, gold dust, gold leaf, silver, iron, iron ore” appear. By page 16, sentences expand to “I have gold; Thou hast gold dust; He has gold leaf; We have silver; You have iron; They have iron ore”. Page 18 shifts the present tense to the past, such as “I had, Thou had, He had...” and page 20 to future tense, such as “I shall have, Thou will have...”). As learners master these basic sentence structures, pronouns are replaced with nouns, and modifiers such as possessive adjectives, quantifiers, and demonstrative pronouns are added incrementally.

This progressive approach is similar to Robert Morrison’s *Grammar of the English Language*, with the layout of content from phonetics to vocabulary, and then to sentences. However, *English and Chinese Languages* emphasizes conversational practice rather than a strict focus on grammatical instruction, allowing learners to internalize grammar rules through dialogue practice.

4.3 Dialogues Based on Daily Life Scenarios

The “Questions and Answers” section presents dialogues commonly used in daily life, reflective of the social context at that time. These eleven dialogues cover the topics of “Yes and no”, “To speak”, “To hear”, “To understand”, “The weather”, “To drink”, “To buy clothes”, “Going to the market”, “Visits”, “About age”, and “To drink tea”. Parts of the contents in each topics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Partial Contents in Each Topics of Questions and Answers

No.of Topics	Names of Topics	Contents
Topic 1	Yes and no	Who doubts it? There is not the least doubts of it. I think there is. I say there is not. Let us make a bet. How much do you bet? I bet a dollar.
Topic 2	To speak	To whom are you speaking? I am speaking to him? Can you speak English? What do you say/What did you say? I say nothing/I said nothing. Be silent/I am silent.
Topic 3	To hear	Do you hear what I say? I hear. Come hither to hear. I do not hear what you say.
Topic 4	To understand	Do you understand Chinese? I do not understand it. I understand everything. Did you understand what I said? I understand it perfectly.
Topic 5	The weather	Does it rain? No, it snows.
Topic 6	To drink	Is the wine good? It is very good.....
Topic 7	To buy clothes	Do you sell clothes? Yes, I have a good many for sale.....

Topic 8	Going to market	You must go to the market to buy rice, mutton and fish. Do you want eggs also?.....
Topic 9	Visit	Who knocks at the door? It is I. Are you not up yet?.....
Topic 10	About age	How old is your younger brother? He is twenty.....
Topic 11	To drink tea	Are you thirsty? I am thirsty, make some tea.....

These scenarios were carefully chosen to help learners engage in practical, everyday conversations. The material progresses systematically, helping learners move from phonetics to vocabulary, grammar, and finally to conversation, following a model similar to methods used in contemporary Western textbooks for French and German.

It is notable that *English and Chinese Languages* only uses Chinese characters to transcribe English pronunciation in its initial sections. From the second part onward, the phonetic annotations are omitted. This suggests that the author viewed these annotations as an introductory aid, meant to be phased out as learners gained a foundational grasp of English phonetics. This approach was forward-thinking; later Chinese-English textbooks adopted similar methods, omitting Chinese annotations in longer sentences and passages.

5. Conclusion

The compilation of *English and Chinese Languages* by Stanislas is unique in its intent, structure, content selection, and teaching methods, having a significant impact on the creation of English teaching materials that use phonetic annotations for Chinese characters.

As early as 1842, British scholar Robert Thom compiled *Chinese and English Vocabulary (Part I)*, using Mandarin phonetics to annotate English pronunciation (Robert Thom, 1842). This work set the precedent for foreigners creating English textbook with Chinese character phonetics. In 1854, Stanislas compiled *English and Chinese Languages*, which became the first phonetic-Chinese English textbook published outside the territory of China, which played an active role in promoting linguistic and cultural exchange between China and the United States. In 1871, Matthew Yates, the American vice-consul in Shanghai, compiled *First lessons in Chinese*, which used Shanghai dialect to annotate English pronunciation, greatly promoting the spread of English in Shanghai (Matthew Yates, 1871). Evaluated by the scientific standard of modern English textbook, these kinds of Chinese phonetic English textbooks are in great need of improvement regards its compiling quality.

Although these foreign authors could have used Western textbook structures to compile English textbooks for Chinese, they instead adapted their works to Chinese learners' unique learning habits by

using Chinese characters to annotate English pronunciation. This approach allowed Chinese learners to quickly grasp foundational English knowledge, affirming the value and influence of the Chinese phonetic English textbooks on early English education in China.

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