

English fan takes XXX approach to teaching ABCs

Lo Wei

David Tung Tak-wai really does have proper manners – although people who read his book might not know that.

In *The Art of The English Quarrel*, he introduces English insults, nasty names and swear words, along with spoken Cantonese translations. He gives examples of how to initiate a fight and how to use your wits to avoid a fight. "Being only able to say 'It's none of your business' just won't do," said Tung, who was born and brought up in Hong Kong. "Not in a world in which people say, 'Get outta my face'."

A piano tutor with two master's degrees, including one in music, Tung has a passion for English, and it pains him that many teenagers turn off to the language. Rather than shove grammar and tenses at the kids, he hopes to inspire them with lingo from life. "I didn't write the book to en-

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David Tung Tak-wai, author of the book *The Art of English Quarrel*

courage people to swear and squabble, I just hope to raise people's interest in learning English," said Tung, who studied in London for three years of college.

His target readers, he said, are mainly secondary school dropouts.

"I didn't focus on foul language, but it's what you'll hear in the streets. You should at least know it when you're being insulted," said Tung.

Phrases like "I might as well save my breath" may come naturally to a native English speaker. But many Hongkongers who learn their English in classrooms often struggle to find the right word. Tung says he used to be one of these people himself.

"From kindergarten to secondary school, we had learned many polite English phrases like 'What's your opinion?' which we always use in

English oral exams. They're not wrong, but they're really boring and insufficient for daily use," he said. "We should know how to respond to people's unreasonable demands. Like you can say, 'Go above my head if you want', meaning, 'Complain to my boss if you like'."

Tung shows how different English expressions can be used in different scenarios – such as what to say when one is not happy with insincere apologies (He suggests "Sorry doesn't mean anything anymore". Or "That's it? That's your apology?").

Or how to tell people to keep their mouth shut. ("Shut up" works. His other recommendations contain swear words.)

In the preface, he said he wrote the book because he had had enough of seeing Hong Kong people being verbally abused by foreigners and unable to fight back in English.

He backtracked a bit in an interview. "Well, it's a way of attracting people to pick up the book," he said, chuckling. "Actually, many of the foreigners I met in the UK were friendly people."

"Sometimes it's the so-called upper-class Chinese who deliberately use English to embarrass you. You should have one or two phrases in hand to get back at them, and tell them, 'I won't be afraid of you just because you speak English'," he said.

His book, published last year, suggests phrases like, "You'll wish you were dead!" to threaten people, and, "Yeah? What are you gonna do?" to answer to people's threats.

Tung said some of the examples came from his experiences. "When I come across new and interesting English phrases, like when I'm watching a movie, reading a book or magazine, I have the habit of writing them down since I was in secondary school," he said.

He researched other examples for two years. "I would look up slang dictionaries and study how people use them, such as from foreign online forums," he said.

The Art of The English Quarrel is his second book. His first was about English slang. His third, about English-language jokes, will be published next month. "I'm not qualified for English education," he said. "I just want to share my learning experiences and help people who are going through difficulties which I had gone through. It's my mission."



David Tung says he wrote the book because he had had enough of seeing Hong Kong people being verbally abused by foreigners and unable to fight back in English. Photo: Edward Wong

College course brings taboo sexualities out of the shadows

John Carney

A ground-breaking course at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) has proved to be a big hit with the city's students this year, despite covering some taboo topics.

The Sexuality and Gender: Diversity and Society course at the university generated huge interest and easily reached its enrolment capacity of 100 students after 170 applied to do it. Course director Dr Sam Winter said the course did not just talk about sexual orientation but also about sexual behaviour.

"We pull no punches," Winter said. "We treat the students like adults, and talk about sex in a simple and direct way that few of them have experienced. We bring in guest speakers from the gay, lesbian, trans-



HKU associate professor Sam Winter

gender, cross-dressing and sex worker communities to talk about their experience of sexuality and gender."

Winter said the course was built on mutual commitment – "a special course with the potential to be life-changing", because students engaged in open and honest conversations on issues that would normally be considered taboo or sinful in their daily lives.

The course is for first-year students, and a lecture theatre at HKU was nearly full as the young men and women listened intently for two hours during the first of three lecture sessions on transgender issues.

The session began with an edited

showing of the 1997 Belgian film *Ma Vie en Rose (My Life in Pink)*, which won the 1998 Golden Globe for best foreign language film.

The film tells the story of Ludovic, a child who is born male but consistently insists that he is supposed to be a girl. The story illustrates the gender identity struggle that Ludovic and his family experience.

Afterwards Momo Li, a Hong Kong "transwoman" – a person classified as male at birth but who grows up identifying and presenting themselves as female – spoke to the group.

She described the agony she had endured for most of her life after realising early on that "she felt like a girl in a man's body". Li, 29, later talked of how for years she had constantly felt suicidal until, in 2008, she had her first sex reassignment surgery. She

has had six kinds of corrective surgery since then. The students listened closely throughout and most stayed on afterwards for a lively question-and-answer session with Li.

After the lecture, Fred, 19, said: "It's about getting to know ourselves as well as other people. This is not a very commonly discussed topic and it helps us to accept others and their way of life."

Another student, 20-year-old Dorothy, said the course helped her understand the different types of people that live in Hong Kong and the difficulties they have to face.

"It has given me a great understanding about these issues, and that people shouldn't be alienated because they are looked upon as different by some people," she said.

For Karthie, 20, the highlight of

the course was the guest speakers. "They talk about their real life experiences and what they have been through in their lives. It helps us to understand them and to appreciate their courage," Karthie said.

Equal Opportunities Commission chairman Lam Woon-kwong said his organisation supported academic courses that promoted better understanding of gender issues, including gender identity and the plight of minority groups.

"We also support the efforts to generate discussions among the public, including our youth, on this issue," Wong said. "Exposure to objective perspectives on this widely misunderstood subject will hopefully foster a more open attitude and help eliminate discrimination and harassment."