

The phonetic features of rhyming words in Hong Kong local hip-hop songs
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This study analyzes the phonetic features of rhyming words and their frequency distribution in Hong Kong (HK) local hip-hop songs. The results suggest that rhymes that end with a diphthong and a nasal are the most prominent linguistic phenomena in the lyrics.

The Hong Kong music scene has centered Cantonese pop songs (Cantopop) since 1970s. Although hip-hop music has been introduced and integrated into the Hong Kong music industry for at least three decades, hip-hop music in Hong Kong is still considered as an alternative music style and receives little attention from the local audience.

With respect to the scholarly research on HK hip-hop music, scholars have investigated the code-switching phenomenon between Cantonese and English and the usages of HK slangs and expletives (Chan 2009; Lin 2008, 2011, and 2014). Other linguists have conducted a quantitative comparison between Cantonese hip-hop and Cantopop lyrics in terms of the linguistic differences (Tsui & Chan 2015). Despite these recent research, different aspects of linguistic analysis of rhyming words in the lyrics remains absent, for example what phonetic sounds of rhyming words occur more in the song lyrics? This study compliments the prior studies and reveals some phonetic phenomena found in the rhyming words.

The data of this study consists of 19 songs lyrics, totaling 750 lines of lyrics, written by the HK local, independent hip-hop artists, namely JB, Novel Friday, Wolfe, and TomFatKi. Two rationales for selecting these artists: 1) they represent the local, grassroots, youth identity in the recent years; 2) Their song lyrics have not been studied.

Four groups of rhymes are categorized: rhymes that end with a single vowel (e.g., /i:/ or /ɔ:/), a diphthongs (e.g., /a:u/ or /ou/), a checked syllable (/p/, /t/, and /k/), or a nasal (/m/, /n/, and /ŋ/). Among these groups, the rhymes that end with a diphthongs occur almost 300 times out of 750 lines of lyrics, which is the highest frequency of the occurrence in the data. Rhymes that end with a nasal has the second highest frequency which occurs 230 times. Whereas rhymes that end with a single vowel and a checked syllable both have less than 100 occurrences in the song lyrics.

This study does not only compliment the previous research but also reveal some phonetic features of rhyming words that have not yet been discussed in the previous literature. The findings also implies that certain sounds are preferred when creating rhymes in hip-hop music.

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