

For discussion on
12 March 2001

Legislative Council
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

**Broadcast of Putonghua Programmes on the English Channels of
Domestic Free Television Programme Services**

Purpose

This paper explains the existing broadcasting arrangements in respect of Putonghua programmes on the English channels of the two existing domestic free television programme (Domestic Free) services.

English Programming Requirements

2. The two Domestic Free service licensees are each required¹ to broadcast two language services, one in the Cantonese dialect and the other in English. The licensees may apply² to the Broadcasting Authority (BA) for approval to deviate from such requirements and each case will be considered on its merits.

3. The English programming requirement was one of the subjects for public consultation during the 1998 Review of Television Policy. The comments received during the consultation period were mixed. Some respondents supported that the English programming requirement should continue while others were of the view that the requirement should be suitably relaxed to provide broadcasters with more flexibility in catering for minority interests. In view of the fact that English is a widely-used

¹ Paragraph 10(1) of the Domestic Free service licence provides that the Licensee shall broadcast one language service in the English language (“the English language service”) and one language service in the Cantonese dialect (“the Chinese language service”).

² Paragraph 10(2) of the Domestic Free service licences provides that the Licensee may, with the prior approval in writing of the Broadcasting Authority and subject to such conditions as may be imposed by it, broadcast the whole or any part of its language services in any other language or languages or dialect.

international language and one of the two official languages in Hong Kong, it was decided that the two English service channels on the Domestic Free services should continue to be maintained. In addition to the need to cater for the interest of and provide programming choice for the non-Cantonese speaking communities in Hong Kong, the English service requirement would be conducive to maintaining Hong Kong's position as a cosmopolitan city as well as an international business centre.

Programming Flexibility

4. The BA has always been aware that the two Domestic Free service licensees would require programming flexibility in response to changing market demands. The BA therefore agreed in 1992 that the two licensees should be allowed to broadcast outside the prime time, i.e. 7:00pm – 11:30pm, up to 20% of their total daily transmission time in languages/dialects other than English and Cantonese on their English channels. The BA considered that the 20% cap should be an appropriate ceiling beyond which a programming channel may start to lose its language characteristics. The licensees, however, could apply for additional approvals from the BA if there is any need for deviation from the 20% limit on the merit of each case. Applications for broadcasting programmes in non-designated language within the prime time would be considered by the BA on a case-by-case basis.

5. The Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) has reviewed the broadcasting arrangements in respect of programmes in non-designated language on the two English channels (i.e., ATV World and TVB Pearl) during the sample period between 1.1.2001 and 14.1.2001. The regular non-English programmes broadcast on ATV World include Putonghua news bulletins, Tagalog programmes, Korean programmes and tertiary educational programmes. On TVB Pearl, the regular non-English programmes include Putonghua news and weather forecasts, Japanese programmes and documentary programmes featuring bona fide interviews or dialogues delivered in Cantonese.

6. Although ATV World and TVB Pearl are permitted to broadcast non-English programmes outside the prime time up to 20% of their total transmission time per day, it appears that they seldom utilize this flexibility to the full. During the sample period (i.e., 1.1.2001 – 14.1.2001), the average daily broadcast of non-English programmes on ATV World was 10.5% of its total daily transmission time. Of this, 61.7% (or 6.5% of its total transmission time) was in Putonghua. As regards TVB Pearl, the average daily broadcast of non-English programmes was 12.0%, of which 83.6% (or 10.0% of its total transmission time) was in Putonghua.

7. The two licensees may also seek approvals from the BA to exceed the 20% limit for the broadcast of non-designated language programmes outside the prime time period. Between 1.1.1998 and 31.12.2000, there were five applications submitted by ATV and TVB for the deviation from the 20% requirement, and none of these applications were for the broadcast of Putonghua programmes.

8. During the same period (i.e., 1.1.1998 – 31.12.2000), ATV and TVB submitted a total of 75 applications covering 101 programmes for approvals to broadcast non-designated language programmes during the prime time. The BA approved the broadcast of 96 programmes (95% of all programmes). Among the 96 approved programmes, 12 programmes (12.5%) were in Putonghua or with parts in Putonghua. A breakdown of programmes in different non-designated languages approved by the BA are at Annex.

NICAM Transmission

9. Apart from the broadcast of Putonghua programmes on the English channels, the two Domestic Free service licensees also provide frequent broadcast of Putonghua programming via their NICAM transmissions. It has become quite a common practice that for programmes which are produced in Putonghua, the original sound track would also be made available to the audience via NICAM transmission regardless of the designated language of the channel.

Putonghua Programmes on Other TV Services

10. There are other sources providing Putonghua television programme services. For example, the domestic pay TV programme service of Hong Kong Cable Television Limited carries two round-the-clock Putonghua channels, viz. Sun TV and Central China TV. The non-domestic television programme service (STAR TV) of Hutchvision also provides two Putonghua channels, namely Phoenix Channel and Phoenix Info News Channel.

Conclusion

11. In the light of the above analysis, it appears that there is room for the Domestic Free service licensees to increase the amount of broadcast of Putonghua programmes within the 20% cap already granted by the BA. The licensees may also apply to the BA for approval to exceed the 20% cap on the merits of individual cases.

12. The English programming requirement is an obligation under the two existing Domestic Free service licences, which will both expire on 30 November 2003. Such requirement is in line with our prevailing policy that the English channels on the two Domestic Free services should be maintained. We consider that the right time to review the matter would be around mid-2002 when the two Domestic Free service licences are due for a review before their expiry. In accordance with the Broadcasting Ordinance, the BA shall conduct a public hearing for the renewal of a Domestic Free service licence for a period of 6 years or more. Public opinion on the extent to which the licensee's existing service has met with the need of the community and their expectation in respect of the future service will be taken into full account in the licence review exercise.

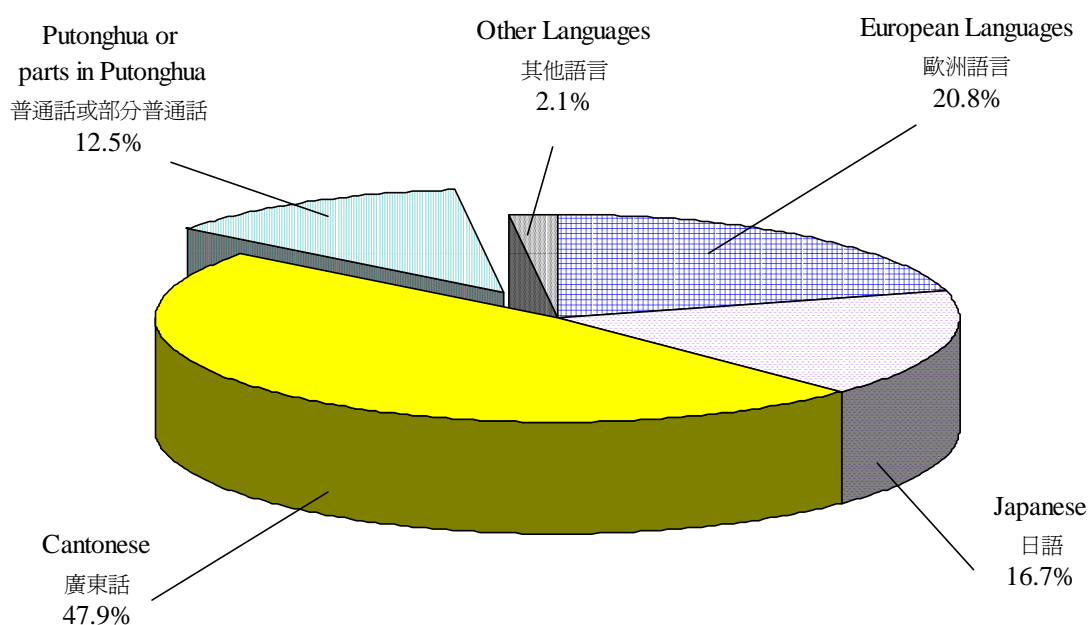
**Breakdown of programmes in different non-designated languages
approved by the BA**

(ATV World & TVB Pearl, January 1998 - December 2000)

獲廣管局批准以非指定語言播放的節目分項百分比

(一九九八年一月至二零零零年十二月)

亞視國際台及無綫明珠台合計



Total number of programmes approved: 96

獲批准的節目總數