SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 189 June, 2009

Sinographic Languages: The Past, Present, and Future of Script Reform

by

Li Chen

Genevieve Y. Leung

Matthew A. Marcucci

Kenneth Yeh

With a Foreword by Victor H. Mair

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series edited by Victor H. Mair. The purpose of the series is to make available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. The editor actively encourages younger, not yet well established, scholars and independent authors to submit manuscripts for consideration. Contributions in any of the major scholarly languages of the world, including Romanized Modern Standard Mandarin (MSM) and Japanese, are acceptable. In special circumstances, papers written in one of the Sinitic topolects (*fangyan*) may be considered for publication.

Although the chief focus of *Sino-Platonic Papers* is on the intercultural relations of China with other peoples, challenging and creative studies on a wide variety of philological subjects will be entertained. This series is **not** the place for safe, sober, and stodgy presentations. *Sino-Platonic Papers* prefers lively work that, while taking reasonable risks to advance the field, capitalizes on brilliant new insights into the development of civilization.

The only style-sheet we honor is that of consistency. Where possible, we prefer the usages of the *Journal of Asian Studies*. Sinographs (*hanzi*, also called tetragraphs [*fangkuaizi*]) and other unusual symbols should be kept to an absolute minimum. *Sino-Platonic Papers* emphasizes substance over form.

Submissions are regularly sent out to be refereed and extensive editorial suggestions for revision may be offered. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with wide margins and submitted in duplicate. A set of "Instructions for Authors" may be obtained by contacting the editor.

Ideally, the final draft should be a neat, clear camera-ready copy with high black-and-white contrast.

Sino-Platonic Papers is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Please note: When the editor goes on an expedition or research trip, all operations (including filling orders) may temporarily cease for up to two or three months at a time. In such circumstances, those who wish to purchase various issues of *SPP* are requested to wait patiently until he returns. If issues are urgently needed while the editor is away, they may be requested through Interlibrary Loan.

N.B.: Beginning with issue no. 171, *Sino-Platonic Papers* has been published electronically on the Web. Issues from no. 1 to no. 170, however, will continue to be sold as paper copies until our stock runs out, after which they too will be made available on the Web at www.sino-platonic.org.

Sinographic Languages: The Past, Present, and Future of Script Reform

Contents

Foreword by Victor H. Mair 1

Text Messaging in Contemporary China
by Li Chen 4

Hong Kong University Students’ Language Use in Blogs: Tensions between Creativity and Prescriptivism (“omg my grammar is rubbish”)
by Genevieve Y. Leung 30

The Prospects for the Development of Written Cantonese and Its Romanization
by Kenneth Yeh 63

Rendering Sinograms Obsolete: Vietnamese Script Reform and the Future of Chinese Characters
by Matthew A. Marcucci 81

Sinographic Languages: The Past, Present, and Future of Script Reform

Foreword

Victor H. Mair
University of Pennsylvania

The four papers in this volume offer a rare look at the dramatic transformations that are currently occurring with regard to language usage in East Asia and the northernmost part of Southeast Asia. In terms of script, we might refer to this region as "the sinographic sphere." Conscious reform of writing systems based on the Chinese characters began well over a century ago, with notable achievements including the establishment of an alphabetic script in Vietnam, the strict limitation on the number of official characters in Japan, the virtual disappearance of characters from daily life in North Korea and South Korea, and the concurrent spread of pinyin romanization and severe simplification of characters that has taken place in the People's Republic of China.

With regard to scripts, the present situation in China is fraught with great instability. On the one hand, there are demands for the recomplexification of the characters; on the other hand, there are calls for expanded use of pinyin, particularly as part of an emerging digraphia. In this age, when the leadership's attention is focused on economic and diplomatic affairs, it is unlikely, however, that the government will undertake further major interventions in restructuring the writing system. Yet this in no way means that additional changes are not forthcoming.

Quite the contrary, we are now witnessing a period of radical evolution that is taking place as a result of new developments in information technology. It has been repeatedly demonstrated, for example, that there has been a rapid increase in the inability of individuals to write numerous characters because they rely on alphabetical computer inputting systems for

much of their routine writing. Short text messaging with roman letter keystrokes is having a similarly profound impact on both how people write and the style they adopt.

Even more remarkable are the effects of the Internet on the language people use when they write to each other via e-mail, in chat rooms, on bulletin boards, group lists, and above all on such mass communication networks as Twitter, Facebook, and so forth.

The papers in this issue reveal how young people in particular have experienced a tremendously liberating and empowering effect from all of the unprecedented developments in information processing that have taken place in recent years. Whole new kinds of language usage are unfolding before our very eyes and ears. The massive adoption of English terms and phrases, the creative application of abbreviations, slang, symbols, and the like, have led to a constantly shifting evolution of language on the Internet.

Perhaps most exciting of all are the possibilities that the Internet and electronic information processing in general afford to the writing of local and regional languages in China. Throughout Chinese history, only national and official writing styles (Classical Chinese, Literary Sinitic, the medieval *koine*, Modern Standard Mandarin) had a chance to gain sufficient circulation to be accepted as legitimate vehicles for writing one's thoughts and emotions. Although limited experiments had previously been made in the sinographic writing of Cantonese and in the romanization of Hokkien and other topolects, China heretofore has never witnessed the development of full-fledged, unfettered written expression in any of the non-standard Sinitic languages.

The authors of the four papers in this volume explore the practical and theoretical aspects of the mind-boggling transformations that are taking place as a result of new developments in information technology. Li Chen provides up-to-the-minute investigations of text messaging in contemporary China, Genevieve Y. Leung studies the language usage of Hong Kong university students in blogs, and Kenneth Yeh examines the prospects for the development of written Cantonese (especially through romanization), while Matthew Marcucci reviews the history of Vietnamese script reform and considers its implications for the future of Chinese characters.

Although the papers of these four authors are up-to-date as of the present moment, we can be sure that the tendency for language in China (both written and spoken) to evolve at a

dizzying pace will persist. While we cannot predict what things will look like five, much less ten years from now, we can be certain that the situation will continue to display the same sort of fluidity and inventiveness that the papers in this volume document. This is inevitable when an archaic script linked to a top-heavy, centralized bureaucracy encounters a cutting-edge set of technologies with inherently democratizing properties.

Text Messaging in Contemporary China

Li Chen
University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

Accompanying the rapid economic and social growth in China since the post-1978 reform, many new things have emerged and spread widely in this previously closed country that have had a profound impact on the traditional culture of China. As one of the most notable developments among all that have occurred in the last three decades, the popularization of text messaging usage has significantly influenced people in China, starting particularly from the mid-1990s, when cell phones were made economically accessible to ordinary Chinese people. This transformation should be largely attributed to the improvement in telecommunication infrastructure. In fact, in terms of technology, the early history of text messaging development in China can really be traced back to the year 1995, marked by the initial operation of the first digital mobile network (GSM system, also known as the 2G network) in China. That revolutionary event soon pushed the popularization of cell phones with increasingly higher quality and function but also increasingly lower price. The massive usage of cell phones thus became possible for people from all different social classes in China.

Text messaging is a unique way of communication based on the platform of the cell phone, whose features, including a limited amount of word input[1] and an efficient promulgating function, inevitably make language employed for text messaging different from the standard Chinese that is used in daily life. It is therefore interesting to compare it with the standard language and reveal the social and linguistic impact it potentially makes.

Social Aspects

1. Recent Development of Cell Phone/Text Messaging Usage in China and Possible Driving Forces

To date, users of cell phones in China have increased to an approximate number of 600 million, nearly half of the total Chinese population. Considering that China is a developing country a considerable proportion of whose population is poor, this should be viewed as an extraordinary phenomenon, in particular in comparison to other large emerging economies. For example, in India, only 14% of the population has cell phones. In China today, people possess cell phones regardless of age, occupation and wealth; for example, a number of kindergarten children and homeless beggars use cell phones very regularly. Many people, especially the young, even own more than one phone per person or replace old cell phones with new ones twice or three times a year. Beyond being the largest cell phone-using population in the world, a unique feature of Chinese cell phone users in contrast to users in other countries is that the Chinese particularly prefer using text messages to communicate, over making conventional phone calls. According to a survey, China has the highest number of messages sent and received per user per year in the whole world. On a single day, the first day of the Spring Festival in 2008, the number of messages created was recorded as 20 billion; in one month, July 2008, the accumulated number of text messages created was recorded as 400 billion. As a result of the massive usage of text messaging, a unique language for text messaging has been arising in China more and more explicitly. This language not only has its own vocabulary and functionality, but even a new syntax different from standard Chinese.

The fact that development in text messaging usage is always ahead of the development of the usage of other functions in cell phones (e.g., phone call, Internet, photograph, music, GPS, etc.) in China may be logically (and also intriguingly) attributed to a few reasons. First of all, relative to other telecommunication services, text messaging service in China is extremely cheap. Although there are several service providers (e.g., China Mobile and China Telecom) in the market, they all provide their services for almost the same charge, and they offer many other

discounts, for example, a one-way charge scheme costing around 0.1 yuan (approximately 1.5 cents) for sending a message but free for receiving. Many plans even offer an extra amount of free text messaging usage as a gift to attract customers. Secondly, Chinese characters are easy to input into text messaging format with *pinyin*—this is particular notable when it is compared to the Chinese input system for computers. Although it is true that cell phones from different brands normally have different input systems, it is usually the case that frequent users find all of them quite easily learnable and applicable. Thirdly, and most interestingly, some scholars, represented by Ni Huang from China Communication University, attribute the popularity of text messaging usage in China to the deeper cultural root of personality characteristics common to the Chinese people. In her Ph.D. dissertation, Ni points out that many characteristics, such as introversion, sense of harmony, occlusion, and obedience, are long rooted in traditional Chinese culture and values, so that, as opposed to Westerners, Chinese people are not used to explicitly and directly expressing their true feelings. In daily life, Chinese tend to pay extra attention to their language (or say, speech) using connotation, which usually gives those addressed more space to understand the context variably and with their own interpretation. Therefore, whenever possible (i.e., given a few alternative means of communications to choose from), Chinese would often avoid those direct face-to-face or voice-to-voice approaches. This tendency, naturally and logically, results in the fact that most Chinese prefer, when holding a cell phone in the hand, to text message rather than to make direct phone calls

2. Different Types of Text Message according to Functionality and Their Significance to People in China

As mutual communicating is always the primary function and objective of text messaging, an easily comprehensible way to categorize different text messages is to identify several groups according to their different functionalities. In general, all text messages could be identified as either functional or entertaining;[2] more specifically, the former includes daily (informative) contact, commercial advertisement, paid informative services, and intentional summon/command; and the latter mainly includes joke and metaphor (satire). Notably, some particular types of text message, such as holiday blessing and casual communications, have dual characteristics and thus

could be attributed to both general groups.

Daily (*Informative*) *Contact:*

This type can be deemed the original purpose of text messaging function installed in cell phones. Since it is purely functional, the language used in this type is plain and close to standard Chinese (in vocabulary, grammar, etc.) while, due to the limitation of words, such messages are also usually concise but quite clear in meaning (i.e., with little metaphor or implied meaning). They are normally inquiries, requests or notices. Examples are as below[3]:

"下午的课不上了，请相互转告。"

The afternoon class is cancelled; please tell each other.

"你知道王老师的电话吗?如知道请发短信告诉我"

Do you know teacher Wang's phone number? Please tell me via messaging if you know.

Commercial Advertisement:

This type of text message is often considered controversial, if not annoying, by most of the receivers. Commercial advertisement through text messaging emerged initially when many companies (usually mid- or small-sized, ones that might not be able to afford the large cost of other means of product or service promotion) began to notice the cheapness and the potentially extensive promulgating effect of text messaging. Gradually, as this particular service grew larger, a unique market arose, in which agencies specialized in helping companies to promote themselves through sending mass messages to cell phone users. The messaging service provided by agencies is extremely large-scale. According to statistics, the number of such messages being sent every day totals around 1 billion.[4] However, since this type of messaging is a disturbance in daily life for most people, these commercial messages are often considered trash or spam, and more and more people are calling for the adoption and enforcement of relevant injunctions by the authorities. On the other hand, cell phone manufacturers have begun installing and improving the filter function in cell phones.

Paid Informative Services:

Such services are usually provided on a daily basis. The main types include daily news, weather forecast and daily stock market information, etc. Most of these services are prepaid and use the month as the time unit for coverage. Most of their users are people such as office workers, who need to update information every day or even every hour, but who lack the time to read newspapers and websites. Users of this kind of text messaging usually find it very useful, convenient and actually quite cost efficient.

Intentional Summoning or Commanding:

Text messaging has increasingly been used to summon people (who could be either known or unknown to the senders) for some particular purpose, such as assembly, demonstration, or any activities in public areas. Since the Chinese authorities have strict rules regarding public activities, and the constitution prohibits any unapproved assemblies, this usage of text messaging is usually deemed controversial and politically sensitive today. One prominent example of using text messages in this way is the anti-Japanese demonstrations that occurred in a number of Chinese cities in spring 2005. Before a demonstration in each city, many residents of that city would receive a text message from an anonymous sender, which told them about the location and time of the demonstration to take place the next day and ask them to pass the message to all of their friends and relatives. The identity of the sender(s) was unknown, but they were believed to be a group of Chinese nationalists, young to middle-aged. Interestingly, in order to prohibit the demonstrations and restore social order and stability, the government also made use of text messaging. The authorities explicitly sent messages to residents, requesting them to stay at home.

Joking:

Text messaging jokes have evolved a high degree of sophistication, and this has become one of the largest non-functional usages of cell phone messaging. Compared to functional messages, joke messages contain a more vivid, ambiguous and variable language with less restriction in linguistic rules. Therefore, to a great extent, entertaining messages such as jokes are in fact what have given birth to the "real" text messaging language. Joke messages have various forms, but the core purpose is always to make a humorous effect by arousing people's visual,

psychological and sensational interests.[5] Specific methods of making humor usually include implementing changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical structure and rhetoric.[6] Notably, since such changes are made based on the uniqueness of individual Chinese characters (and their different combinations) and often link to specific elements of Chinese culture, it is hard for non-Chinese native speakers to understand, and it is even difficult to translate these adequately into other languages (e.g., English). The new style of language based on these changes will be discussed in more linguistic detail later in this paper. Here is an example of a text messaging joke:

> "米的妈妈是谁?花,因为花生米;米的爸爸是谁?蝶,因为蝶恋花;米的外婆是谁?妙笔,因为妙笔生花;米的外公是谁?爆米花,又抱过米,又抱过花."

An approximate English translation would be:

> **Who is rice's** (*mi*'s) **mom? It is flower** (*hua*), **because flower bears** (*sheng*) **rice** (*hua sheng mi*, i.e. peanut in Mandarin Chinese); **who is rice's dad? It is butterfly** (*die*), **because butterfly loves** (*lian*) **flower** (*die lian hua*, i.e. a *cipai* in Mandarin Chinese); **who is rice's grandma? It is splendid pen** (*miaobi*), **because splendid pen bears flower** (*miaobi sheng hua*, i.e. a Chinese *chengyu* (set phrase); **who is rice's grandpa? It is popcorn** (*baomihua*), **because it holds** (*bao*) **both rice and flower.**

Metaphor and Satire:

This type of message is sometimes considered a subset of joke messages due to its similar humorous effect. But the difference is that, this type usually has to do with current political issues (or anything in the public domain), and it works in a humorous but seemingly disguised manner. Here is an example (a satire of civil servants in the government):

> "猪找上帝要求投胎做人，上帝问曰：耕种如何？猪答：太累！上帝再问：做工可否？猪再答：太苦！帝略思又问：要猴怎样？猪答：太难！上帝最后问其：尔到底何求？猪猥琐却鼓足勇气答：能吃能喝能玩能嫖能赌！上帝大

惊暴怒：狗日的，还想当公务员？"

An approximate English translation:

> A pig comes to God and asks for reincarnation as a human. God asks him: what about doing agrarian cultivation? The pig answers: that is too tiring! God asks: what about doing factory work? The pig answers: that is too hard! God thinks a bit and asks: what about training and playing with a monkey? The pig answers: that is too difficult! Then God finally asks: what do you want to be, anyway? The pig answers wretchedly but with all his courage: something that can enable me to eat, drink, play, go whoring and gamble! God then becomes astonished and extremely mad, yelling: You son of bitch, how dare you dream about being a civil servant?!

Holiday Blessing:

As previously mentioned, messages for the purpose of holiday blessing have both functional and entertaining characteristics. The functional feature is the greeting to (or interaction with) friends and relatives, while the entertaining feature is that such messages usually have joke-like contents that can make a humorous effect. Nowadays in China, text messaging has almost replaced traditional means (letters, telegrams, phone calls, etc.) of greeting during such holidays as the Spring Festival.[7] Sending holiday blessings with text messages has largely changed the way people interact with one another during holidays. On the one hand, a person using text messages to greet others reduces the need to physically visit each of the receivers' homes; on the other hand, however, he or she also faces the "bombing" of a tremendous number of greeting messages from other people, because virtually everyone uses text messages to greet one another. Many people have been criticizing the negative consequences brought about by the extensive replacement of traditional greeting ways with text messages. They argue that with impersonal text messages being sent back and forth, the original significance of the holiday—which is supposed to be an occasion for people to have warm reunions—is missed. For example, many people simply copy and paste a blessing message received from someone else, and then

send it on to another friend as a greeting.[8] This seems more like a replicative task than an expression of true feeling.

Casual Communication:

Similarly to holiday blessing messages, text messaging for casual communication also possesses dual characteristics. Two representative types are the communications between close friends and within couples in a relationship. The functional feature is for the need of necessary and constant bonding; while the entertaining feature is for enhancing vivid mutual interactions and having fun.

3. Different User Groups of Text Messaging

As one might imagine, the frequency of text messaging usage varies greatly across different groups, which could be classified in terms of age, occupation or social status. However, the most common categorization is always based on age range. A number of corresponding surveys have been done in China, either by research institutions or cell phone-related service providers (i.e., private companies), in order to find out which particular groups contain the potentially most profitable customers. Not surprisingly, all these surveys reveal that young people, namely, high school students, college students and young office workers, are among the most frequent users of text messaging.

As the surveys show, over 75% of text messaging users are under 35 in China; among all age ranges, people ages 20–25 use text messaging most often, with a popularization rate of 89%.[9] This statistic also implies that college students are the most dominant users because their age usually matches this range. A 2007 survey conducted in Fuzhou with college students from five local universities as subjects showed that 344 out of 400, or 86% of respondents, had cell phones at that time, and all of the 344 people had used the text messaging function. The majority of respondents gave positive feedback to the role of text messaging in their lives. For example, 62% of these thought the number of their friends increased after they started using text messaging; 93% thought using text messaging could enhance the connection between current friends and themselves.[10] Based on such faith, people began using text messaging more frequently and actively. So, to some extent, such positive feedback could explain the increasing popularization

of text messaging among young people.

Another, more recent, survey, conducted in Wuhan in 2008, in which 500 college students from six local universities were selected as respondents, shows similar results to the one conducted in Fuzhou. According to this survey, 57% of the respondents sent over 400 text messages per month, and only 19% of them sent fewer than 200 per month. Over all, respondents showed a relatively high degree of satisfaction with the text messaging services provided by the relevant companies.[11]

Linguistic Aspects

1. Comparison of Text Messaging in (Mandarin) Chinese and Standard (Mandarin) Chinese in Vocabulary and Rhetoric (Syntax)

Logically, the very origin of text messaging language came from standard Chinese, but it gradually has evolved into a unique form that can be seen as different from standard Chinese in many aspects. In return, text messaging language is now imposing a reverse impact on the form of Chinese language that is considered standard. One can witness some striking distinctions between these two languages (or, put another way, between standard Chinese and one of its sub-languages) by making a linguistic comparison.

a) Vocabulary:

The most prominent feature making text messaging language different from standard Chinese is probably vocabulary. In fact, compared with other aspects such as grammar, which is relatively stable, vocabulary is usually the most volatile and changeable component of any given language. New text messaging words can be produced in a number of ways, and such words are often combinations of Chinese, English (or other languages), numbers, symbols, letters and various abbreviations.[12] When using these words, the barrier between different scripts is seen as insignificant by the users, and thus any script can be deconstructed and reconstructed with another script at any time. Notably, many of the new words in text messaging are actually

borrowed from Internet language, and, to some extent, this fact makes frequent users of text messaging and online chatting tools intelligible to one another in a common language other than standard Chinese.

Some most frequently seen types of text messaging words include:

- (Similar) Pronunciation Borrowing

This type of words uses the approximate pronunciations of numbers, letters, Chinese characters or various combinations of these to replace certain standard words with similar readings. Examples include:

Replacing words (in characters) that have their own meanings:

- ❖ 生蛋 (shēng dàn, bearing an egg) for 圣诞 (Shèngdàn, Christmas)
- ❖ 圆蛋 (yuán dàn, round egg) for 元旦 (Yuándàn, New Year)
- ❖ 油饼 (yóubǐng, pancake) for 有病 (yǒubìng, ill)
- ❖ 稀饭 (xīfàn, porridge) for 喜欢 (xǐhuan, like).

Replacing words with characters that have no particular meaning:

- ❖ 偶 (ǒu) for 我 (wǒ, I/me)
- ❖ 干虾米 (gànxiāmǐ) for 干啥/干什么 (gànshá / gàn shénme, to do what)
- ❖ 木有/米有 (mùyǒu/mǐyǒu) for 没有 (méiyǒu, no/absence/lack).

Numbers replacing words:

- ❖ 8147 (bā yāo sì qī) for 不要生气 (bú yào shēngqì, Don't be angry)
- ❖ 5555 (wǔ wǔ wǔ wǔ) for 呜呜呜呜 (wūwūwūwū, a simulated sound of crying, meaning, crying)
- ❖ 88 (bā bā) for bye-bye/拜拜 (bāibāi, goodbye).

Combinations of multiple scripts to replace words:

- ❖ I H8 U for I hate you
- ❖ W8in4 for Waiting for.

Ideographic Expressions:

- 囧 (jiǒng; looks like a sad face) for 窘 (jiǒng, Awkward/Embarrassing)
- Orz (showing a person kneeling with hands on the ground) for 失意体前屈/天啊为什么会是这样/无可奈何/受不了你/拜托 (Oh my god, how could this possibly be?/Come on!/Please!).

Deconstructing original characters for emphasis:

- 弓虽 (gōng suī) for 强 (qiáng, powerful/strong)
- 走召 (zǒu zhāo) for 超 (chāo, super)
- 女子 (nǚzǐ) for 好 (hǎo, good).

Symbolic combinations representing facial expressions and moods:

- $_$ for greedy
- :-) for smile
- lol for laugh
- ^0^ for laughing heartily.

Number combinations (using intrinsic meanings of numbers rather than only borrowing the sounds):

- 13579 for It's odd (the numbers in this combination are all odd).

Abbreviations:

- BT for 变态 (biàntài, abnormal/weird/strange/gross)
- KKK for 快快快 (kuàikuàikuài, Quick!/Hurry up!)
- HAK for hug and kiss.

Words influenced by foreign languages:

- Any verb + ing (e.g. 吃饭 ing, *chīfàn*, eating) for emphasizing the current ongoing status of an action

- ❖ 的说 (*dě shuō*) for a suffix that can be put at the end of any statement sentence (from the suffix です [*desu*] for statement sentences in Japanese).

Other words (idioms) established by usage:

- ❖ 吼吼 (*hǒuhǒu*) for laughing (A phonetic simulation of laughing)
- ❖ 汗 (*hàn*, literally meaning "sweat") for facing an awkward situation or person without being able to say or do anything
- ❖ 晕 (*yūn*, literally meaning "faint") for facing an unimaginably awkward situation or person and feeling like fainting because of not being able to say or do anything
- ❖ 倒 (*dǎo*, literally meaning "falling onto the ground") for facing an awkward situation or person and being shocked, and therefore feeling like falling onto the ground
- ❖ 闪 (*shǎn*, literally meaning "flash") for leaving a place in an instant
- ❖ 摸摸 (*mōmō*, literally meaning "touch or feel a bit") for appeasing or comforting someone in bad mood or hard situation.

In summary, the ways of creating new text messaging words are diverse and, more importantly, open-ended.[13] This indicates great potential for the number of such words to grow unlimitedly in the future.

b) Rhetoric:

Compared to that of the standard language, text messaging rhetoric is considered figurative, grandiloquent, and sometimes vague. Major types of rhetoric include (but are not confined to): homophony, parataxis, conversion, metaphor, reverse words, imitation, intentional misinterpretation, and more.[14]

Homophony (谐音)

Homophonic rhetoric is probably the type that has been used most often and pervasively in text messaging. It subtly extracts phrases from their original contexts and puts them into a new

language environment, while keeping their phonetic function but having their semantic function changed. Since this type is so large, it could thus be subdivided into 6 smaller categories[15]: same readings with different characters (同音异形), same readings with same characters (同音同形), similar readings with different characters (近音异形), alternative interpretation of homophonic words (谐音别解), dual meanings of homophonic words (谐音双关), intentional use of wrong homophonic characters (谐音飞白).

An example of homophony (same readings with different characters):

> "教练对同学们说第一排报数.你惊讶地看看教练,教练又大声说了一遍: 报数!于是你极不情愿地转过身去抱住了树."
>
> Translation: The coach asks the students in the first row to announce their numbers (*bao4shu4*). You look at the coach with surprise. The coach then asks again loudly: voice your numbers (*bao4shu4*)! Then you turn around; embrace the tree (*bao4shu4*) with extreme unwillingness.

This message subtly makes use of the same pronunciations of "voice numbers" (*bao4shu4*) and "embrace the tree" (*bao4shu4*) to attain a humorous effect.

Parataxis (排比)

A text message with parataxis is one displaying a uniform structure for all sentences within a short paragraph. For example (notably, there are also homophonic elements in this message):

> "送你一枝紫罗兰，祝你一生无麻烦!送你一枝康乃馨，愿你生活更温馨!送你一枝黄玫瑰，愿你开心更富贵!送你一朵喇叭花，愿你天天有钱花!" [16]
>
> Translation: Give you a violet and may you live with no trouble! Give you a carnation and may you live in warmth! Give you a yellow rose and may you be happy and richer! Give you a bugle flower and may you have money to spend every day!

Conversion (换算)

This type usually makes use of mathematical relations to derive and present some seemingly logical but in fact entertaining causality.[17] It is often seen in entertaining text messages such as the ones for holiday blessing or between close friends. For example:

> "爱加爱等于非常的爱，爱减爱等于爱的起点，爱乘爱等于无限的爱，爱除爱等于唯一的爱."
>
> Translation: Love plus love is extraordinary love, love minus love is the origin of love, love times love is infinite love, love dividing love is exclusive love.

Metaphor (比喻)

Almost all text messages have more or less metaphor elements. It is very pervasive because it is probably the easiest type of rhetoric to use in text messaging. For example:

> "心愿是风，快乐是帆，祝福是船，心愿的风吹着快乐的帆，载着祝福的船，飘向永远幸福的你。轻轻地问一声:新年快乐。"
>
> Translation: Wish is the wind, happiness is the sail, and blessing is the boat. The wind of wish blows the sail of happiness, and the boat carrying blessing approaches to you who are eternally happy, saying gently: happy New Year.

Reverse Words (反言)

This type of rhetoric is most often used in relaxing and entertaining text messages in order to make a humorous effect.[18] A common way of using reverse words is to praise someone or something with seemingly criticizing phrases, or vice versa. Example:

> "如果长得好看是一种错，我已经铸成大错;如果可爱是一种罪，我已经犯下滔天大罪:做人真难!你就好了，没错又没罪，真羡慕你。"
>
> Translation: If looking good is a fault, then I have made a huge fault; if being cute is a crime, then I have committed an unforgivable crime; so it is so hard to be an upright person! Luckily you, who have neither fault nor crime, I am so envious.

Imitation (仿拟)

Imitation is the form of rhetoric that intentionally imitates popular existing phrases, sentences, poems or short articles by replacing key words while keeping the original text structure unchanged.[19] The unique feature of this rhetoric is that it subtly applies the connection or relationship among words in the original texts to new sets of objects. And since those original texts are very familiar to ordinary people, this kind of text messaging would usually make an exceptionally humorous or satirical effect by arousing people's memories of the original. For example:

This is a message produced in Beijing during the city blockade due to SARS in spring 2003, which shows a clear imitation from Mao Zedong's *Qinyuanchun-Xue* (*沁园春 雪*)。

> "首都北京，千里病风，万里菌飘。望长城内外，人心惶惶，京城上下，顿失吵闹。吃板蓝根，服维生素，欲与萨斯试比高。无宁日，看口罩手套分外畅销."
>
> Translation: In the capital Beijing, wind of disease blows for thousands of miles, bacteria floats in air for ten thousand miles. Looking inside and outside of the Great Wall, everyone is freaking out, so all over the capital, noise suddenly ceases. Taking woad and eating vitamins, people are trying to fight against SARS. There is no more peaceful time; respirators and gloves are exceptionally hot to sell.

Intentional Misinterpretation (歧疑)

This kind of rhetoric usually uses the first part of a message to misguide the receiver into a wrong understanding, and then makes a strikingly shocking contradiction in the second part, the ending, to bring about an amusing effect. This type of messaging usually makes a better humorous effect than those displaying jokes who point is made obvious by a conventional way of thinking.[20] For example:

> "你从来不用护肤品，却有光滑的肌肤，天生大大的水汪汪的眼睛，一身浅绿色的连衣裙。夜晚，你的歌声伴我入梦，喔!亲爱的 - 青蛙。"

Translation: You never use any moisturizer but have smooth skin. You have bright and large eyes and wear a green one-piece skirt. At night, I fall asleep along with your singing. Ah! My dear — frog.

Apart from the seven representative types of text messaging rhetoric shown above, there are also many other interesting ways to edit and modify language in text messages, such as insertion (镶嵌), duality (对偶), ending-beginning connection (顶真), superposition (重叠), etc. All these unconventional ways of rhetoric make text messaging language fully vivid, entertaining and, more importantly, different from the language used in daily life.

2. Text Messaging for Topolect Speakers

While text messaging is extremely popular among Mandarin speakers in China, it is also pervasive among all different topolect speakers (or say, Mandarin and topolect bilingual speakers). As indicated earlier, most frequent text message users are people under 35. Nowadays in China, people in this age range are almost all fluent in Mandarin due to compulsory Mandarin education in primary and high schools, regardless whether their (supposedly) original mother tongue is Mandarin or not. Interestingly, though many topolect speakers can fully communicate in Mandarin, they sometimes still prefer using text messaging in their own mother tongue. There are two reasons. First of all, some topolect speakers want to protect and preserve their unique culture based on the regional language against the invasion of Mandarin and the culture (usually seen as the "northern" culture by many topolect speakers in the south) it is rooted in. Secondly, topolect speakers from a specific region with the same or similar cultural tradition often tend to use topolect in text messaging, as well as in daily life, with one another to form a distinct subgroup with a superior bonding than with people from other regions. Other people who do not belong to this cultural group will then automatically quit because they cannot understand the topolect. This phenomenon is seen quite often particularly in universities in China. Among all the topolects, a few most pervasively used ones, such as Cantonese, are frequently used in text messaging.

The way that topolect speakers use text messages in designed-for-Mandarin (*pinyin*)-

input cell phones is rather remarkable and interesting. What they do is to type (input) the specific characters according to their Mandarin (*pinyin*) pronunciation but then read and interpret them with a topolect reading and corresponding syntax, which is usually distinct from Mandarin. For example (a message in Cantonese that could often be seen in cities in Guangdong, such as Shenzhen or Guangzhou):

"你地依家系呢度做紧咩啊？"

When one is inputting this into a Mandarin input-system cell phone, the corresponding *pinyin* would be *ni3di4yi1jia1xi4ne0du4zuo4jin3mie1a0*. But this message will make absolutely no sense to non-Cantonese speakers. However, when it is read and interpreted in Cantonese, it would approximately be read *nei5dei6yi1ga1hai6li1do6jou6gan2me1a0*, and it means "what are you (guys) doing here now?" The equivalent Mandarin translation is 你们现在在这里做什么啊? (*Nǐmen xiànzài zài zhèlǐ zuò shénme a?*). Notably, messages that are in Cantonese (or any other topolect) but typed by the Mandarin system usually lack the unique characters (mostly phonetic) which exist only in Cantonese and not in Mandarin. In this case, topolects speakers will just simply replace the original phonetic characters with similar characters available in Mandarin. For example in the sample message above, the character 地 is replacing 口地 and 系 is replacing 係, which are the real Cantonese phonetic characters not seen in Mandarin.

On the other hand, topolects also influence the usage of text messaging in Mandarin. Some new words in text messaging were in fact produced based on various topolects. For example, the words 酱紫 (*jiàngzǐ*) and 酿紫 (*niàngzǐ*) are increasingly replacing 这样子 (*zhèyàngzi*，this kind of) and 那样子 (*nàyàngzi*，that kind of) in Mandarin messaging. And these two new words are borrowed from Taiwan-accented Mandarin, which is influenced by the Min (闽) topolect.

Controversies

The Ongoing Debate on the Usage of Cell Phone Language

The impact that the flourishing text messaging language is having on the language and society of China is revolutionary. For many Chinese back in the 1990s, using text messages on cell phones was the first time in their lives that they had a platform for speaking without any external interference. Because text messaging offers a relatively more private setting than other means of communication and allows users to promptly delete any past information on cell phones,[21] people dare to speak out words they previously had been hesitant to say. This circumstance leads to concerns about the ethics regarding the usage of text messaging language.

Proportionate to the huge number of proponents of text messaging are the impressive number of opponents against frequent text messaging usage. Text messaging and its language have been under criticism and have been controversial mainly in two areas: one is the content and the other is the new type of language it creates.

In terms of content, what has been under fire most frequently is the erotic theme that a number of the entertaining text messages have.[22] Critics argue that considering that many of the frequent text messaging users are students in high schools and colleges, the negative consequences brought about by erotic messages appear especially severe. Another major negative aspect in regard to content is the disturbance from commercial advertising messages. As critics point out, though they may not contain harmful information, they still disturb peoples' normal daily life.

Controversy also lies in the fact that certain types of text messaging have made large changes in the way people behave. For example, as mentioned earlier, sending holiday blessing messages in a mass production and duplicative fashion has changed the behavior from the traditional way people used to greet one another during holidays.[23] Critics argue that emotionless messages have replaced genuine human emotion, and thus social values have been becoming more and more utilitarian. In response to that argument, however, proponents of text messaging

think that massive usage of text messaging to replace face-to-face contact is inevitable in today's world, as the amount of information one receives is increasing exponentially everyday and people are becoming much busier than they used to be. As a result, there is no other better alternative than using text messages to communicate, for the sake of convenience and efficiency.

In terms of language, critics claim that the "purity" of standard Chinese has been severely challenged by text messaging language, and that the situation is rapidly leading to a linguistic crisis.[24] This is because text messaging users are bringing the words and rhetoric that used to exist only in text messages into daily life in place of conventional language with strict grammatical rules. They think such words and phrases (usually combining multiple scripts, such as Chinese, English, numbers and symbols) are trendy and to some extent, more convenient than standard Chinese. However, the legitimacy of these critics' argument remains in question, and a clear conclusion has not yet been drawn from this ongoing debate.

Conclusion

The Significance of Text Messaging

Though text messaging has provoked many different opinions from people in China, positive as well as negative; the incontestable fact, which neither proponents nor opponents can deny, is that the rise of text messaging usage and its language has already significantly changed the way Chinese people communicate linguistically and behave socially. Text messaging is now a significant part of popular culture in China, using which people constantly try to pursue both fashion and individualism.[25] While text messaging is leading the direction of popular culture, it is also undergoing a fascinating transformation itself. For example, the form of content carried by text messaging has evolved from the purely textual to the currently used multi-polar elements, including pictures, videos clips, music, etc.

The more successful development of text messaging in comparison to other means of communication should largely be attributed to the unique characteristics cell phones and text

messaging exclusively possess. In the first place, one prominent advantage is that cell phones are one of the most portable platforms for communication, which surely outdoes competitors such as desktops, laptops and fixed telephones. This feature enables text messaging not to be confined by time and space. Secondly, as the text messaging function is able to deliver information simultaneously to hundreds or even thousands of recipients, people realize text messaging is one of the most efficient but also cheap mass promulgating methods in today's extremely fast-paced world. This once again is not challengeable by computers and telephones.

In a deeper sense, the rise of text messaging is closely associated with the freedom and openness being slowly but certainly developed in China today; it is credible that this aspect is the fundamental and ultimate driving force of its expansion, which has led to the popularization of text messaging usage. The spirit of freedom and openness is displayed virtually everywhere when people use text messages, such as in creating new phrases and rhetoric. By text messaging, theoretically anyone with a cell phone could become a terminal of information, which would allow him or her to create any message or idea and promulgate it to thousands of recipients. Anyone could participate in this process of information sharing. This revolutionary effect has clearly broken the monopolized control of information by public media authorities.[26] Some people even point out that text messaging should play and, is now in fact playing, an essential role in facilitating democratization in China. For example, in the "Super Girl" (超级女声) singing contest between 2004 and 2006, supporters of different singers voted for their idols with text messages, and millions of text messages from an enormous number of youngsters all over China were collected throughout the months' long contest. On cell phones, everyone was treated equally, and all were totally free to express his or her preference. Though the voters themselves might not have perceived it at the time, many commentators observed that people were actually exercising their voting power to determine the outcome of a national event. Although the contest was terminated by the government after 2006, it is now seen by many people as a "democratic trial" in the entertainment industry.

In conclusion, the impact, whether linguistically or socially in China, of the rise of text messaging is certainly profound. But accompanying the revolutionary consequences it brings, there are also increasingly difficult issues such as the overrun of text messages with

inappropriate contents and its corresponding ethics. These are yet to be dealt with, but it is certain that text messaging will continue its influential presence in peoples' lives and that it will continue to facilitate even more significant transformation in Chinese society in the future.

Notes

1. Shi Hui, A Brief Discussion about the Characteristics of Text Messaging (*Exam Weekly*, Vol. 24, 2007), 119. 石惠，*浅论手机短信的特点*（考试周刊，2007 年第 24 期），119。(Shí Huì, Qiǎn lùn shǒujī duǎnxìn de tèdiǎn (Kǎoshì Zhōukān, 2007 nián dì 24 qī), 119).
2. Tong Fuqi, Guan Lixin and Wang Minzhi, The Intrinsic Characteristics and Communicational Value of Text Messaging Language (*Jiamusi University Social Science Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2007), 56. 佟福奇，关立新，王敏芝，*短信语言的本体特点及其交际价值*（佳木斯大学社会科学学报， 2007 年第 25 卷第 03 期），56。(Tóng Fúqí, Guān Lìxīn, Wáng Mǐnzhī, Duǎnxìn yǔyán de běntǐ tèdiǎn jíqí jiāojì jiàzhí (Jiāmùsī Dàxué Shèhuì Kēxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 25 juàn dì 03 qī)*,56*).
3. Ibid., 56.
4. Text Messaging about to Step into a Dead End (*Communication and Information Daily*, July 10, 2008). *短信广告即将步入死胡同*（通信信息报，2008 年 7 月 10 日）。(Duǎnxìn guǎnggào jíjiāng bùrù sǐhútòng (Tōngxìn Xìnxī Bào, 2008 nián 7 yuè 10 rì)).
5. Wang Xuezhong and Guan Lixin, The Newly Emerged Rhetoric in Entertaining Text Messages (*Jiamusi University Social Science Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 6, 2007), 42. 王学忠，关立新，*娱乐短信中的新兴修辞格*（佳木斯大学社会科学学报，2007 年第 25 卷第 06 期），42。Wáng Xuézhōng, Guān Lìxīn, Yúlè duǎnxìn zhòngdì xīnxīng xiūcígé (Jiāmùsī Dàxué Shèhuì Kēxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 25 juàn dì 06 qī)*,42*).
6. Wang Huali, An Analysis of the Features of Text in Text Messages (*Scientific Information* [Academic Section], No. 11, 2007), 133. 王华丽，*试析趣味手机文本短信的文体特征*（科技信息（学术版），2007 年 第 11 期），133。(Wáng Huálì, Shì xī qùwèi shǒujī wénběn duǎnxìn de wéntǐ tèzhēng (Kējì Xìnxī (Xuéshù Bǎn), 2007 nián dì 11 qī)*,133*).
7. Zhang Tianying, A Brief Analysis of the Language Characteristics of Holiday Blessing Text Messages (*Journal of Hubei TV University*, Vol. 27, No. 8, 2007), 125. 张天莹，*浅析节日祝福短信的语言特色*（湖北广播电视大学学报，2007 年第 27 卷第 8 期），125。(Zhāng Tiānyíng, Qiǎn xī jiérì zhùfú duǎnxìn de yǔyán tèsè (Húběi Guǎngbō Diànshì Dàxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 27 juàn dì8 qī)*, 125*).
8. Chen Li, Blessing Text Messages and People's Holiday Life Today (*Journal of BUPT* [Social Science Edition], Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007), 61. 陈莉，*手机祝福短信与现代人的节日生存状态*（北京邮电大学学报

（社会科学版），第 9 卷第 2 期），61。(Chén Lì, Shǒujī zhùfú duǎnxìn yǔ xiàndàirén de jiérì shēngcún zhuàngtài (Běijīng Yóu-Diàn Dàxué Xuébào (Shèhuì Kēxué Bǎn), dì9 juàn dì2 qī)*, 61*).

9. Wang Yanxing, The Psychological Impact that Text Messaging has on College Students—Taking College Students in Fuzhou as Example (*Contemporary Communication*, Vol. 2, 2007), 63. 王燕星，*手机短信对大学生心理影响——以福州市大学生为例*（当代传播，2007 年第 02 期），63。(Wáng Yànxīng, Shǒujī duǎnxìn duì dàxuéshēng xīnlǐ yǐngxiǎng——yǐ Fúzhōu Shì dàxuéshēng wéilì (Dāngdài Chuánbō, 2007 nián dì 02 qī)*, 63*).

10. Ibid., 63.

11. Hu Tian and Liu Yi, Survey and Analysis on Text Messaging Usage by College Students—A Survey of 500 College Students from 6 Universities in Wuhan (*Scientific Educationalist*, Vol. 05, 2008), 31. 胡甜，柳毅，*关于大学生手机短信的调查分析——对武汉市六高校 500 名大学生的调查*（科学教育家, 2008 年第 05 期），31。(Hú Tián, Liǔ Yì, Guānyú dàxuéshēng shǒujī duǎnxìn de diàochá fēnxi——duì Wǔhàn shì liù gāoxiào 500 míng dàxuéshēng de diàochá (Kēxué Jiàoyù Jiā, 2008 nián dì 05 qī)*, 31*).

12. Yu Xiangshun, The Characteristics of Text Messaging Language and a Discussion on the Rhetoric (*News Knowledge*, Vol. 6, 2005), 42. 俞香顺，*短信语言特点与修辞刍议*（新闻知识, 2005 年第 06 期），42。(Yú Xiāngshùn, Duǎnxìn yǔyán tèdiǎn yǔ xiūcí chúyì (Xīnwén Zhīshi, 2005 nián dì 06 qī)*, 42*).

13. Zhou Qiuzhi, Exploring Text Messaging (*Southern Discussion Journal*, Vol. 05, 2006), 52. 周求知，*短信语言初探*（南方论刊, 2006 年 第 05 期），52。(Zhōu Qiúzhī, Duǎnxìn yǔyán chūtàn (Nánfāng Lùn Kān, 2006 nián dì 05 qī)*, 52*).

14. Ibid., 52.

15. Rong Xue, A Study on the Phenomenon of Homophonic Variation in Text Messaging Language (*Modern Language* [Linguistic Research], Vol. 12, 2006), 76. 荣雪，*短信语言中的谐音变异修辞现象研究*（现代语文（语言研究）2006 年第 12 期），76。(Róng Xuě, Duǎnxìn yǔyán zhòngdì xiéyīn biànyì xiūcí xiànxiàng yánjiū (Xiàndài Yǔwén (Yǔyán Yánjiū) 2006 nián dì 12 qī)*, 76*).

16. Zhou Qiuzhi, Exploring Text Messaging (*Southern Discussion Journal*, Vol. 05, 2006), 52. 周求知，*短信语言初探*（南方论刊, 2006 年 第 05 期），52。(Zhōu Qiúzhī, Duǎnxìn yǔyán chūtàn (Nánfāng Lùn Kān, 2006 nián dì 05 qī)*, 52*).

17. Wang Xuezhong and Guan Lixin, The Newly Emerged Rhetoric in Entertaining Text Messages (*Jiamusi University Social Science Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 6, 2007), 42. 王学忠，关立新，*娱乐短信中的新兴修辞格*（佳木斯大学社会科学学报，2007 年第 25 卷第 06 期），42。(Wáng Xuézhōng, Guān Lìxīn, Yúlè duǎnxìn zhòngdì xīnxīng xiūcígé (Jiāmùsī Dàxué Shèhuì Kēxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 25 juàn dì 06 qī)*,42*).

18. Yu Xiangshun, The Characteristics of Text Messaging Language and A Discussion on the Rhetoric (*News Knowledge*, Vol. 6, 2005), 42. 俞香顺，*短信语言特点与修辞刍议*（新闻知识, 2005 年第 06 期），42。(Yú Xiāngshùn, Duǎnxìn yǔyán tèdiǎn yǔ xiūcí chúyì (Xīnwén Zhīshi, 2005 nián dì 06 qī*), 42*).

19. Li Xiaoyu, A Brief Analysis of the Rhetorical Characteristics of Text Messaging (*Southern Discussion Journal*, Vol. 01, 2007), 96. 李小宇，*浅析手机短信的修辞特色*（南方论刊, 2007 年第 01 期），96。(Lǐ Xiǎoyǔ, Qiǎn xī shǒujī duǎnxìn de xiūcí tèsè (Nánfāng Lùn Kān, 2007 nián dì 01 qī*), 96*).

20. Ibid., 96.

21. Wang Xueqin, Looking at Text Messaging Culture from a Social and Linguistic Perspective (*Journal of Luohe Vocational Technology College*, Vol. 06, No. 1, 2007), 67. 王雪芹，*从社会语言学角度看短信语言文化*（漯河职业技术学院学报, 2007 年第 6 卷第 01 期），67。(Wáng Xuěqín, Cóng shèhuì yǔyánxué jiǎodù kàn duǎnxìn yǔyán wénhuà (Luòhé Zhíyè Jìshù Xuéyuàn Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 6 juàn dì 01 qī), *67*).

22. Yu Xiangshun, The Characteristics of Text Messaging Language and a Discussion on the Rhetoric (*News Knowledge*, Vol. 6, 2005), 42. 俞香顺，*短信语言特点与修辞刍议*（新闻知识, 2005 年第 06 期），42。(Yú Xiāngshùn, Duǎnxìn yǔyán tèdiǎn yǔ xiūcí chúyì (Xīnwén Zhīshi, 2005 nián dì 06 qī*), 42*).

23. Wang Xueqin, Looking at Text Messaging Culture from a Social and Linguistic Perspective (*Journal of Luohe Vocational Technology College*, Vol. 06, No. 1, 2007), 67. 王雪芹，*从社会语言学角度看短信语言文化*（漯河职业技术学院学报, 2007 年第 6 卷第 01 期），67。(Wáng Xuěqín, Cóng shèhuì yǔyánxué jiǎodù kàn duǎnxìn yǔyán wénhuà (Luòhé Zhíyè Jìshù Xuéyuàn Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 6 juàn dì 01 qī), *67*).

24. Ibid., 67.

25. Liang Lanxiang, An Analysis of the Causes for Text Messaging Development and Its Cultural Significance (*Cultural Discussion*, 2006), 144. 梁兰香，*析手机短信发展的原因及文化意义*（文化论苑，2006），144。(Liáng Lánxiāng, Xī shǒujī duǎnxìn fāzhǎn de yuányīn jí wénhuà yìyì (Wénhuà Lùn Yuàn, 2006*), 144*).

26. Ibid., 144.

Bibliography

Chen Li. Blessing Text Messages and Peoples' Holiday Life Today. *Journal of BUPT* (Social Science Edition) Vol. 9, No.2, 2007. 陈莉，*手机祝福短信与现代人的节日生存状态*. 北京邮电大学学报（社会科学版），第 9 卷第 2 期。(Chén Lì, Shǒujī zhùfú duǎnxìn yǔ xiàndàirén de jiérì shēngcún zhuàngtài. Běijīng Yóu-Diàn Dàxué Xuébào (Shèhuì Kēxué Bǎn), dì 9 juàn dì2 qī.

Hu Tian and Liu Yi. Survey and Analysis on Text Messaging Usage by College Students—A Survey of 500 College Students from 6 Universities in Wuhan. *Scientific Educationalist* Vol. 05, 2008. 胡甜，柳毅，*关于大学生手机短信的调查分析——对武汉市六高校 500 名大学生的调查*. 科学教育家, 2008 年第 05 期。(Hú Tián, Liǔ Yì, Guānyú dàxuéshēng shǒujī duǎnxìn de diàochá fēnxi——duì Wǔhàn shì liù gāoxiào 500 míng dàxuéshēng de diàochá. Kēxué Jiàoyù Jiā, 2008 nián dì 05 qī).

Li Xiaoyu. A Brief Analysis of the Rhetorical Characteristics of Text Messaging. *Southern Discussion Journal* Vol. 01, 2007. 李小宇，*浅析手机短信的修辞特色*. 南方论刊, 2007 年第 01 期。(Lǐ Xiǎoyǔ, Qiǎn xī shǒujī duǎnxìn de xiūcí tèsè. Nánfāng Lùn Kān, 2007 nián dì 01 qī).

Liang Lanxiang. An Analysis of the Causes for Text Messaging Development and Its Cultural Significance. *Cultural Discussion,* 2006. 梁兰香，*析手机短信发展的原因及文化意义*. 文化论苑，2006。(Liáng Lánxiāng, Xī shǒujī duǎnxìn fāzhǎn de yuányīn jí wénhuà yìyì. Wénhuà Lùn Yuàn*, 2006*).

Rong Xue. A Study on the Phenomenon of Homophonic Variation in Text Messaging Language. *Modern Language* (Linguistic Research) Vol. 12, 2006. 荣雪，*短信语言中的谐音变异修辞现象研究*. 现代语文（语言研究）2006 年第 12 期。(Róng Xuě, Duǎnxìn yǔyán zhòngdì xiéyīn biànyì xiūcí xiànxiàng yánjiū. Xiàndài Yǔwén (Yǔyán Yánjiū) 2006 nián dì 12 qī).

Shi Hui. A Brief Discussion about the Characteristics of Text Messaging. *Exam Weekly* Vol. 24, 2007. 石惠，*浅论手机短信的特点*. 考试周刊，2007 年第 24 期。(Shí Huì, Qiǎn lùn shǒujī duǎnxìn de tèdiǎn. Kǎoshì Zhōukān, 2007 nián dì 24 qī).

Text Messaging about To Step into a Dead End. *Communication and Information Daily*, July 10, 2008. *短信广告即将步入死胡同*. 通信信息报，2008 年 7 月 10 日。(Duǎnxìn guǎnggào jíjiāng bùrù sǐhútòng. Tōngxìn Xìnxī Bào, 2008 nián 7 yuè 10 rì).

Tong Fuqi, Guan Lixin and Wang Minzhi. The Intrinsic Characteristics and Communicational Value of Text Messaging Language. *Jiamusi University Social Science Journal* Vol. 25, No. 3, 2007. 佟福奇，关立新，王敏芝，*短信语言的本体特点及其交际价值*. 佳木斯大学社会科学学报， 2007 年第 25 卷第 03 期。 (Tóng Fúqí, Guān Lìxīn, Wáng Mǐnzhī, Duǎnxìn yǔyán de běntǐ tèdiǎn jíqí jiāojì jiàzhí. Jiāmùsī Dàxué Shèhuì Kēxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 25 juàn dì 03 qī).

Wang Huali. An Analysis of the Features of Text in Text Messages. *Scientific Information* (Academic Section), No. 11, 2007. 王华丽，*试析趣味手机文本短信的文体特征*. 科技信息（学术版），2007 年 第 11 期。(Wáng Huálì, Shì xī qùwèi shǒujī wénběn duǎnxìn de wéntǐ tèzhēng. Kējì Xìnxī (Xuéshù Bǎn), 2007 nián dì 11 qī).

Wang Xueqin. Looking at Text Messaging Culture from a Social and Linguistic Perspective. *Journal of Luohe Vocational Technology College* Vol. 06, No. 1, 2007. 王雪芹，*从社会语言学角度看短信语言文化*. 漯河职业技术学院学报, 2007 年第 6 卷第 01 期。(Wáng Xuěqín, Cóng shèhuì yǔyánxué jiǎodù kàn duǎnxìn yǔyán wénhuà. Luòhé Zhíyè Jìshù Xuéyuàn Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 6 juàn dì 01 qī).

Wang Xuezhong and Guan Lixin. The Newly Emerged Rhetoric in Entertaining Text Messages. *Jiamusi University Social Science Journal* Vol. 25, No. 6, 2007. 王学忠，关立新，*娱乐短信中的新兴修辞格*. 佳木斯大学社会科学学报，2007 年第 25 卷第 06 期。(Wáng Xuézhōng, Guān Lìxīn, Yúlè duǎnxìn zhòngdì xīnxīng xiūcígé. Jiāmùsī Dàxué Shèhuì Kēxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 25 juàn dì 06 qī).

Wang Yanxing. The Psychological Impact that Text Messaging Has on College Students—Taking College Students in Fuzhou as Example. *Contemporary Communication* Vol. 2, 2007. 王燕星，*手机短信对大学生心理影响——以福州市大学生为例*. 当代传播，2007 年第 02 期。(Wáng Yànxīng, Shǒujī duǎnxìn duì dàxuéshēng xīnlǐ yǐngxiǎng——yǐ Fúzhōu Shì dàxuéshēng wéilì. Dāngdài Chuánbō, 2007 nián dì 02 qī).

Yu Xiangshun. The Characteristics of Text Messaging Language and a Discussion on the Rhetoric. *News Knowledge* Vol. 6, 2005. 俞香顺，*短信语言特点与修辞刍议*. 新闻知识, 2005 年第 06 期。(Yú Xiāngshùn, Duǎnxìn yǔyán tèdiǎn yǔ xiūcí chúyì. Xīnwén Zhīshi, 2005 nián dì 06 qī).

Zhang Tianying. A Brief Analysis of the Language Characteristics of Holiday Blessing Text Messages. *Journal of Hubei TV University* Vol. 27, No. 8, 2007. 张天莹，*浅析节日祝福短信的语言特色*. 湖北广播电视大学学报，2007 年第 27 卷第 8 期。(Zhāng Tiānyíng, Qiǎn xī jiérì zhùfú duǎnxìn de yǔyán tèsè. Húběi Guǎngbō Diànshì Dàxué Xuébào, 2007 nián dì 27 juàn dì 8 qī).

Zhou Qiuzhi. Exploring Text Messaging. *Southern Discussion Journal* Vol. 05, 2006. 周求知，*短信语言初探*. 南方论刊, 2006 年 第 05 期。(Zhōu Qiúzhī, Duǎnxìn yǔyán chūtàn. Nánfāng Lùn Kān, 2006 nián dì 05 qī).

Hong Kong University Students' Language Use in Blogs: Tensions between Creativity and Prescriptivism ("omg my grammar is rubbish")[1]

Genevieve Y. Leung
University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

While Inner Circle (British, American) varieties of English are preferred in educational and professional contexts, Englishes of the world must be looked at with critical language awareness if they are to be encouraged and promoted. Work has been done establishing the creative potential and agency that Hong Kong English has for its users (see work by Xu Xi, Bolton, or Lim). With the rise of information technology, use of Hong Kong English in realms such as instant messaging, informal emails, blogs, and message boards becomes particularly interesting because these domains are where one's creativity and verbal prowess are made public and stylistic nuances often emulated and proliferated.

This paper looks at the English(es) and Chinese(s) used by university students in Hong Kong ages 18–24 as they intersect with popular culture and technology. Questionnaires were distributed to 61 Hong Kong university students. From this pool of participants, blog entries of focal students were analyzed. The research questions were: 1) What are the language ideologies of Hong Kong university students regarding Hong Kong English(es), and how are these played

1 An earlier draft of this paper was submitted for a course taught by Professor Victor Mair and presented at the 14th Conference at the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE) in Hong Kong. I thank the IAWE audience for their feedback on my presentation and Professor Mair for his continual guidance and support in this endeavor; all inadequacies of this paper are mine alone.

out in their writing? 2) What, if any, are the "rules" and/or regularization of English(es) used by university students? 3) Are there any limits to the creativity of Hong Kong English(es) and Chinese(s) as reported by HKE users themselves? The first question was answered through the questionnaires, and the last two were answered post data collection through unstructured interviews with the focal participants.

Literature Review

With the increased amount of time that people spend online in this day and age, an extensive number of scholars (Huffaker and Calvert 2005; Crystal 2001; Greenfield and Subramanyam 2003, among others) call for the need to look deeply into the realm of language use and interaction in online spaces. Of particular interest to many scholars is the evolution of discourse, especially in that of adolescents, who are seen as key contributors to this change. Building upon social interactionist theories, which assert that meaning-making comes from the interactions of individual and groups, scholars have noted that in "virtual worlds," one can construct one's own identity anonymously, allowing for a flexibility and creativity that might not otherwise be possible in face-to-face interactions. Lam (2000) and others have looked at the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) as means of lowering the affective filter and anxieties related to the pressures of using one's second (or any additional) language, thereby introducing a space for language experimentation, code-switching, and creative uses of language.

As Greenfield and Subramanyam (2003) note, adolescents are at the very center of the growth and proliferation of "netspeak," where, like other forms of spoken language, language use is shaped entirely by its users. With its ease of access and user-friendly publishing platform,

much attention has been placed on weblogs (hereafter abbreviated as "blogs"), where the ability to archive and scaffold entries mirrors the principle that identity construal is a similarly continual process. While the social interactionist view might lend weight to the idea that, in writing a blog, an author might put forth "multiple faces" in his/her writing, Huffaker and Calvert (2005), in their research on language use and emotional codes in self-expression in blogs, found that this type of persona was actually not the norm. Their research concludes that blogs are not simply sites where people can pretend to be someone else to explore various personae; rather, one's blog might actually represent more of one's "true" self than social interactionist theory suggests. In fact, as Schmidt (2007) writes, bloggers need to be thought of as part of a larger, legitimate "community of blogging practices," building on the analytical framework of sociocultural structuralism, where agency is constructed through micro-level individual actions and macro-level social structures.

If language is key in identity construal, scholars have argued, then blogs are highly relevant in the sense that they serve as sites for both self-expression and peer group relationships. As an established mode of communication, blogs can promote and enhance existing relationships as opposed to causing isolation and loneliness (Stefanone and Jang 2008). The ability to give and receive delayed, personal or impersonal feedback from peers sets blogs apart from other media like instant-messaging, where delayed responses might signal breaches of "netiquette" (Huffaker and Calvert 2005). As Gumbrecht (2004) exemplifies, a phrase like "I'm sad" on a blog does not necessitate a call for response, whereas in an instant message conversation, it might; this makes communicating via blogs a preferred medium of communication for many people. Herring et al. (2004) also note this, stating that the limited interactivity and asymmetrical communicative rights between author and reader situate blogs between Internet websites and email.

In looking at the rationales behind blogging, Nardi et al. (2004) conducted ethnographic interviews with 23 bloggers. They classify the privacy levels of blogs into three types: 1) password protected, 2) unlisted, and 3) able to be found by search engines. Nardi and her colleagues found that regardless of the privacy levels set on the blogs, bloggers were acutely aware of their audience, calibrating what they wanted to reveal with their own "personal code of ethics" (5). Those studied in the ethnography stated that they expressed themselves in light of their audience, using an array of expressions and leaving the lines open for communication. Likewise, while Gumbrecht (2004) typifies blogs as a protected space for authors to express their own ideas and control the presentation of material, her research also found that bloggers included disclaimers as much as possible, fully aware of the ramifications and consequences of "throwing bombs" at their readers. Both Nardi et al. (2004) and Gumbrecht (2004) note the transformative, life-altering potential of blogs, especially in terms of providing a sort of self-catharsis and musing on one's life and actions. It is interesting to note that Gumbrecht found that there was purported to be a fine line between blogs that are started organically versus "educational blogs" assigned to be written for a class for "transformational" purposes. She notes that bloggers first must embrace the community (echoing Schmidt's 2007 coinage of "community of blogging practices") before feedback and the act of blogging become relevant.

Much of the research on blogging has come from English-speaking countries. Less work has been done in Asian contexts, where, as Markus and Kitayama (1991) note, Asians tend to think of themselves in the context of the larger world and focus more on group membership compared to those in Western cultures. As blogging is presumed to be communicative and interactive, it is important, then, to consider the cultural-specific relationship between author and reader. Kawaura et al. (1999) note that Japanese bloggers make mention of similarly "like-

minded" blogs in their writing more than any other country's bloggers. The authors write that while in these blogs authors disclose information that is not common in Japanese face-to-face interactions, that the texts were released where it can be read anonymously indicates that the writers want the information to be known.

Having established that blogging indeed is a legitimate genre where authors are part of a larger community of practice, it is time to look at the English(es) and Chinese(s) used by university students' blogs in Hong Kong. In doing so, one must turn not only to World Englishes and Hong Kong English but also to the notion of written vernacular Cantonese in relation to Standard Chinese.

The "Hong Kong Chinese" identity is one that is complexly intertwined with Western and Eastern ideas and values, reflected in Hong Kongers' language ideologies (Xu Xi 2000). Similiarly, Hong Kong teachers of English have long been grappling with questions of identity and ownership of the English language. Poon (2006) writes of his experiences as an English teacher in Hong Kong who has never studied abroad:

> …one of the most common phrases I have used when correcting students' 'mistakes' is *Native speakers don't say it in this way*. It was as if I really knew how a native English speaker speaks. I don't. I was brought up and educated entirely in Hong Kong and never had the privilege of studying overseas…. So how can I become a spokesman for a language that I am exposed to only in lessons but rarely in daily life? Can I be a legitimate gatekeeper of a language that is foreign to me? Whose English am I teaching and whose rules and principles am I preaching? At times, I feel inferior and lack a sense of ownership of the language that I rely on to make a living. (27)

Poon's students' (and perhaps his own) linguistic offshoots from the "native speaker" norm do not suggest a substandard variety of English. Rather, it calls for the need to recognize the legitimacy of the English that Hong Kong people speak, aligning itself to the call for English as an International Language. However, Poon furthers this idea with an interesting caveat:

> 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to the English-speaking community?' a professor of English asked me recently in a lesson. My answer was *No*. I can speak English but I honestly don't have a sense of belonging to such a community. Everyone in the world is a citizen of some place or another, and I am a Hong Kong citizen. Citizenship is something universal and by putting the name of a place in front of the word *citizen*, we can get some sense of a person's identity. Can we do the same kind of thing with English? Can we have 'Hong Kong English' or 'China English' without these labels bearing any negative implications—like 'pidgin English' or 'Chinglish'? (27)

The irony behind this statement, perhaps, is that while Poon (and countless other English teachers in his position) is perfectly capable of teaching English and writing academic articles using it, he still does not feel part of the English-speaking community. If he does not feel like he has gained entry as an "English-speaking citizen," then this hinders the recognition of Hong Kong English as a legitimate variety and, ultimately, English as an International Language might not be able to come to fruition. In its most ideal state (though most would agree this state can never be attained), English as an International Language should be "neutral" and its speakers connected by some shared identity; however, in what is almost a denying of self, Poon's reaction as a Hong Kong Cantonese- and English-speaking person seems to be limiting his/her social and linguistic currency in an international realm. The English he speaks is not neutral, nor can he escape the labels he becomes associated with by others in the wider English-speaking community with whom he is supposed to be a part.

The above comment might seem a little jarring; however, Hong Kong people and society have taken many a blow by Hong Kong and Western scholars alike. Perhaps the most sadistic is

that from Lord and T'sou (1985), blasting the Hong Kong educational system, saying that Hong Kong people suffer from a *cultural eunuch syndrome*:

> The end result of the educational system, based on complaints and opinions commonly expressed, is a product which can be generally expressed as a 'cultural eunuch'—someone who knows what things could or might be like in cultural terms but who is not able to participate. This product is brought about by a light veneer of Western culture, glimpsed through exposure to the English language in schools and the media, on to a less than wholesome body of Chinese values and culture. (17)

Speaking of Hong Kong culture, Abbas (1997) has stated, "Hong Kong culture is coaxed into subjectivity that develops precisely out of a space of disappearance" (10). Abbas' view is that Hong Kong's constantly "disappearing" space—both as colonized subjects and later as a returned people—causes a paradox that not only renders the Hong Kong person confused in terms of identity and culture, but also limits what can be produced through the written medium of English in Hong Kong.

According to Kachru (1986), outer circle countries are those where English is important for historical reasons such as British colonization and, as a result, plays a significant role in the country. As such, it can be argued that the English spoken by Hong Kongers is an outer circle variety by the criteria of Kachru's circles of varieties of English. Kachru and others (Phillipson and Widdowson, to name just two) have labeled a paradigm shift in the understanding of English as a world language. With globalization and the increasing interconnectivity of the world, the role of English in multilingual societies is one that must be conceptualized in terms of *glocalization*—a portmanteau of "globalization" and "localization"—with aims to view and act on both macro and micro scales. With this globalized view comes the notion of English as an "Asian language" (Bolton: 198), where in many cases many Asian people use English in locales where English does not take on the role of a first language. As Bolton aptly notes, "A language is

to be separated from its non-liberated uses. Kachru emphasizes the importance of literary creativity and argues for the acculturation of English to the needs and visions of Asian societies" (199).

Kachru (1986) writes that there are two main factors contributing to the development of a non-native variety of English: indigenization and localization. Both attitudinal and linguistic processes must work simultaneously in order for the variety of English to be used in full force. It is based on Kachru's constructs that most Hong Kong linguists have traditionally denied the existence of a "Hong Kong English." Citing the lack of motivation for indigenization, Evans (2002) writes, "English has a minimal social or cultural role to play in the lives of the vast majority of the territory's Chinese community" (191). Others, like Pang (2003), go as far as calling Hong Kong English an *acrolect*, a term commonly used to refer to the social dialect most similar to a standard language in post-creole communities (Stewart 1965). Poon describes Hong Kong English as an acrolect because it localized to a large extent but has not yet indigenized because of a linguistic purism that prefers standards and resists deviation. This "invisibility myth," as Bolton (2005) calls it, is problematic because "diglossia without bilingualism is no longer the case. There is no longer such a thing as societal bilingualism where two monolingual communities exist" (202). That is, while the Hong Kong of fifty years ago might have typified Haugen's (1972) exemplar of diglossia without bilingualism, as it currently stands today, Hong Kong is undeniably multilingual and multiglossic. Poon (2006) calls for the need to indigenize and asks English teachers in Hong Kong to have a new mindset about "what English as a world language should be and how it should be taught" (24). Indeed, one needs to look no further into this linguistic situation than the fact that many words in Hong Kong are explicable only in reference to semantic and pragmatic relations that are internal to the Hong Kong context. That is, the mapping of Hong Kong words is enregistered only through the cognizance of "semantic oppositions" between nodes and antinodes like pro-Beijing and pro-Hong Kong, private and public housing, economic migrants and refugees (Bolton, 2005:214).

With the increased efforts to recognize and legitimize Asian Englishes once thought of prescriptively as simply "bad English," the study and documentation of Singaporean English, Indian English(es), Chinese English(es), and Malaysian English have emerged. Work on the

autonomy and creativity of Hong Kong English (Bolton, Xu Xi, Lim, and others) notes that an indigenization process is taking place, especially in arenas like creative writing. As previous literature on blogs indicates, blog writing is very much intertwined with the creative outpour of opinions and emotions. As such, examining Hong Kong English use in blogs in detail is a worthwhile endeavor if one wants to the current state of autonomy and recognition of Hong Kong English by Hong Kongers today.

The Study

The current study examines the perceptions of language use, the language ideologies, and actual language use in blogs written by university students in Hong Kong. The rationale for choosing university students aged 18–24 was partly out of convenience; it was students from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, City University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong University who were most accessible at the time this study was conducted. While this in no way representative of the full gamut of the Hong Kong population, it is illustrative of the (post)-adolescent group of language users who have had long-term exposure to both reading and writing in blogs, making them central players in the blogosphere.

Sixty-one respondents, fifty-nine from three classes at HKIEd and two solicited through snowball sampling, with the average age of 20.6 years old, were asked to complete a seven-item questionnaire about language use and blogging. The questionnaire had both English and Chinese translations, and respondents could respond in either or both languages (the complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix A). Questions asked ranged from students' frequency of reading and writing in blogs, whose blogs they read, the content of their blogs, whether or not they could discern a "Hong Kong" blogger from just the blog itself, and their opinions of the blog genre. An additional free-response section asked students to list some examples of "Hong Kong Written Cantonese" (written vernacular Cantonese) and "Hong Kong English."

Students were also asked whether they would be willing to provide their blog addresses and if they would be willing to participate in a series of follow-up semi-structured interview questions regarding language use. From the original 61 participants, 14 provided their blog addresses and 13 agreed to participate in follow-up questioning. These people became the study's

principal qualitative informants, from which blog excerpts were taken.

Questionnaire Results

Below are the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire responses.

Blogging Habits

Of the 60 people who responded to the question, "Do you write in a blog?" 53 (88%) said they did. In addition, 88% of those who said they wrote in blogs have maintained them for two years or longer. The frequency of updating one's blog is as follows, for the 51 people who responded to the question:

Frequency of update	# respondents (%)
Every day	8 (16%)
Several times a week	8 (16%)
Weekly/biweekly	12 (24%)
Once a month	7 (14%)

The remaining participants responded either that they updated "irregularly" or "when I have time." As evidenced, a solid 70% of the sample population updates blogs.

All 61 respondents said they read others' blogs and cited friends, family, and classmates as authors of the blogs most frequently read. Others also noted that they read strangers' and famous peoples' blogs. In terms of time spent on reading blogs, 65% of respondents spent 80–100% of their blog-reading time reading close friends' blogs. The percentage rises to 80% when the percentage of time spent is 60–100%.

From this, it can be said that the bulk of these Hong Kong university students spend a significant amount of time both updating their own and checking their close friends' blogs.

Language Use

Of the 57 students who responded to the question, "When you blog, what language(s) do you use?" only one person reported using English exclusively. Likewise, only one person said

Cantonese was used exclusively. There were 33 (58%) who said they wrote in "Chinese" only. "Chinese" here probably refers to Standard Written Chinese (i.e., Modern Standard Mandarin, [MSM]).

The remaining 22 students (39%) said that they used both English and some form of "Chinese" (Standard Chinese and/or Written Cantonese) to blog. The use of multiple languages and scripts to write blogs is significant because it reflects the multilingual and multiglossic nature of language use in Hong Kong.

Ideologies about Blogging

Respondents were asked whether or not they agreed with the following statements, which were adapted from research by Miura and Yamashita (2007):

a) I can express myself sufficiently in my blog.
b) I am sufficiently understood by others through my blog writing.
c) There is something about communicating via blogging that is different than emailing or face-to-face conversations.

The responses were as follows:

Statement	Agree	Disagree
(a) I can express myself sufficiently in my blog. (n=51)	43 (84%)	8 (16%)
(b) I am sufficiently understood by others through my blog writing. (n=52)	30 (58%)	22 (42%)
(c) There is something about communicating via blogging that is different than emailing or face-to-face interactions. (n=51)	47 (92%)	4 (8%)

As the table indicates, most students are in agreement with statements (a) and (c). However, responses for statement (b) were not so clear-cut, as some of the responses that students wrote alongside their choices of agreement or disagreement show, "Some things only I can understand" or "I may not write so clearly when the topic is about my private matter." It is possible that for some of these bloggers, the aim of blogging is more for "self-catharsis," in which case the necessity for readers to understand the authors is less great. Nevertheless, the results for part (c) delineate blogs as being sites of "something different" to those who write in

them and, as such, should be focused on in greater detail by researchers, which is one of the aims of the current study.

Written Cantonese and Hong Kong English Examples

In the design of this study, it was important to look at Hong Kong English as being strongly intertwined with written Cantonese. While perhaps not immediately apparent, the relationship between Hong Kong English and written Cantonese, both stigmatized media of writing in Hong Kong, go hand in hand, especially in terms of being labeled as reasons for the "downfall" of the Hong Kong education system. This prescriptive label has been debunked by scholars like Bolton, Lim, and McArthur, who point to creative writing as sites for the indigenization and localization of Hong Kong English to continue to take place and thrive. In addition, both written Cantonese and Hong Kong English are used by many Hong Kong bloggers. Thus respondents were asked to list examples of what they considered to be "written Cantonese" and what they considered to be "Hong Kong English."

Because both written Cantonese and Hong Kong English have long been stigmatized, it deserves special note that the rationale behind asking the respondents themselves to elicit examples (as opposed to carrying out acceptability judgments of what "are" or "are not" examples of the two), was to get at the respondents' own knowledge without denigrating them for knowing words or sentences that belong to this genre. Participants were told explicitly that there were no correct or incorrect answers in responding. Moreover, in analyzing the data, examples were not looked at in terms of errors. More even than expected, what resulted from this line of analysis was that respondents were found already to be metapragmatically aware of their "errors," thus yielding a tension between creativity and prescriptivism, as noted in the title of this paper. More about this tension will be discussed in later sections.

Below are some examples that were elicited for "written Cantonese." These are some of the full sentences that emerged, with *Jyutping* romanization and English translation for reference:

我真係好開心，好感動

Ngo zan hai hou hoi sam, hou gam dung

'I am very happy, very moved.'

你隻屎窟鬼

Nei zek si fat gwai

'You punk' [lit: butt ghost]

你哋去邊度 hea

Nei dei heoi bin dou he

'Where are you guys going to hang out?'

你 D 朋友番黎未

Nei di pang jau faan lai mei

'Have your friends returned yet?'

Others included words with Roman characters or English words as written Cantonese:

O 嘴

O zeoi

'mouth in an O-shape'

gag

geg

'a gag/very cheesy joke'

hae[2]

he

'to waste time idly/hang out'

[2] This is an alternate spelling of "hea" seen in the previous example: 你哋去邊度 hea

There was a large corpus of interesting examples, filled with illustrative metaphor, including those in the following list.

人山人海
jan saan jan hoi
‘people everywhere’

乜嘢
mat je
‘what’

7 仔
caat zai
‘7-11’ (convenience store)

勁
ging
‘powerful/great’

正
zeng
‘awesome/cool’

索
sok
‘attractive [for females]’

喪笑,叫
song siu, giu
‘to laugh, scream uncontrollably’

串嘴
cyun zeoi
‘to act arrogantly’

摺
zip
‘reserved’

豬扒
zyu paa
‘an unattractive woman’

灰爆
fui baau
‘extremely depressed’

大鑊
daai wok
‘in big trouble’

潛水
cim seoi
‘to go into hiding’

骨仙
gwat sin
‘a very thin person’

牛扒
ngau pa
‘an unattractive man’

人蛇
jan se
‘an illegal immigrant’

十卜
sap buk
‘support’

溝女
kau neoi
‘to pick up chicks’

四眼龜
sei ngaan gwai
‘person with glasses’ [dorky]

入貨
jap fo
‘to stock merchandise’

冇貨
mou fo
‘to not have merchandise’

爆分
baau fan
‘to get full marks’

先都唔先
sin dou m sin
‘to be without money’

Many words on this list would be considered as largely Cantonese “slang,” but it would be misleading to simply call them such; some of these colloquialisms (**四眼龜**, **大鍋**, **入貨** ,冇**貨**) are also frequently used across age groups.

There were also words related to Internet discourse that were considered written Cantonese, such as 滴汗 (*dik hon*, ‘a drop of sweat’) which corresponds to the emoticon:

(-_-"""), a face with beads of sweat. Also mentioned was the emoticon 囧 (*jiong* in Mandarin and *gwing* in Cantonese), which stands for an embarrassed-looking face.

Interestingly, as the data for this project were being analyzed, a Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking colleague looked at the example 先都唔先 and noted that 先 was the “incorrect” character for the phonetic *sin*. The “correct” character, she explained, should be 仙 (also *sin*), because this was the same character used for the phonetic borrowing for “cents.” The same person also said that since Hong Kong no longer uses one-cent coins in its currency, the respondent probably “got the sounds confused.” This interchange is but one example of the regularization of prescriptivism in written Cantonese. As respondents were filling in the questionnaire, many were seen asking each other which was the “right” way of writing certain Cantonese words, discussing with each other until the “accurate” rendition of a character was reconciled.

The following examples were elicited for “Hong Kong English.” Below are the examples of full sentences, along with the Standard English equivalents:

I ate dinner than back home
‘I ate dinner and then I went back home’

u tonight eat what ar?
‘What did you eat tonight?’

You die la
‘Go to hell!’

Utterance-final particles "ar" (啊) and "la" (啦) have been noted by many scholars as being typical of Asian Englishes, and Hong Kong English is no different in this respect. Respondents mentioned other romanized final particles like *ga la, wor, le,* and *jor* as representative of Hong Kong English. The sentence order and uninflected verb stem are reminiscent of Bolton's (2002) examples of instant messaging platform ICQ ("I seek you") chat conversations as well.

Some respondents also gave "text-book" examples of Hong Kong English as mentioned in previous research (Bolton 2002, 2005; McArthur 2005), including these two phrases that have been incorporated into English:

long time no see
好耐冇見 (好久不見)

people mountain people sea
人山人海

These English phrases, when translated word for word back into Cantonese, yield coherent, culturally-specific, in-group content. This is further exemplified by these two examples:

add oil (+oil)
加油

piano piano sound
琴琴聲

While "add oil" is a phrase that is not uncommon also in Mandarin Chinese, the phrase "piano piano sound" needs a little more cultural and linguistic context in order to be understood. A Cantonese speaker will readily know that it stands for 琴琴聲—to move in a very hurried manner—and perhaps laugh at the wittiness of the English phrase. A non-Cantonese speaker (but reader of Chinese characters) might understand the phrase if it were written down as it is pronounced: *kam kam seng*. It might be clear, then, that this onomatopoetic phrase has used the

"piano piano" characters solely for the sound.

The example of "add oil" also yielded a very interesting piece of anecdotal evidence to the regularization of Hong Kong English phrases: when I told a Hong Kong Cantonese-speaking colleague to "add gas," which I meant as an equivalent to "add oil" (as 油 can mean both 'oil' and 'gas,' as in 石油). My colleague responded, "Actually, we say it this way…" suggesting I say "add oil" instead. This acute metalinguistic commentary of appropriateness of language use indicates the rules of "correct" usage leading to correction if used in the "wrong" way, separating in from out group. Here, at least at the local level, "we" as Hong Kong people is being dichotomized with "you" as someone not using the phrase in the right way.

There were also examples of a term I am calling *script-switching*, which is the written equivalent of code-switching. These four are script-switching examples in which a Chinese character is combined with a romanized or English word:

好 pro
hou pro
'very professional'

con 人/會
con jan/wui
a person/group that cons people

大 bo
dai bou
'big trouble' (similar meaning to 大鍋)

出 pool[3]

ceot pool

'to go out on a date'

入 pool

jap pool

'to not have a date'

Save for con 人/會 and 大 bo, English script is used probably because the consonant string pr- and syllable-final -l are not allowed in Cantonese phonology for an existing character to replace these sounds. The fact that "bo" (assuming it is the same *bou* as 煲 'pot, to boil', which it most likely is, as the phrase is a spin-off of 大鍋, with *wok* also being a cooking vessel) actually has its own character that could have been written instead of romanized "bo" demonstrates the creativity and flexibility of language use in Hong Kong English.

Another form of script-switching which was seen was the use of romanization and English to represent Cantonese without any Chinese characters. For example:

sad bao

sad bau

extremely sad

Here it is unclear what exactly motivates the spelling out of "bao" instead of using the character for it (爆), though it does indicate the versatility of Cantonese and the written form—to the point where even the Chinese character 爆 spelled out in Roman alphabet as "bao" is taken to be evidence of Hong Kong English. Further evidence of this comes from these three examples that were considered Hong Kong English. Below are the exact renditions of what the respondents wrote down:

[3] The meanings of the phrases 出/入 pool come from the metaphor of going into a "pool" of people dateless and coming out with one to date. The respondents' own definitions have been maintained in this paper, and this footnote is for clarification purposes only.

"ng" (唔/不)

m

'negative marker'

"nei" = 你

nei

'you'

sing k ng = Friday

sing kei m

'Friday'

It is significant that each of these respondents made sure to specify with an equal sign exactly which meanings they meant after each romanization. Fully aware of homophones and the potential confusion that might ensue, the respondents further elucidated their answers with the English or Chinese equivalent. Thus these examples show that the lines which separte unstandardized and romanized Cantonese from Cantonese/Chinese characters and Hong Kong English from written Cantonese are not entirely clear. The lexicons move along a continuum with Hong Kong English on one end and written Cantonese at the other. These forms also suggest the indigenization of language use that must be "translated" to those who might be unclear about or uninitiated to the form.

As with the examples given for written Cantonese, respondents made use of words for what could be categorized as Internet discourse: wt (what), thx (thanks), bibi/88 (bye-bye), keekee (hee-hee), Orz (an emoticon of a person kneeling down or bowing). While these forms are not necessarily exclusively used by Hong Kong people, the fact that they are considered "Hong Kong English" by some respondents inherently links Hong Kong English (in part) with Internet language and use.

As alluded to earlier, there were clear signs of linkage between what is considered "Hong Kong English" and what is considered "written Cantonese." In fact, some of the same words

occurred in both realms: hea, O嘴, gag, 十卜. In addition, there were respondents who explicitly connected their written Cantonese examples with their Hong Kong English ones, as in this one example:

WC example:

我琴日去左打邊爐

Ngo kam jaat hoei zo daa bin lou
'I went to eat hot-pot[4] yesterday/I went hot-potting yesterday'

HKE example:
I go hot-pot yesterday.

This particular example is salient. "Hot pot" is a culturally-specific term; were 打邊爐 to be translated word-for-word, it might be read as 'hit which stove' or 'hit the hot pot', both of which make little to no sense. Hence "hot pot" is a Hong Kong English word exactly as Butler (1997) typifies it, as "particular words and phrases which spring up usually to express key features of the physical and social environment and which are regarded as peculiar to the variety" (100). Many critics bring up the fact that written Cantonese is merely "slang" or some form of standard Chinese gone awry; however, this respondent's sentence is neither slang nor awry. In fact, one might find the sentence quite "normal" and typical of a Hong Kong person's social (and epicurean) reality.

Content of Blogs Surveyed

Eight blogs were looked at in detail. The content of each revolved mostly around daily life and emotions, mirroring the purported questionnaire responses. None of the blogs were consistently written only in English, written Cantonese, or Standard Chinese. In fact, a great deal of code- and script-switching took place. Some of the examples listed in as "Written Cantonese" or "Hong Kong English" were also found in the blogs.

While the content and language use of these blogs could be taken as a separate project

[4] 打邊爐, perhaps translatable into Standard Chinese as 吃火鍋, is the culinary tradition similar to fondue, where diners dip raw meat and vegetables into a communal pot of boiling soup.

endeavor in itself, what seemed most relevant to the current research was the metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness and knowledge of the writer's own language use. That is, the blogger would write the blog entry then qualify it with some faulty aspect of their language. For example, one respondent, Charlene (a pseudonym), has as her 21 October 2008 entry:

> Tuesday, October 21, 2008
> dear all fellow students,
> to make our class more interesting and interactive, lets have a outing next week, pls bring your digital camera, sound recorder and logbook and meet you all
> at Shek Kip Mei MTR station exit B2 at 9:30am next monday (27 Oct)
> we are going to have a leisure stroll in Lam Shan Estate, and record the texture, sound, people, conversation, public/ private space, density, smell, colour, smiles, temperature, shape, objects or whatever you find interesting.
> give me a reply note after receiving this mail.
> pls help me checking if all classmates are well received this note.
> cheers
> cally
>
> cally my gd gd gd gd teacherrrrrrr!!
> assignment on progress
> movie n pyschology term paper creative writing emprical city photography narrative photos digital media processing 2d studio and practice stop motion sound bases and design quiz and test sound bases and design sound recording **ding ngo gor lung** byebye
> omg i think im interested in processing omg i chatted with enrica for more than 4 hours on msn omgomgomg my narrative photos fuck omg i dun want to be mature omg omgomg tmr be back spcs **omg my grammar is rubbish**

This entry was chosen because Charlene includes an email from her instructor, who also uses Hong Kong English (all instances of this are underlined). What the blogger herself writes is an account of school life, documenting the tasks she has yet to complete and other stresses in her life. It is clearly informal, lacking capitalization and sometimes punctuation, making use of romanized Cantonese and script-switching ("ding ngo gor lung byebye" which is the vulgar expression 頂我/你個肺) as well as Hong Kong English ("tmr be back spcs[5]").

Perhaps most significantly, at the very end, this blogger comments on her own language use, "omg my grammar is rubbish." While her language choice obviously meets her own

[5] Here, "spcs" refers to the initials of the respondent's secondary school.

linguistic needs, the fact that she is aware of a larger existing language prescription by which she judges herself is significant and will be explored in more detail.

Respondents' Assessments of "Four Different" Blog Entries

As evidenced in the free response section of the questionnaire, respondents self-reported rules and use of "appropriate" characters in written Cantonese and Hong Kong English. To further probe at whether there would be any limits to creativity in language use in blogs by bloggers who use Hong Kong English and/or written Cantonese, a small task was given to the 14 participants who volunteered to participate in follow-up questioning. These participants were given four entries to read and told that they were written by different Cantonese-speaking people. (The document can be found in the Appendix section.) From only reading each of these four blog entries, which ranged from heavy use of Written Cantonese to heavy use of English, the participants were asked to guess from this person's writing (words, style, etc.) where the author is from (Hong Kong or elsewhere) and to justify their guess.

Most of the responses that were received typified all four entries as being written by Hong Kong bloggers.[6] Interestingly, in the participants' rationales of why the blogger was from Hong Kong came typifications of what a Hong Kong blogger should be like in terms of "appropriate" language use: *"writing blogs in both English and Cantonese in one entry is the Hong Kong blogging style. And, 'tim' is translating from Cantonese." Also, "only Hong Kong people would use words like "o 地" "o 左"."*

A Hong Kong blogger is also seen as having "bad" grammar: "*Wrong grammar and a major example of Chinglish*," "*There is inconsistent but complicated grammar, looks like Hong Kong English*." In response to the fourth entry, which was written almost entirely in English, one respondent said, "*A native English speaker would not write it like this. It's pretentious, like you*

[6] However, all four entries actually came from my own blog, which I have kept for the last seven years. As a Chinese-American L1 Cantonese speaker with strong linguistic and cultural ties to Hong Kong, I have followed Hong Kong popular culture and media most of my life and read blogs by Hong Kong authors. I do not aim to "pretend" to be a Hong Kong blogger but do utilize written Cantonese, Standard Chinese, and English in my blog entries. While my use of English does not incorporate many characteristics of Hong Kong English, the rationale behind choosing my own entries was not to trick participants but to create ambiguity that would lead to definitive judgments that delved into participants' language ideologies. It was also the most convenient and plenteous source from which to obtain writing samples.

want to show off all the English you know, but it's still wrong [incorrect English]!" Only one respondent guessed that the fourth entry was written by a "foreigner"—that is, someone who is not from Hong Kong—with the rationale being: "*the English style is casual and natural which is similar to western English.*" Thus it can be extrapolated that her comments imply that because the entry was too much like Standard American/British English, it was too "casual" and too "natural" to be written by a Hong Konger; the deprecation behind this statement is intense.

One person also guessed that the second entry was written by someone who was not from Hong Kong because "*no one uses "zek goek"—it would be written as "jerk gerk" or something, even if it is the wrong way of doing it.*" Ironically, *zek goek* is romanized à la Jyupting romanization, the official romanization system of the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong; this respondent's comments illustrate the disjunction between the academic community—the respondent knows something is "wrong" about the mainstream use of "jerk gerk"—and the reality of language use of people in Hong Kong; the meta-linguistic awareness behind these comments is quite profound.

All these prescriptive responses point to the construct of linguistic purity on several levels—one is that the English used by "foreigners" (e.g., non-Hong Kongers) is still considered natural and good, holding Inner Circle varieties of English above all other Englishes. Another, more novel facet is that English used by Hong Kongers, whether it be "the wrong way" or "inconsistent" is still recognized as "unpretentious" and, by extension, even "natural" and "normal" in this respect, used by the common Hong Kong person; anything that is aberrant to this is considered too over-the-top for "real" Hong Kong English.

Implications and Future Directions

Several trends have emerged from this research study. First is that Hong Kongers, like most adolescents and university students, write in and check blogs frequently and consistently. Moreover, the use of language in Hong Kong blogs reflects the multilingual and multiglossic nature of Hong Kong: Hong Kong English and written Cantonese, along with Standard Chinese, are used in blog writing in a relatively regularized way which is recognizable to most Hong Kongers as being distinctly "Hong Kong." Most important, perhaps, is the element of awareness

on the part of the respondents when they were interviewed and also in their blog writing. Balancing the awareness of subtle constraints of language use with calling attention to oneself (and obtaining readership) through language use, as mentioned in Gumbrecht (2004), leaves room for communication within the blogging network. While this is not necessarily unique to the Hong Kong context, language awareness and prescriptivism should not only be seen in terms of what is lacking in one's own language use ("omg my grammar is rubbish," "this is the wrong way of doing it"); rather, such heightened metalinguistic awareness is most effectively paired with a certain degree of pride in the flexibility of one's own language use, which has the ability to cover such a vast linguistic landscape. While this might seem too idealistic an endeavor, both localization and indigenization, Kachru's key components to the development of a non-native English variety, have already been clearly exemplified in the Hong Kong blogosphere.

Blogs, like many other sites in Hong Kong where language ideologies and actual language use are in fierce contention, are sites where creativity and prescriptivism continually face tension. However, unlike more institutionally-fixed realms like education, creativity in language use in blogs seems to win over prescriptivism; that is, *in spite of* (and perhaps also *because of*) being critically aware of how their language use "should be," Hong Kong bloggers are still creating—and regularizing—their variety of English and written Cantonese. As such, the next step in the life of Hong Kong English might be to replace self-deprecation with pride in one's linguistic accomplishments and awareness, questioning whose notions of "purity" are being used as the constant arbiters of "correctness" that inherently varies depending on social context; this might be the key to further embracing the linguistic reality of Hong Kong English.

Acknowledgments

This research could not have been completed without the collaborative efforts and logistical support of my colleagues Winnie Tang and Erica Chan, with whom I engaged in numerous valuable conversations, as well as the university students who participated in the study. I dedicate this paper to my parents, Lily and Alex Leung, and grandmother, Ngan Yee Lee, each of whom taught me to appreciate my cultural and linguistic heritage in multiply nuanced and rewarding ways.

Bibliography and Works Cited

Abbas, Ackbar. 1997. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Benson, Phil. 2000. Hong Kong Words: Variation and Context. *World Englishes* 19(3): 373–380.

Bolton, Kingsley. 2005. *Chinese Englishes: A Sociolinguistic History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bolton, Kingsley, ed. 2002. *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Butler, Susan. 1997. Corpus of English in Southeast Asia: Implications for a Regional Dictionary. In *English Is an Asian Language: The Philippine Context* (Proceedings of the Conference held in Manila on August 2–3, 1996), ed. Ma. Lourdes Bautista. Manila: De La Salle University Press.

Crystal, David. 2001. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Greenfield, Patricia, and Kaveri Subramanyam. 2003. Online Discourse in a Teen Chat Room: New Codes and New Modes of Coherence in a Visual Medium. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 24: 713–738.

Gumbrecht, Michelle. 2004. Blogs as "Protected Space." Workshop on the Weblogging Ecosystem: Aggregation, Analysis, and Dynamics: WWW 2004.

Haugen, Einar. 1973. Bilingualism, Language Contact, and Immigrant Languages in the United States. In *Current Trends in Linguistics*, ed. Thomas Seboek, 10: 505–591.

Herring, Susan, Inna Kouper, John Paolillo, Lois Scheidt, Michael Tyworth, Peter Welsch, Elijah Wright, and Ning Yu. 2005. *Conversations in the Blogosphere: An Analysis "From the*

Bottom Up." Proceedings of the 38th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

Huffaker, David, and Sandra Calvert. 2005. Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10(2).

Joseph, John. 2004. *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kachru, Braj. 1986. *Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions, and Models of Non-native Englishes*. New York: Pergamon.

Kawaura, Yasuyuki, Kiyomi Yamashita, and Yoshiro Kawakami. 1999. What Makes People Keep Writing Web Diaries?: Self-expression in Cyberspace. *Japanese Journal of Social Psychology* 14(3).

Lam, Wan-Shun Eva. 2000. Second Language Literacy and the Design of Self: A Case Study of a Teenager Writing on the Internet. *TESOL Quarterly* 34(3): 457–483.

Lim, Shirley Geok-Lin. 2002. Cultural Imagination and English in Hong Kong. *Asian Englishes Today—Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*, ed. Kingsley Bolton. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Lord, Robert, and Benjamin T'sou. 1985. *The Language Bomb*. Hong Kong: Longman.

Markus, Hazel, and Shinobu Kitamura. 1991. Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation. *American Psychological Association Psychological Review* 98(2): 224–253.

Miura, Asako, and Kiyomi Yamashita. 2007. Psychological and Social Influences in Blog Writing: An Online Survey of Blog Authors in Japan. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(4).

McArthur, Tom. 2005. Teaching and Using English in Hong Kong, China, and the World. *English Today* 84(4): 61–64.

Nardi, Bonnie, Diane Schiano, Michelle Gumbrecht, and Luke Swartz. 2004. "I'm Blogging This": A Closer Look at Why People Blog. *Communications of the ACM* 47(12).

Pang, Terence T. T. 2003. Hong Kong English: A Stillborn Variety?' *English Today* 14(2): 12–18.

Phillipson, Robert. 1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Poon, Franky Kai-Cheung. 2006. Hong Kong English, Chinese English, and World English. *English Today* 22(2): 23–28.

Schmidt, Jan. 2007. Blogging Practices: An Analytical Framework. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11(1).

Snow, Don. 2004. *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Stefanone, Michael, and Chyng-Yang Jang. 2008. Writing for Friends and Family: The Interpersonal Nature of Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13(1).*

Stewart, William. 1965. Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting English Teaching. In *Social Dialects and Language Learning*, ed. Roger Shuy, pp. 10–19.

Widdowson, Henry. 1998. The Theory and Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Applied Linguistics* 19(1).

Xu Xi. 2000. Writing the Literature of Non-denial. Special issue of *World Englishes* on "Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity" 19.3:415–428.

Appendix A: Blogging Questionnaire

Name:
Email:
Age/Gender:
Name of Secondary School:
Name of University:
Major:

Below are some questions about language use and blogging. Please answer these questions as completely as you can, using English and/or Chinese. If a question does not apply to you or if you choose not to answer it, you can leave it blank. There are no correct or incorrect answers to any of these questions. You can type your responses directly onto this document and email it back to Genevieve.

1. Do you write in a blog? How long have you kept this blog? How regularly do you update it?

2. When you blog, what language(s) do you use?

3. Do you read other peoples' blogs? If yes, whose blogs do you read?

4. Using percentages, characterize your time reading blogs from each of these groups:

a) Close friends: ________%

b) Friends of friends: ________%

c) Complete strangers: ________%

d) Other group: ________%

(Note: the sum of (a), (b), (c), and (d) should add up to 100%.)

5. What kind of topics do you write about in your blog? How about in the blogs that you read?

6. When you read a blog for the first time, can you "tell" whether or not the author is a person from Hong Kong? If yes, what clues give the author away as being someone from Hong Kong?

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these three statements?

a) I can express myself sufficiently in my blog.

b) I am sufficiently understood by others through my blog writing.

c) There is something about communicating via blogging that is different than emailing or face-to-face interactions.

Explain your thinking about statements (a), (b), and (c).

8. Many people have commented that Hong Kong people have a distinct way of writing both English and Cantonese, especially when these languages are used in informal contexts. In the space below, please give some examples of written "Hong Kong Cantonese" and written "Hong Kong English":

Examples of written "Hong Kong Cantonese":

Examples of written "Hong Kong English":

9. If you have a blog, would it be possible for the researchers of this project to read it? If yes, please write the web address here:

10. Are you willing to answer some follow-up questions regarding your responses in the next month? All contact will be via email (perhaps Skype).

Any additional comments or concerns:

Thank you very much for your help in answering these questions. Your assistance is greatly appreciated!

Appendix B: Four Blog Entries

(1)

四個字：

堅持到底

--

四行：

而家先發現我o地兩個其實真係嗌o左3+年交。

Talk about 大嘥時間，真係嘥o左好多好多口氣tim。

As "Ah May" would say, "俾佢激死啊"。

And there is nothing more to say than that...

完o左就完o左，以後唔會再題佢了。(慘笑)

Question:
If you had to guess from this person's writing (words, style, etc.) where would you guess this author is from? (Is this person from Hong Kong? Somewhere else?) Why do you think so? Try to describe this author if you can.

(2)

i want to do this:

kiu hei zek goek, just sit there on a shelf and relax.

too bad this is not the case!

Question:
If you had to guess from this person's writing (words, style, etc.) where would you guess this author is from? (Is this person from Hong Kong? Somewhere else?) Why do you think so? Try to describe this author if you can.

(3)

I don't know

how much I want anything anymore.

Although drinking a milk tea with M would be nice.

誰懂我的心？現在都沒什麼 expectations。

Question:
If you had to guess from this person's writing (words, style, etc.) where would you guess this author is from? (Is this person from Hong Kong? Somewhere else?) Why do you think so? Try to describe this author if you can.

(4)

BIG 瓜

瓜 has been a major catchword in my household recently. Why, you might ask? Well, because N's family grows a lot of them. And believe you me, they're HUGEMONGOUS. Like the size (and weight) of watermelons. But the kind you can make soup with. So we decided to surprise my grandmother with one of N's family's 瓜. And she was IMPRESSED (this one wasn't even a big one)—it spans the length of the three of us. Impressive, huh.

Question:

If you had to guess from this person's writing (words, style, etc.) where would you guess this author is from? (Is this person from Hong Kong? Somewhere else?) Why do you think so? Try to describe this author if you can.

The Prospects for the Development of Written Cantonese and Its Romanization

Kenneth Yeh

University of Pennsylvania

This study aims to analyze the prospects for the future development of written Cantonese in Hong Kong. It also gives special regard to the romanization of the language and focuses on a phenomenon growing on the Internet amongst Cantonese speakers regarding a romanized input system for Cantonese.

Background

Hong Kong is an oddity within the Chinese cultural context. The first odd thing one will find is that English plays an unusually prominent role in formal Hong Kong society due to the hundred years of colonization the area has experienced since the Opium War. English was *the* language of the law and of the government, and to use it well rendered oneself part of the social elite. After the handover to China in 1997 and the cessation of English to be its official formal written language, Hong Kong still markets itself as a bilingual society (something that almost spills over into false advertising).[7] The second is that Cantonese is used as the main spoken language of the Hong Kong people, almost to the complete exclusion of Mandarin. Cantonese is certainly the most ubiquitous variety of spoken Chinese one will find, and it pervades all aspects of daily life, from school to politics to business to the media. One must be cautious here and take

---

[7] John Flowerdew, David Li and Lindsay Miller, "Attitudes Towards English and Cantonese among Hong Kong Chinese University Lecturers," *TESOL Quarterly* 32 (1998): 202

note: Hong Kong is a linguistically homogenous territory, with 98% of the population speaking Cantonese. There was never any need for English as a lingua franca between different ethnic groups, as in Malaysia and India for example, except at the highest level of government.[8] The third oddity is that, whilst Cantonese is the main spoken language, Standard Chinese (i.e., Mandarin in written form) is used as the main written language medium for Chinese in Hong Kong.

Although Standard Chinese remains the dominant written language in Hong Kong, following the Dialect Literature Movement in Hong Kong during the years 1947–49,[9] Cantonese as a written language has gradually established a stronghold for itself in Hong Kong society. Written Cantonese was traditionally associated with marginalized audiences such as women and used for purveying light entertainment, and it has always been linked with the oral tradition (e.g., quotations in newspapers).[10] Although a breakthrough in recent years has seen the steady incorporation of its written form into texts for the middle class, the restrictions through which it is used principally for light entertainment and to record speech are still very much culturally enforced. A full history of its development is not needed, but I will enumerate the factors that have affected or aided the growth of written Cantonese in Hong Kong society, as an understanding of these is imperative for foreseeing the future of written Cantonese.

As Don Snow mentions in his book *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular,* ethnolinguistic vitality is the most important factor required for a language to secure and maintain a legitimate place in society, especially in a diglossic society like Hong Kong. Contrasting with Standard written Chinese (the language of high prestige), Cantonese in its written form has had just under a century's worth of real exposure, yet the latter has spread quickly. Several factors have contributed to written Cantonese's rapid rise:

1. Hong Kong was a British Colony. Cantonese found a complete safe haven from the disapproving eyes of the PRC and was able to avoid the destruction that other vernaculars

---

[8] *Ibid*., 202

[9] Don Snow, *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 101

[10] *Ibid.,* 173

like the *Wu* dialect of Shanghai experienced due to the mandated rise of Mandarin in China. The language was equally fortunate in that the British ruling government was largely indifferent to it. Whilst the British made sure that pupils learnt and were at least proficient in English from a very young age, enforced with the advent of compulsory secondary education in the 1970s and the introduction of mass university education in the late 1980s,[11] they did not actively discourage the use of Cantonese as the de facto language of instruction in schools or, for that matter, its presence in the media.

2. Cantonese was and is written by Hong Kong people for Hong Kong people, and hence it has a very high degree of market appeal. Although Cantonese is still the written language of lower prestige in Hong Kong that provides the "light" form of entertainment mentioned above, this circumstance plays to its favor in terms of its marketability. Novels in Cantonese, for example, deal mainly with the daily lives of Hong Kong people, and these ultimately speak more to their hearts because the text is in their mother tongue. The light material also encourages learning, as people learning Cantonese do not approach it as an arduous task. People who are not willing to put up with the unfamiliarity of a written vernacular in order to read an ancient saga might well be willing to make the effort to read a popular romance.[12]
3. A powerful propulsion to the growth of a language in written form occurs when the identity of its society is closely associated with its spoken language, as in the case of Hong Kong. A note to be made here is that this does not constitute a single either/or choice in the diglossic context. The growth of a low-prestige language does not mean the overthrowing of the high-prestige language. Rather, it is more likely that a new equilibrium (that incorporates more of the low-prestige language in the high) is reached between the two languages.
4. Hong Kong's economic success, its peoples' wealth and its peoples' power have

---

[11] John Flowerdew, David Li and Lindsay Miller, "Attitudes Towards English and Cantonese among Hong Kong Chinese University Lecturers," *TESOL Quarterly* 32 (1998): 202

[12] Don Snow, *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 209

contributed greatly to written Cantonese's ethnolinguistic vitality. This point may seem obvious, but all too often the focus on languages becomes fixed on the narrow linguistic aspect of the language, and people fail to take in the big picture. Ultimately, the rise and fall of languages have a direct correlation with the rise and fall of the communities that use them. Hong Kong's prosperity has greatly increased Cantonese's prestige, to the extent that Mandarin has started to incorporate written words from Cantonese into Standard Chinese, a circumstance to which people have even given a name: "the tail wagging the dragon."

Having reviewed the evidence that written Cantonese has grown in Hong Kong, and the reasons for it, in the next section I will give an example of one way in which Cantonese may be able to develop further, in a genre I have deemed most likely to see notable change. I will then move to the phenomenon of the romanization of Cantonese and the subject of inputting characters.

Newspapers

Marked increases in the use of Cantonese have tended to coincide with the appearance of new genres in which, right from the start, the conventions of the genre tolerate a higher degree of vernacular use (e.g., advertising). It is harder for a vernacular to break into an established convention than to establish itself without competition in a certain genre. On the other hand, Cantonese has surpassed expectations by increasingly infiltrating areas that were traditionally the exclusive preserve of Standard Chinese. The newspaper is one such area, and written Cantonese's proportion of that medium is set to grow considerably with the advent of more newspapers like the *Apple Daily*. The *Apple Daily* was founded in 1995 by Jimmy Lai Chee Ying, and its main sections include: "Local News," "Foreign News," "Finance," "Entertainment," and "Sports" amongst other sections. But its real popularity as Hong Kong's second best-selling newspaper is derived from its concentration on celebrity coverage, sensationalist news reportage, and its anti-government political positions: the kind of all-round newspaper Hong Kong

socialites want to read.[13] *Apple Daily* was the first newspaper in Hong Kong to start using extensive written Cantonese in its articles, and not just in the headlines. When high-level government officials were quoted in direct speech, it appeared in Cantonese in the article, where until recently it would have been translated into Standard Chinese. *Apple Daily*'s market success has largely been attributed to the fact that it has been willing to go against the political grain, but there is no doubt that the use of written Cantonese that speaks directly to the hearts of the Hong Kong people in its headlines and articles has helped considerably in the sales of the paper. These market strategies have not gone unnoticed, and when one compares the number of Cantonese articles present in any newspaper today versus the amount in the same paper a decade ago, the proportion of Cantonese words and phrases has increased across the board. Newspapers here have inadvertently created an extremely good environment for the development of written Cantonese. To be competitive and profitable in the market, they have had to start adopting more and more Cantonese into their headlines, quotes, and articles. This in turn exposes more and more people to the phenomenon of written Cantonese. As time goes by, and as a younger generation, a generation that grew up with written Cantonese, becomes Hong Kong's future middle and even upper class, the acceptance of written Cantonese is bound to increase. The newspaper is one of the ways Cantonese could work its way up into the upper echelons of society, and as of the present, it seems to be the medium that is proving to be the most influential. It is also an example of a genre that has gradually accepted a vernacular in its midst, rather than ousting it and forcing it to create its own new milieu elsewhere. It is important to notice that the association of written Cantonese with speech and the stigma marginalizing it to non-serious articles will not be broken in the immediate future. Nevertheless, people have found that there are economic as well as cultural reasons for using Cantonese in writing.

Romanization, Inputting and the Internet

Having discussed the importation of written Cantonese into a conventionally Standard Chinese setting, I will now turn to an example of its dominance in a new form. The new genre

---

[13] Wikipedia, "Apple Daily" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_Daily (5/11/2008)

that I am about to discuss not only involves Chinese Characters, but the English alphabet as well, and is something that is not only happening in Hong Kong, but all over the world with Cantonese speakers. I believe that this is an important step towards the legitimization of Cantonese, for the following reasons.

At this moment, one of the major differences between Mandarin and Cantonese is that one has a widespread and accepted Romanization, and the other does not. The Linguistic Society of Hong Kong developed the *Jyutping* romanization for Cantonese in 1993,[14] and this is the most widespread system used currently. The problem is that no one knows or uses it sufficiently frequently save certain groups of specialists. When one asks native Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong or out in the Cantonese Diaspora whether they are familiar with this system, they either have never heard of it before, or if they are somewhat learned, they will say yes, but they do not know how to use it. Is it not somewhat ironic that this is the main system (other than the International Phonetic Alphabet) used by foreigners to learn Cantonese, and yet its native speakers do not know it? What would a native speaker do when confronted with a query by such people on pronunciation in Cantonese? Whilst Mandarin has *Hanyu Pinyin* as its standard romanization system, nothing comparable has been established in the realm of Cantonese. Romanization is important for the development of Cantonese because it will consequently aid learning and boost literacy in the way that *Pinyin* has done for Mandarin, thereby increasing its growth potential.

Romanization also aids the inputting of Chinese characters into computers through a more efficient system, which is becoming increasingly important in this information age. Currently the way that Cantonese is learnt is through a haphazard method of trial and error. The fact that readers of Cantonese can make use of light reading material to enhance their written Cantonese knowledge, while somewhat effective, is still a far cry from the established platform that Mandarin has. Moreover, the system people use to romanize and input Cantonese must be used extensively by native speakers, not just scholars or foreign students of Cantonese. There is one place however, where native speakers of Cantonese all over the world are creating their own

[14] Cantonese Romanization http://www.lshk.org/cantonese.php (accessed 5/11/2008)

system of romanization and inputting: the Internet.

A brief note on input methods for computers: I will focus especially on romanized input methods for Chinese because romanization has proved to be the currently most efficient way of inputting characters into the computer. There are input systems that use stroke order or other methods, but romanization is by far the fastest way of typing Chinese characters. Mandarin uses *Hanyu Pinyin*, but the most widespread form of input for Cantonese into computers is currently the *Cang Jie* (*Chong Kit*) input system. It is a clumsy system in which certain "generic" parts of characters are assigned to keys on the standard keyboard. One must combine the "parts" in such a way as to create a certain character. (For further information, please see the description for *Cang Jie* on Wikipedia. I have also attached in Appendix 1 a picture from that site that explains the system well.[15])

August 9, 1995, was a turning point in the history of computers and communication. It was the date on which the Internet web browser Netscape went public. Until then, the Internet had been the province of the early adopters and geeks; Netscape sent a wake-up call resounding through the world. People suddenly could digitize music, photos and all sorts of data and transport them to anyone's computer. With the launch of Windows 95 in the same year, the great change was settled.[16] The launch of Netscape, followed by Windows 95, which gave all PCs built-in Internet support, is one of ten "flatteners" of the world that Thomas L. Friedman cites in *The World Is Flat*, the bestseller that recounts the phenomenon of globalization and the "flattening" of the world playing field over the last two decades. The Internet was truly a revolutionary product that made the dissemination and communication of knowledge and information infinitely more convenient, and in some cases possible where it previously was not. I start with this watershed event, because the phenomenon of the romanization en masse of Cantonese really starts with it. No one in Hong Kong knew about Unicode *Pinyin* input methods for Mandarin (not many people had caught on at the time); they only wanted to get what they wanted to say across chat programs as fast as they could. With no input system to type Cantonese

---

[15] Wikipedia, "Cangjie Input Method," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cangjie_method (accessed 8/11/2008)

[16] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 56–57

into computers (the *Jyutping* input having only come out recently on Windows Vista,[17] and *Cang Jie* not fully customized for Cantonese yet), the Hong Kong people turned to the simplest alternative, the alphabet. This started what I shall call: the Cantonese Internet Romanization Movement.

Don Snow argues in his book on Cantonese that, amongst those who deal with languages, there is a tendency to ensure that they, especially in their written form, are standardized and pure. He remarks that in fact, natural developmental stages may be even more beneficial to the development of a written vernacular, as survival is the most important primary issue, and if one starts censoring and standardizing too early it may kill the language prematurely. It is also easier for people to "pick up" the written vernacular if it first appears in small manageable doses. Snow notes that when the vernacular is not taught in schools, "gradual exposure may be the most practical route."[18] This is exactly the route that romanization is taking in Hong Kong today, by natives, for natives, and it happens to be in the form of another of Thomas Friedman's world flatteners: open sourcing.[19]

Open sourcing was originally a term for computer software released under an open source copyright license. This license makes the source code of the program involved available to all users for modification and enhancement. Computer software such as the popular web browser Firefox is open source, with everyone all over the world contributing to modify and enhance the program's capabilities. The romanization of Cantonese is taking exactly this route on its way to standardization. Cantonese speakers all around the world are chatting in Cantonese romanization everyday, blogging and commenting on their friends' sites and inventing new romanization for words that do not have it yet. One might be tempted to ask why Cantonese needs another method of romanization rather than sticking to the *Jyutping* system it already has. The answer may be found by looking at the development of Mandarin.

---

[17] Wikipedia, "JyutPing" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyutping (accessed 6/11/2008)

[18] Don Snow, *Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular* (Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 208

[19] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 81

Mandarin itself, for various reasons, has gone through its fair share of romanization systems. *Tongyong Pinyin,* for example, was a romanization system with, of course, a political intent, but what the *Jyutping* method most resembles with regard to Mandarin romanization is the GR (*Guolu Luoma Zi*) system. Many scholars believe that the GR system is the best system for romanizing Mandarin because of its built-in tones. However, it was too complex a system for the masses to grapple with and learn, and consequently it never achieved widespread usage. People tended to opt for the simpler *Hanyu Pinyin,* and today that has won out over all other romanization systems, becoming the world standard system for romanizing Mandarin. In the same way, I believe the *Jyutping* system has not caught on because of its complexity and lack of user-friendliness. A much simpler romanization system is needed, and this has been under construction on the web.

I have attached, in Appendix 2, a conversation I had with a friend recently, using computer-input instant messaging. In it one sees the fruits of years of Cantonese native speakers trying to find the best way to romanize their native language, along with comments that may serve to shed further light upon this complex subject. I've shortened the interchange so that it focuses on the topic at hand, but other than that, this is the original conversation. The translations, by me, are in parentheses next to the Cantonese.

When examining the text, notice the difference in the way we romanize Cantonese. For example, I say "ngor" for the character "我" meaning "I" in Chinese, and she uses "ngo." I confess that I myself am also inconsistent when writing romanized Cantonese. I use both of the romanizations "dou" and "do" for the character "度" meaning "degrees" as we talk about the temperature. Thus it is clear that this form of romanization is still in its developmental stages. However, one gleans much more from this simple conversation. Both of us know that there is a "conventional" (*Jyutping*) way of romanization, but we both do not know how to use it. When asked about the number of people who know how to use the *Jyutping* system, it's clear from her response (1 out of 50 in the end) that it has extremely scarce utility. We also learn that Cantonese people prefer the more backward and complex *Cang Jie* (I figured out what "chong keet" was later) method of input into computers in spite of the fact that the *Juytping* system has been made known to the public. Moreover, people choose to write using *Hanyu Pinyin*, sacrificing their

mother tongue to write in essentially a second language, because of the system's greater efficiency. Having taken all these factors into account, what does this say about the *Jyutping* system? What, then, are the prospects of Cantonese romanization and inputting?

Like *Guoyu Luoma Zi*, the *Jyutping* system is a good, but ultimately too complex and difficult tool for the average Cantonese native speaker to grasp. In its place, people are inventing their own romanization system, which I suspect will in time metamorphose into the future standard romanization method for written Cantonese, just as *Hanyu Pinyin* did.[20] It will be a system that started on the Internet between native speakers, closely tied to and propelled by the need to communicate with the world in this digital age. If and when this system finally develops into a fully-fledged romanization system for written Cantonese, Cantonese will have taken a monumental step towards legitimacy in Hong Kong, and I believe that will virtually guarantee its survival in the years to come.

As this study comes to a close, one last piece of this puzzle has yet to be discussed, and that piece is critical to the survival and prosperity of written Cantonese. That puzzle piece is the PRC government, and the 39 years of autonomy that Hong Kong has left, dating from the time of the handover.

China is in the midst of its greatest transition ever. No matter from which angle one looks, whether it is political, economical or sociological, China is changing fast. Yet on the subject of language reform, any change from the current policy remains to be seen. The Chinese government still fosters an unfavorable environment regarding vernaculars in written form, as the authorities are adamant that Mandarin must be the sole official language of the PRC for the sake of unity amongst the Chinese. Hong Kong's colonization was a blessing in disguise for written Cantonese, and Hong Kong's 50 years of autonomy after the handover will buy Cantonese the time it needs to develop. The true test lies ahead. In the 39 years Hong Kong has left, will Cantonese establish itself as a legitimate written language in Hong Kong? A spoken language is far easier to suppress than a written one, and an interesting situation would arise if China had suddenly to face a Hong Kong that had a large portion of its written language in

---

[20] The chief difference is that *Hanyu Pinyin* was created by a government committee, whereas the emerging Cantonese romanization is emerging completely without benefit of government support.

Cantonese. Romanization, as I have discussed above, will be a key factor in bringing native Cantonese speakers to a consensus in building a platform, a platform that will no doubt augment written Cantonese's prestige in Hong Kong. The next few decades will be extremely interesting to watch. If written Cantonese does not reach widespread acceptance, its survival will be threatened in 39 years. However, the contrary outcome is something that, as a native Cantonese speaker, I await with great excitement.

Appendices

Appendix 1. An example of the *Cang Jie* (*Chong Kit*) inputting system

Read in Modern Standard Mandarin pronunciation, the characters say "Cang Jie shoufa" (*Cang Jie* input method).

Appendix 2. Instant messaging communication between the author and a friend

Emily: how've you been?

Kenneth: ngor seung yung gwong dung wa tong lei gong gei gui ah... (I want to speak in Cantonese with you for a while)
it's for an experiment

Emily: mo mun tai (No problem)

Emily: but guo ngo deee chinglish ho char (But my chinglish is very bad)
haha

Kenneth: mo mun tai (No problem)

Kenneth: zhui gun deem ar (How have you been lately?)

Emily: gei ho gei ho (Not bad, not bad)
haha
ho dong nga (It's really cold)

Kenneth: hai meh? (Really?)
gei do dou ah? (What's the temperature?)

Emily: um
dai koi 7 dou zhor yau (Around 7 degrees?)
haha

Kenneth: ...

Kenneth: tsut dou? (Seven degrees?)

Emily: hai ya (Yeah)
but guo yao fung gah mar (But I mean there's wind…)

Kenneth: wai dou gei dong wor (Whoa, that's pretty cold)
haha
lee dou ngor lum yao sang sup gei do la.. (It's only in the teens over here I think)

Emily: WAH

Kenneth: mmm (Yeah)

hai lor! (Yeah, right?)

dou m dong ge! (It's not even cold!)

Emily: i can't do this

my chinglish is SO BAD

I am just stuck

haha

Kenneth: HAHA it's not chinglish man!

Emily: i fail so awfully at chinglish

I'm surprised you understood it. Most people take a while to decipher what i say

Kenneth: haha

Emily: because I don't follow the conventional way

Kenneth: what's the "conventional way"?

Emily: there's a specific way of doing it, for example, certain sounds have certain ways of spelling them

so "ts"

for the ts sound from 7

Kenneth: is there a standard?

Emily: yeah

there's a way to do it properly, but i don't know how, or rather

Kenneth: but don't ppl just do it random?

Emily: there's a way that most people do it

Kenneth: oh

yeah ok

Emily: i swear - my french is better than my chinglish :p

Kenneth: have you ever heard of the jyutping system for cantonese?

Emily: yeah yeah

	i have
	my mom works on it, i think :p
Kenneth:	do you know it?
Emily:	no :
Kenneth:	would you have known it if your mum didn't work on it?
Emily:	there's a RIGHT way of pinyin for cantonese
	well, i know she works on it but i don't actually know the specifics
Kenneth:	right…
	ok
	how many ppl would you say on avg know the Jyutping system
	we're talking native canto speakers
	like...
	know it and use it
Emily:	i'd say 1 out of 10?
	perhaps even less
	maybe even 1 in 20?
	you know, probably less
	1 in 50
Kenneth:	hahahaha
Emily:	haha
	because that's one of the frustrations my mom has
	they're trying to popularize the system so they can create a computer input system
	similar to the mandarin pinyin input system
Kenneth:	but i heard that windows vista has it in their input no?
Emily:	yes - it exists but it's not as popular
	as 9 fong
	or chong keet

Kenneth: what's that?

Emily: 倉 something

Kenneth: i know chong but

what is that

Emily: nono

Kenneth: is that another system?

Emily: it's yeah

so it's CHONG KEET

it's another input method

Kenneth: ok...

but that's not official?

Emily: yeah

no, it's pretty widespread

lots of cantonese speakers use that

Kenneth: ok

Emily: as the input system of choice instead of any pinyin based system

Kenneth: as in…it's characters?

Emily: yeah

Kenneth: but that's clumsy man...

Emily: yah

Kenneth: it's not fast….i mean…you know how much easier it is to input by pinyin…

Emily: yeah

i do :p

haha

Kenneth: i know of canto character input based systems

yeah

just didn't know it was called chong keet

Emily: yeah haha

for me - i just use mandarin pinyin cause it's fast for me

Kenneth: yeah

for sure

same

ok…thanks

References

Books

Friedman, Thomas L. The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Snow, Don. Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular. Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

Articles

Flowerdew, John, David Li and Lindsay Miller. "Attitudes towards English and Cantonese among Hong Kong Chinese University Lecturers," *TESOL Quarterly* 32 (1998): 201–231.

Websites

Cantonese Romanization http://www.lshk.org/cantonese.php (accessed 5/11/2008)

Wikipedia, "Apple Daily" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_Daily (5/11/2008)

Wikipedia, "Cangjie Input Method," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cangjie_method (accessed 8/11/2008)

Wikipedia, "JyutPing" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyutping (accessed 6/11/2008)

Rendering Sinograms Obsolete:

Vietnamese Script Reform and the Future of Chinese Characters

Matthew A. Marcucci

University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

Vietnamese writing has rendered Chinese characters obsolete. More precisely, the romanization scheme, *quoc ngu*, ultimately won out over sinograms[21] as the preferred way to transcribe spoken Vietnamese. In contrast, the millennia-old pictophonetic Chinese writing system is still the official script of numerous, often mutually unintelligible languages spoken by the diverse populations that currently reside within the borders of the People's Republic of China. What factors compelled the Vietnamese to fully embrace an alphabet at the expense of both the Chinese writing system and *chu nom*, an indigenous script largely based on the characters?

Fundamental to an analysis of the development of writing in Vietnam is the acknowledgment that the victory of *quoc ngu* over sinograms essentially amounts to the replacement of an older colonial borrowing by a more recent one. Indeed, for much of its recorded history the area of contemporary Vietnam has been subjected to external political control by two imperial powers: China and France. Han China seized Vietnam's northernmost territory in the third century B.C. and ruled for roughly a millennium, until A.D. 939. France completed its annexation of the region in the 1860s, only to relinquish its hold over Vietnam soon after the Second World War. During these periods of subjugation, the Vietnamese populace was forced to adhere to the linguistic imperatives promulgated by its respective colonial administrations. Presumably, both Chinese characters and *quoc ngu* were at the time of their

[21] A term that is used interchangeably with "Chinese characters" to refer to the Chinese writing system (Mair 1996).

reception unpalatably perceived as instruments of foreign political oppression. Sinograms, however, gradually assumed an entrenched position within Vietnamese culture, as they were the prized medium of the small but prominent Confucian literati. On the other hand, romanization schemes were first used to transcribe Vietnamese by European Catholic missionaries, and were later appropriated by the French to further their political and cultural influence over the Vietnamese population. It is therefore remarkable that the Vietnamese chose for themselves a foreign script with an indubitably tarnished legacy. That *quoc ngu* could so rapidly shed its repellent association with colonialism and become the official Vietnamese script betrays, if nothing else, its profound efficacy.

In Vietnam, Chinese characters met an unhappy fate when confronted by an alphabetic writing system. What implications does the Vietnamese linguistic reality have for the continued use of sinograms in China? Moreover, why have the sinograms continued to survive in China despite the concurrent existence of such effective romanization schemes as *Hanyu pinyin*? William C. Hannas succinctly describes the context in which the shift from sinograms to *quoc ngu* took place in Vietnam.

> Vietnam never had a top-down coordinated, state backed movement to effect the [script] reform. Rather, the impetus for change began innocuously and trickled around slowly until the characters were removed not by fiat but by their inability to compete with a viable, tested, popularly based system [*quoc ngu*], grounded on solid phonetic principles and more the product of growth than invention (1997:84).

Hannas straightforwardly asserts that Chinese characters were simply "unable to compete" with the romanization systems that, after a protracted period of organic development, eventually coalesced into *quoc ngu*. In contrast, language reform in China is inevitably the product of "top-down coordinated, state backed movement[s]," and therefore stifles orthographical competition. Upon breaking free from colonial bondage, the Vietnamese nevertheless chose to implement a script that was advanced by their French colonizers. In so doing, they rendered Chinese characters obsolete as a means to express spoken Vietnamese in writing. Perhaps sinograms would meet a similar fate in China if script reform adhered to the maxim 听其自然 and, in

"allowing things to follow their natural course," responded to the practical demands of the people.

The Development of Writing in Vietnam

The recorded history of the Vietnamese people began in B.C. 111 when the Han Empire extended its realm into the northernmost section of contemporary Vietnam. Chinese control of the region never reached farther south than the seventeenth parallel, near to the location of Hue, a city perhaps best known as the imperial capital of the Nguyen dynasty. The Han conquest of the region also marks the inauguration of Vietnamese writing. According to John DeFrancis, "the early speakers of Vietnamese had no writing before the coming of the Chinese….[T]he people who came under the control of the Han empire were at a preliterate stage of so-called 'tribal' organization" (DeFrancis 1977:9). Owing to the desire of the Chinese to prevent any Vietnamese from permeating the governmental administration, Chinese governors of Vietnamese provinces "if not entirely hostile…did little to spread education" (1977:12). As a result, during the millennium of Chinese occupation very few Vietnamese themselves ever attained fluency in writing classical Chinese.

The Vietnamese gained their independence from imperial China in A.D. 939, and for roughly the following three centuries sinograms existed as the only means to write the Vietnamese language. This early period of Vietnamese autonomy also witnessed the large-scale adoption of many Chinese cultural institutions of a decidedly Confucian sort, including the establishment in 1089 of nine degrees of civil service and military officials (DeFrancis 1977:14). Along with the implementation of this Confucian-style bureaucracy, sinograms secured a central position within Vietnamese culture. The Confucian elite never consisted of more than a handful of the Vietnamese population, yet they maintained their literary tradition well into the twentieth century. Vietnamese literature penned in sinograms is generally designated as Sino-Vietnamese, a term that refers to "anything written in classical Chinese by a Vietnamese and pronounced, when read aloud, in the Vietnamese manner" (DeFrancis 1977:15). Sino-Vietnamese is therefore indistinguishable from classical Chinese. Moreover, even when read aloud, Sino-Vietnamese was capable of being understood only by those with fluency in classical Chinese, a very small

proportion of the population as a whole.[22] Naturally, many Vietnamese felt compelled to express in writing their substantial repository of indigenous oral literature, a task to which Sino-Vietnamese was incapable of rising. By the thirteenth century, *chu nom*, a curious home-grown script modeled after Chinese characters, had emerged to satisfy this demand.

The oldest extant inscription in demotic Vietnamese[23] dates from 1209, and consists of the use of Chinese characters purely for their phonetic value to represent the sounds of spoken Vietnamese (DeFrancis 1977:21). This practice likely had its origins in Buddhism, which arrived to Vietnam in the second century A.D. Buddhism's "missionary zeal" necessitated its appropriation of vernacular languages to facilitate its spread throughout Asia, and the emergence of demotic Vietnamese is indubitably a consequence of Buddhism's arrival in Vietnam (Mair 1994:721). To transcribe unfamiliar Sanskrit terms, Vietnamese Buddhists would make phonetic use of sinograms without regard for their semantic value. *Chu nom*, literally "Southern writing," emerged alongside of Sino-Vietnamese, which was subsequently designated as *chu nho*, or "writing of the scholars" (Hannas 1997:79). Sino-Vietnamese remained the official language of the Vietnamese court for the majority of its subsequent history. As a consequence, *chu nom* was limited to such expressions of literary composition as poetry, the area in which it has left its most lasting legacy (DeFrancis 1977:44). The writing system is complex, and, as Hannas trenchantly observes, "There appear to be as many classification schemes for *chu nom* characters as there have been people who have analyzed it" (1997:80). Perhaps the most notable aspect of *chu nom* is the script's close resemblance to Chinese characters, and many of the graphs are indeed sinograms that have been appropriated wholesale. However, as the script evolved it gradually began to make use of the component parts of Chinese characters in a variety of ways, thus rendering it completely indecipherable, yet frustratingly familiar, to a reader of Chinese. Ultimately, the staggering complexity of *chu nom* precluded the further spread of its influence: "the use of characters as the basic units of writing guaranteed that the orthography would be as complex as the Chinese [*chu nho*] with which it was competing, with none of the latter's status

---

[22] Victor Mair contends that Sino-Vietnamese was wholly a written enterprise, and probably not capable of being understood even when read aloud (conversation 2008).

[23] Another term for *chu nom* (DeFrancis 1977).

[as the official script of the court]" (Hannas 1997:84).

The use of *chu nom* reached its zenith toward the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth, as literary works composed in this system were embraced by people from all social strata of the Vietnamese population. Unlike *chu nho*, when read aloud *chu nom* could be understood by nearly any Vietnamese speaker, regardless of formal education or degree of literacy in the script. DeFrancis observes that, in due course, "[t]he fact that even illiterates could understand the Nom literature influenced the way in which it was written. Books had to be composed not to be read but to be recited," which undoubtedly lent the writing system an overtly local flavor (1977:46).

Differing perceptions of the home-grown *chu nom* script mirrored factions of Vietnamese society itself. On the one hand, "diehard bureaucrats and scholars of Chinese" abhorred the script. On the other, those who detested the Confucian governmental bureaucracy sought to divorce the Vietnamese language from Chinese characters entirely and replace all Sino-Vietnamese writing with *chu nom*. In between these two extremes existed many who, regardless of their political leanings, tolerated the traditionally limited use of *chu nom* for composing such literature as song and poetry (DeFrancis 1977:44). Indeed, its very indigenousness "marginalized [*chu nom*'s] applicability in the eyes of the educated, bureaucratic elite to areas of local (native Vietnmese) culture" (Hannas 1997:83). For these Confucian bureaucrats, classical Chinese was not only an international *lingua franca* of "state and scholarship," but also "their symbol of group identity," an identity that signified the political sway they wielded over their empire's population and the elite position they occupied within the Vietnamese social hierarchy (Hannas 1997:83).

Methods of romanizing the Vietnamese language emerged irregularly at the hands of European missionaries, who began to appear on Vietnam's shores around the turn of the seventeenth century. Gradually, missionary activity served to widen a gulf already existent within Vietnamese society: that separating the Confucian ruling elite from the "economically depressed peasantry" (DeFrancis 1977:48). Although the missionaries attempted to convert as many Vietnamese as possible, they met with the greatest success among those segments of the population that, to quote sometime director of the Ecole Coloniale in Paris Etienne Aymonier, would trade "religion for a sack of rice" (DeFrancis 1977:48). Notwithstanding its crudeness,

this statement betrays the extreme degree of social stratification within the Vietnamese population, a reality that facilitated the conversion of significant numbers to Christianity.

> Many [Vietnamese] were doubtless attracted to a doctrine [Christianity] that expressed concern for the salvation of their souls in a situation that was all too frequently characterized by a marked lack of concern for their welfare on the part of the indigenous ruling class (DeFrancis 1977: 49).

Missionaries needed to obtain fluency in spoken Vietnamese in order to evangelize. Driven by this necessity, they devised numerous systems "to serve not as full-fledged orthographies, but as working notations to fulfill limited, real-world functions" (Hannas 1997:85). In 1651, Alexandre de Rhodes, a French polyglot missionary who had lived intermittently in Vietnam since 1624, penned a *Dictionarium Annamaticum, Lusitanum et Latinum* (Vietnamese–Portuguese–Latin Dictionary), which is generally considered to be "the first systematic scheme for the romanization of Vietnamese" (DeFrancis 1977:54). Nevertheless, two centuries would pass before the publication of the next work in romanized Vietnamese, another *Dictionario anamatico-latinum* compiled by Father Jean-Louis Taberd in 1838. The script of Vietnamese Christians was *chu nom*, while sinograms remained the writing system of the elite (1977:64). Romanized Vietamese basically "lay in a state of incubation" until after the French arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century (Hannas 1997:85).

On the eve of the French military conquest of Vietnam, a traditionalist Confucian faction dominated the court of Minh Mang, the reigning Nguyen emperor. This ruler directed the energies of his administration in a two-pronged effort to restrain commercial pressures exerted by European nations, and to stifle the spread of Christianity by reinstating a formal policy of persecution, which contributed to the deaths of ninety-five Catholics (DeFrancis 1977:70).

In this highly sensitive political climate, Napoleon III failed in his effort to obtain a treaty that demanded "commercial freedom" and "religious toleration" (DeFrancis 1977:70). As a consequence, he sent a naval expedition under the command of Admiral Rigault de Genouilly to Vietnam in 1858. In 1862, this force formally began the French annexation of Vietnam's three southernmost provinces. At the beginning of their rule, the French admirals largely followed in

the footsteps of their missionary forebears in educating themselves in Vietnamese by means of romanizing the language. In 1861, Naval Lieutenant Gabirel Aubaret compiled a 157-page French-Vietnamese/Vietnamese-French lexicon, which "marked the beginning of a new phase in the use of romanized writing in Viet Nam" (1977:76). Indeed, French colonial policy rapidly began to influence the Vietnamese language, particularly in expanding the use of romanized Vietnamese: "It served as both an aid to their own study of the language and as a counter to Chinese writing and *chu nom*, both of which entailed unwanted associations with another colonial power [China]" (Hannas 1997:85).

The French became convinced early in their rule that the biggest hindrance to the spread of their influence was the Chinese script. John DeFrancis quotes from an 1866 letter composed by Paulin Vial, Directeur du Cabinet du Gouverneur de la Cochinchine.

> From the first days it was recognized that the Chinese language [classical Chinese] was a barrier between us [the French] and the natives…. Consequently we are obliged to follow the traditions of our own system of education; it is the only one which can bring close to us the Annamites of the colony by inculcating in them the principles of European civilization and isolating them from the hostile influence of our neighbors. (1977:77)

Unless the use of sinograms was prohibited, the French believed, Confucian ideology and cultural influence from China would be perpetuated unceasingly, thus forever preventing the French from securing their dominion over the Vietnamese population. Consequently, the French embraced romanized Vietnamese, as it allowed the Vietnamese themselves to write their spoken language directly without recourse to sinograms, and simultaneously "free[d] the French from dependence on interpreters and traditional scholars" (DeFrancis 1977:80).

In 1865, the French colonial government sponsored the publication of *Gia Dinh Bao*, the very first periodical printed entirely in romanized Vietnamese (save for its titular characters: 嘉定报), which "marked the beginning of journalism in romanized Vietnamese" (1977:82). The term *quoc ngu* appears as a designation for romanized Vietnamese for the first time in an 1867 article printed in *Gia Dinh Bao*. DeFrancis conjectures that the term *quoc ngu* ("national

language," a cognate of the Chinese word 国语) probably emerged in Sino-Vietnamese to distinguish the Chinese language from spoken Vietnamese during the millennium of Chinese colonial rule. When it was appropriated by the French, they were apparently unaware of its "possible nationalistic implications relative to France" (1977:87). Nevertheless, by 1870 the ascendancy of *quoc ngu* was underway.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the linguistic situation in Vietnam had reached the apex of its complexity. Chinese, French, and Vietnamese each were spoken by their respective substrata of Vietnamese society: Chinese speakers wrote in Sino-Vietnamese, Vietnamese speakers could write in either *chu nom* or *quoc ngu*, and French speakers wrote in French.[24] In this atmosphere of both linguistic and orthographical competition, spoken Vietnamese and *quoc ngu* would ultimately emerge victorious, but not until Vietnam gained its independence from France in 1945. Until then, in fact, *quoc ngu* was still scorned by many Vietnamese. DeFrancis describes the sociolinguistic climate in Vietnam in the late nineteenth-century as follows: "For serious writing one used Chinese. For secondary things like poetry one might perhaps use Nom. Apart from such restricted usage in literature, Vietnamese was merely a vehicle for common everyday speech" (1977:95).

After consolidating their power in Cochinchina in 1879, the French pursued an educational policy that wavered between two pedagogical methods: indirect and direct teaching of French (DeFrancis 1977). Both methods were devoted to, as Joseph LoBianco asserts, "[t]he paramount objective of the promotion of French" (2001:183). The indirect approach, advocated by the Resident General in Vietnam in 1886, Paul Bert, had its origins in the practice of instructing Vietnamese students in *quoc ngu*, first as a means to transcribe and pronounce Chinese characters. After acquiring fluency with the romanization system this way, students would begin learning French, which, "[f]or students who had sharpened their memories learning thousands of Chinese characters…was child's play" (DeFrancis 1977:130). Later on, the transcription of sinograms into *quoc ngu* was apparently replaced by mere study of romanization

---

[24] In his exhaustive work, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920–1945*, David Marr asserts that there were no less than eight possible permutations of spoken language and script available to Vietnamese at the dawn of the twentieth century (Marr 1971:147).

so that when it came time to learn French, students already had a working knowledge of the Latin alphabet. (1977:138)

The indirect approach also, as Hannas asserts, tempered the growing popularity of *chu nom* as a "vehicle of anticolonial protest," for it offered the Vietnamese a "Western-style alternative" for writing in their own tongue (1997:85). On the other hand, advocates of the direct approach believed that instruction in *quoc ngu* had no value as an intermediate stage on the path to learning French (DeFrancis 1977:137). Such proponents of teaching French directly "feared that promoting *quoc ngu* would lead to a movement away from French, as the notation took on the function and trappings of a regular orthography and as it acquired the nationalist image that its name implied" (Hannas 1997:85). These sentiments also betray "another constant in French policy:" their "almost unrelieved belief in the inferiority of the Vietnamese language as a vehicle for abstract thought and scientific reasoning" (LoBianco 2001:184).

Before the outbreak of the First World War, inklings of what ultimately evolved into nationwide embracement of *quoc ngu* began to appear in Vietnamese society, particularly among radical-minded reformers who sought to elevate their nation's degree of civilization. The Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1905, the first Asian military victory over a European power, inspired an upsurge of ethnic pride throughout East Asia. In the wake of this monumental event, something of a revolutionary fervor swept through Vietnam and motivated many to actively resist French colonial rule through the written word. DeFrancis describes the significance of this trend, and contextualizes it within the larger progression of colonial Vietnamese history.

> In contrast to earlier scholar-gentry resistors who disdained the romanization and wrote all their literature in Chinese or Chu Nom, the new generation of leaders decided that they could also make use of Quoc Ngu in the war of words against the French and their collaborators (1977:163).

In an ironic twist of fate, certain Vietnamese were beginning to employ *quoc ngu* as a weapon against the French, the very people who, just decades beforehand, advocated its use as an instrument of "linguistic genocide" (1977:240). Such forward-thinking Vietnamese realized that *quoc ngu* was perhaps the most effective way to aid their nation's people in absorbing the

rapid and numerous technological advancements occurring worldwide, which they themselves experienced firsthand in studying abroad in Japan or the West. Indeed, *Quoc ngu* was an ideal medium with which to render the “influx of new words coined to represent Western scientific, technological, and cultural concepts” (Hannas 1997:85). Relatively informal publications such as journals and newsletters served as the forum in which *quoc ngu* was standardized and disseminated. This process was crucial to the eventual adoption of the script as Vietnam’s official orthography. As DeFrancis asserts, “…what is of decisive importance in the establishment of a system of writing is not the existence or availability of such a system [such as *pinyin* in China today] but the extent of its actual use in publication” (1977:193).

According to historian David Marr, Vietnamese intellectuals active during the period between the two World Wars shared three assumptions on the nature of language: that “words must be used correctly in order to communicate properly and hence foster appropriate conduct,” that “spoken Vietnamese was an important and perhaps even an essential component of national identity,” and, owing to their awareness of similar developments in Japan and Europe, that widespread literacy plays an integral role “in the strengthening of nation-states” (1981:138). Each of these notions betrays a heightened national and cultural consciousness on the part of the Vietnamese intelligentsia. Furthermore, these three assumptions collectively display the powerful transformation that the Vietnamese intellectual climate underwent during the period of French colonialism. By the twentieth century, a Confucian, Chinese-speaking elite no longer monopolized the intellectual life of Vietnam. A millennium-old tradition had all but faded into oblivion, and so too would its lifeblood: the sinograms. Poetry from the turn of the twentieth century displays the sentiment on the part of many Vietnamese that Confucian learning was an irrelevant, outdated undertaking (DeFrancis 1977:155). This conviction having gained all but universal acceptance among Vietnamese intellectuals, Marr boldly asserts that the shift to *quoc ngu* was bound to happen: “Once they [the intellectuals] had decided that Chinese characters were no longer appropriate to Vietnam, and that *nom* was not worth overhauling, then the move to some form of romanized script was logical, perhaps inevitable” (1981:149).

The drive to achieve universal literacy became the impetus that ultimately enabled *quoc ngu* to supplant all other methods of writing Vietnamese. On the eve of the Second World War,

with a national population of roughly twenty-three million, five hundred thousand Vietnamese children attended grammar school. Only ten percent of these continued their education at the elementary level, and of these few only one percent went on to secondary schools. Based on such figures, various historians have estimated national literacy rates during this period to fall somewhere in between five and twenty percent (DeFrancis 1977:218). On 2 December 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, yet it was not until 1954 that the Vietnamese finally succeeded in ridding their country of the French once and for all. This early period of tenuous independence witnessed fervent government campaigns to eradicate illiteracy. Just days after declaring independence, Ho Chi Minh issued a *Chong Nan That Hoc*, or "Appeal upon the entire people to combat illiteracy" (LoBianco 2001:195). The text of Ho's statement plainly displays his commitment to *quoc ngu* as the means to accomplish his end.

> Vietnamese! To consolidate national independence, to strengthen and enrich the nation, it is necessary that each one of us…possesses new knowledge so as to be able to participate in building up the nation. Above all, it is necessary that everyone knows how to read and write Quoc Ngu (DeFrancis 1977:239).

The campaign was a success: from 1945 to 1953, illiteracy fell from eighty to thirty percent (1977:240). Ho's efforts mobilized the Vietnamese population to take action against their own illiteracy. Marr relates a memorable image that has become indelibly associated with this period of Vietnamese history: "…the barefooted peasant walking to evening classes, tiny oil lamp in one hand, battered *quoc ngu* primer in the other" (1981:184). While this depiction certainly hyperbolizes reality, it nevertheless portrays the universality of Vietnam's commitment to *quoc ngu*. The ingeniousness of romanized Vietnamese transcends the tendency to confine consideration of the script to associations with imperialism's evils. After a millennium of composing Confucian literature and conducting the affairs of government in sinograms, over eight hundred years of expressing its national voice in *chu nom*, and nearly five hundred years of often painful contact with romanization schemes, Vietnam chose the least indigenous and most effective way to express the spoken language of its people: *quoc ngu*. In so doing, the Vietnamese population became literate in a matter of years.

The Development of Romanized Chinese

Undoubtedly the best-known manifestation of Chinese civilization is its writing system. Sinograms bear not only the distinction of being perhaps the most complex script on earth, but also that of having been used continuously for longer than any other written language. At various points in history, Chinese characters were the official scripts of, aside from China itself, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. As the *lingua franca* of East Asia, sinograms filled a similar role as Latin in Renaissance Europe.[25] Moreover, this analogy can rightfully be extended to encompass the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences among the peoples who used, and still do use, the sinograms to express their spoken languages in writing: Latin united Italians, the French, Spaniards, Portuguese, English, Germans, and Hungarians alike, just as Chinese characters currently permit speakers of Mandarin, Wu, Yue, Min, Hakka, Gan, and Xiang Chinese topolects to communicate with one another on paper.

China's political unity obfuscates its linguistic reality; the differences in China's topolects when spoken are often as great as those between the aforementioned European languages. Furthermore, pictophonetic writing is inherently cumbersome and inefficient, a fact that ultimately led the Vietnamese (as well as the Koreans and, to a lesser degree, the Japanese)[26] to abandon Chinese characters in favor of an alphabetic script. China's consolidated, centralized government, whether imperial, Communist, "republican," or a conveniently nebulous synthesis of these and other designations, has succeeded over time in maintaining national unity through promoting linguistic uniformity (DeFrancis 1950). Nevertheless, romanized Chinese has existed in China for as long as it has in Vietnam. Indeed, many Chinese themselves have recognized the necessity of formulating romanized methods to express their spoken language in writing, and have done so since at least the nineteenth century (Mair 1996). The Chinese government has designated *Hanyu pinyin* as the official romanization scheme for the Chinese language, yet sinograms still reign supreme. In Vietnam, *quoc ngu* successfully displaced Chinese characters and *chu nom* only after a period of broad dissemination and active governmental promotion. As

[25] By this analogy, I mean to compare Latin to sinograms solely as a script, without regard for the spoken Latin language.

[26] Of course, the Koreans and Japanese did not abandon sinograms for alphabetic scripts, but for syllabaries.

the history of romanized Chinese clearly demonstrates, sinograms stand a chance of losing orthographical preeminence in their own homeland only if the powerful Chinese government directs its energies to the achievement of this aim.

Buddhism was the impetus for realizing the purely phonetic capabilities of sinograms in China, just as it was in Vietnam. Victor Mair points out that "the Buddha made the wise decision to allow Buddhist practitioners to transmit his teaching in their own respective languages" (1994:722). As a consequence, foreign Buddhist missionaries in China evangelized in vernacular Chinese. The influence of Buddhism on Chinese writing was profound; in the long run, as Mair argues, "every major advance in linguistics from the Han period until the advent of Jesuit-inspired evidential learning….in the Ch'ing period over 1,500 years later, particularly in phonology, was dependent upon or conditioned by Buddhism in one way or another" (1994:718). More immediate, however, was Buddhism's facilitation of the development of "counternomy," or "cut and splice pseudospelling," known in Chinese as *fanqie*, as a pronunciation aid for sacred texts (Mair 1994:722). This technique involves mentally combining the initial of one sinogram with the final of another, so as to arrive at the pronunciation of an entirely new phoneme. Of course, those who lacked sufficient formal education were precluded from employing the *fanqie* system, such as children and uneducated adults. "Ironically, they are the ones who most need a phonetic system to help them read," as Zhou Youguang asserts (2003:96).

The arrival of Sanskrit in China exposed many Confucian literati to a phonetically based writing system for the first time, and indeed some recognized the advantages of such a script. Zheng Qiao, an encyclopedist of the Song Dynasty period, made the enthusiastic observation that "the foreign script [Sanskrit] was 'very simple' because it could represent an endless number of sounds with a few simple hooks and curves" (DeFrancis 1950:10). Nevertheless, Zheng's conclusion from these remarks illustrates the narrow-minded arrogance of the Confucian literati, whose monopolization of Chinese intellectual life *via* the sinograms scorned any departure from the time-honored script: "…people who know ideographs [sinograms] are wise and worthy, whereas those who do not know ideographs are simple and stupid" (DeFrancis 1950:10).

As was also the case in Vietnam, European missionaries were the first to introduce the Latin alphabet to China. Beginning around the turn of the seventeenth century, Catholic Jesuits

developed romanization schemes to facilitate their own education in spoken Mandarin and written classical Chinese. In 1605, Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit, composed 西字奇迹, or *The Miracle of the Western Alphabet*. This work presents "the earliest design of using Roman letters to systematically spell Mandarin writing" (Zhou 2003:100). Just over two decades later, Nicolas Trigault, a French Jesuit, penned 西儒耳目资, or *Assistance for Western Scholars in Listening and Reading*, which was essentially a revision of Ricci's earlier efforts (Zhou 2003:100). Similarly to parallel developments in the history of romanized Vietnamese, the work of such Catholic missionaries as Ricci and Trigault exerted little-to-no influence upon the speech and writing of the Chinese population. Rather, methods of romanizing Chinese existed solely as a means for European missionaries to further their efforts at spreading the doctrine of Christ. Centuries passed, as they had in Vietnam, before successive waves of Europeans arrived in China to spur the development of romanized Chinese.

The defeat of the Qing Empire by Britain in the Opium War ushered in an era of Chinese history widely known as the "century of humiliation" (M. Colette Plum, lecture notes 2007). As stipulated in the terms of the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing between Britain and China, the latter was compelled to open the port cities of Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen (Amoy), and Guangzhou to foreigners who wished to engage in commerce. The treaty also enabled missionaries to travel in safety to China. As a consequence, a wave of English Protestants arrived in these southern "treaty port" cities to evangelize, and they initiated a movement known as 方言罗马字, or "using Roman letters to write local dialect" (Zhou 2003:100). Unlike their Catholic Jesuit predecessors, these Protestant missionaries romanized not Mandarin, but rather the topolects of the various southern locales in which they found themselves. DeFrancis emphasizes that "[i]t is especially important to note that in the period mentioned [the 1850s and early 60s] not a single romanized item was published in the Mandarin dialect" (1950:23). Furthermore, these Protestants scorned sinograms as anachronistic vestiges of a bygone era, whereas Catholic Jesuits in the seventeenth century venerated Chinese characters and, in some cases, acquired fluency in the script themselves. In a broad sense, the attitude of the Protestant missionaries towards the sinograms is analogous to that of the French colonizers in Vietnam. Both viewed Chinese writing as a hindrance to the satisfaction of their aims, whether these respective groups

of Europeans desired to convert Chinese to Christianity or to assimilate Vietnamese into the French colonial Empire.

As DeFrancis asserts, "in the declining years of the [Qing] empire the problem of reforming the language by the adoption of an alphabetic script had fully evolved from a technical linguistic question to one affecting the very foundations of Chinese society" (1950:27). Indeed, the rapid decline of the Qing symbolized, to many Chinese, the evaporation of their very civilization itself. Some reformers linked the "salvation of their country" to the adoption of an alphabetic system of writing, expressing similar convictions as those espoused by Vietnamese intellectuals during the period just before and after their nation gained independence from France (Mair 1996:6). Lu Zhuangzhang was the first to concoct a system based on the Latin alphabet to transcribe Chinese, which he outlined in his 1892 work, *First Steps in Complete Understanding at a Glance: A New Chinese Script for the Amoy Dialect* (DeFrancis 1950:33). The title reveals that Lu applied his system to his native Amoy topolect, yet by no means did he intend for his method to be limited to his own language (DeFrancis 1950:33). Other Chinese reformers followed in Lu's footsteps. According to DeFrancis, most of these individuals shared certain attributes, including a working knowledge of English, origins in China's southern regions, and a desire not to implement a new universal Chinese script, but merely to demonstrate the superiority of phonetic over "ideographic" writing (1950:38). A dispute over which variety of Chinese should be alphabetized soon emerged. While some advocated confining the romanization of Chinese to Mandarin, others felt that this was impractical given the often great disparity between Chinese topolects (DeFrancis: 1984:242). On the brink of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, which formally brought an end to imperial Chinese history, linguistic reformers had generally reached a consensus: only a standard national language should be romanized, so that political "unity" could be achieved "through [linguistic] uniformity" (DeFrancis 1950:54).

The Conference on Unification of Pronunciation that convened in 1913 was one of the first undertakings of China's republican government. This convocation inaugurated a legacy of government-sponsored initiatives that would henceforth characterize the process of Chinese linguistic reform. Its major contribution was the adoption of *Zhuyin Zimu*, or the "National Phonetic Alphabet," a set of thirty-nine phonetic symbols derived from the forms of sinograms.

They were to be used in much the same way as Japanese *furigana*, namely, as adjuncts to aid in the pronunciation of characters (Mair 1996:6). Perhaps the most important legacy of the 1913 Conference was the complete victory of its pro-Mandarin faction over representatives from the southern coastal regions (DeFrancis 1984:242). As a consequence, the standard Chinese language was defined "by fixing the pronunciation of some 6,500 characters in a *Dictionary of National Pronunciation*," to which the newly codified *Zhuyin Zimu* were to be applied as pronunciation aids (DeFrancis 1950:58). Ultimately, however, the National Phonetic Alphabet exerted little influence on the subsequent course of Chinese script reform, as it was met with "apathy, disagreement, and distrust" from both government personnel and the population at large (1950:64). Not only did many feel that the script posed a threat to traditional Chinese culture as manifested in the sinograms, but the "indefatigable little band of [National Phonetic Alphabet] supporters" themselves were widely perceived as "advocates of subversive ideas" (1950:67). Today, the system, now designated as *Zhuyin Fuhao* ("phonetic symbols") or *Bopomofo* (from the names of the first four symbols), enjoys its most widespread use as an educational tool in Taiwan (DeFrancis 1984).

In the wake of the so-called "Literary Renaissance" of 1917 that merged with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Chinese intellectuals who had studied abroad in the United States inaugurated what Zhou Youguang labels the 罗马字运动, or "Romanization Movement" (Zhou 2003:101). The primary aim of the Literary Renaissance was to replace classical with vernacular Chinese, or *Baihua* ("plain speech"). One of *Baihua*'s active supporters, Chen Duxiu, insisted that Roman letters should be adopted in place of sinograms for writing Chinese, though he ultimately did not pursue this aim (DeFrancis 1984:245). The talented, American-educated linguist, Y. R. Chao, picked up where Chen left off. Along with several other scholars, Chao created a brilliant romanization scheme for Mandarin known as *Gwoyeu Romatzyh*, or "National Language Romanization" in 1928. It is important to note that the five linguists who convened to work out the principles behind this new script had to do so in private. The imperviousness of China's government made it impossible for this group to "achieve any positive results" in working under its auspices (DeFrancis 1950:74). The five men under the leadership of Y. R. Chao initially sought to create an alternative to the Wade-Giles system, a romanization scheme

for the Beijing dialect developed by Englishman Thomas F. Wade in the 1860s for use largely by foreigners. In this they succeeded, as National Language Romanization became "the first officially promulgated Chinese Romanization [scheme]" (Zhou 2003:102). The new system, generally abbreviated to "G.R.," is perhaps best known for its expression of supra-segmental phonemes, or tones, within the spelling of individual words, a device known as tonal spelling. While G.R. enjoyed governmental support for its implicit advocacy of the Mandarin topolect as the national standard, its tonal spelling was to render it too difficult to grasp for most Chinese and Westerners alike (DeFrancis 1950:79).

Chinese collaboration with Russian linguists in the late 1920s and early 1930s resulted in the emergence of a highly controversial new romanization scheme. The impetus that motivated the creation of this system was a population of about 100,000 Chinese immigrant workers resident in Russia, who were almost entirely illiterate (DeFrancis 1950:88). In 1930, Qu Qiubai, a young Chinese intellectual studying in Moscow, devised a scheme that made use of Russian, sinograms, and romanized Chinese. He labeled his system *Zhongguo Latinhuadi Zemu*, or the "Chinese Latinized Alphabet" (1950:93). One year later, Qu's Latinized Alphabet was perfected by a group of Russian Sinologists and Chinese scholars who lent to it the new moniker of Latinxua Sin Wenz ("Latinized New Writing").

Thus began the Latinization Movement. Fundamental to this school of thought were two convictions: that the sinograms were "a tool for the enslavement of the working masses by the government class" and had to be abandoned, and that the representation of tones was unnecessary (1950:95). Upon its introduction into China, the script had been adapted to various topolects spoken in China's southern coastal regions, reminiscent of the romanization schemes of the late Qing era. This fact, along with its neglect of tones, drove a rift between advocates of New Writing and supporters of such other systems as G.R. Many felt that adapting the writing to express more than just the standard Mandarin topolect would bring about the division of China into separate autonomous regions, each with its own script (DeFrancis 1984:247). The communist Yan'an government under the leadership of Mao Zedong actively promoted New Writing as part of their political line. However, the Japanese occupation in the early 1940s of many communist-held areas and the ensuing Chinese Civil War brought the movement to a halt.

Soon after Mao declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, he seems to have had a change of heart regarding language policy, and the Latinization Movement formally came to an end (DeFrancis 1984:257).

In 1950, Mao officially shifted the focus of language reform from Latinization to simplification of the sinograms. In so doing, he subordinated romanized Chinese to sinograms indefinitely. While the precise reasons for this policy change are unclear, "[n]ationalistic feeling was clearly an all-pervasive factor" (DeFrancis 1984:258). Mao and others likely viewed the sinograms as an instrument of national unity, and feared potential divisiveness from promoting romanization. Moreover, a deep attachment to the sinograms permeated not only the intellectual elite, but also, and arguably to a greater degree, the downtrodden, illiterate peasantry. Writing in 1950, DeFrancis observed that "[r]everence for the ideograms has become so deeply embedded that even illiterates have reacted against Latinxua" (1950:248). This sentiment among the peasantry doubtless still exists today. Mao did not entirely dispense with his belief in the potential boons of alphabetized Chinese, however, and called for a "national-in-form" alphabet that was to be based on Chinese characters (DeFrancis 1984:262). Although it did not fulfill this qualification, *Hanyu pinyin fang'an* ("Chinese Phonetic Plan") was officially promulgated as China's official romanization scheme in 1958, a distinction it maintains at present (1984:265).

As its name implies, *Hanyu pinyin* romanizes standard Mandarin and, unlike G.R. or Latinxua, uses diacritical marks to represent tones. *Pinyin* has rarely been considered for anything other than aiding the pronunciation of the sinograms, let alone replacing the time-honored script. In regard to eradicating illiteracy, it is unfortunate that *pinyin* has been officially subordinated to the characters. Children educated in this system have demonstrated a dramatically increased capability of expressing themselves in writing, and the active promotion of *pinyin* would inevitably bring literacy to many uneducated segments of the Chinese population (1984:283). The rapid upswing in national literacy engendered by Vietnam's embracement of *quoc ngu* underscores this claim.

Since the 1950s, China's government has been the exclusive arbiter of national language policy. Many effective romanization schemes have emerged in the past century, yet the government has officially subordinated alphabetized Chinese to sinograms. The philosophy of

assuring national unity through linguistic uniformity has largely guided China's decision to uphold its pictophonetic script over any alternative. Sinograms certainly possess qualities that render them difficult to supplant: complexity, sheer number, and, perhaps most importantly, a level of prestige that has elevated them to an art form. Yet these attributes can readily turn from strengths into weaknesses, and in places such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, this has in fact already occurred. The progression of writing in Vietnam has proven that a script grounded on alphabetic principles possesses enough efficacy to render sinograms obsolete. Active governmental promotion and popular dissemination, however, are fundamental for any script reform to take effect. So long as China's government seeks to uphold the supremacy of sinograms, romanized Chinese will remain a secondary system to the pictophonetic characters. Furthermore, as DeFrancis observed over half a century ago, sinograms possess a powerful mystique that, ironically, often renders illiterates more inclined than anyone else to uphold the ancient writing system. This is an especially disheartening phenomenon, as these people would benefit from an alphabetic script most of all. As a consequence, the Herculean task of demonstrating the impracticality of sinograms to the Chinese populace rests firmly upon the shoulders of intellectuals who possess the requisite courage to question a tradition as old as Chinese civilization itself. To paraphrase a witticism from Lu Xun, as courageous a Chinese intellectual as any, will China sacrifice itself for its sinograms, or sacrifice its sinograms for itself?

Final Remarks: Can Chinese Dispense with Sinograms?

Perhaps some ardent advocates of sinograms would argue that, while *quoc ngu* may have been appropriate for Vietnamese, such a shift to romanization would never work for China. In reality, the Vietnamese language possesses certain attributes that render it more complex than most varieties of spoken Chinese. To name but a few, there are either five or six supra-segmental phonemes in Vietnamese, depending upon which dialect is spoken (DeFrancis 1977:5). In contrast, the standard Mandarin topolect of Chinese contains only four tones. Moreover, spoken Chinese makes use of nine vowel phonemes, whereas Vietnamese employs eleven (DeFrancis 1984:44). Vietnamese also possesses more independent syllables than does any variety of

Chinese: roughly 4,800 in the former and, on average, 1,300 in the latter (1977:7).[27] In light of these basic linguistic differences, Chinese is perhaps capable of more readily dispensing with sinograms than was Vietnamese.

To be sure, *quoc ngu* is not without its share of flaws. Not only does the system represent supra-segmental phonemes with diacritics, but it also employs these cumbersome marks to indicate vowel distinctions. The result is a script that seems, to borrow a descriptor from Hannas, "cluttered" (1997:95). However, these diacritics are often essential for readers, as *quoc ngu* does not express whole words but merely individual syllables. Even *Hanyu pinyin*, if employed correctly, distinguishes words from syllables. Ironically, *Quoc ngu* likely inherited its lack of word division from sinograms and *chu nom*, the morphosyllabic systems that it ultimately supplanted. Hannas traces this phenomenon to "the Sinitic compulsion to supply every syllable with its own semantic interpretation," a tendency that has led many to falsely classify Chinese as a monosyllabic language (1997:94). Indeed, sinograms employ a legacy so powerful that they still hamper the efficiency of the only alphabetic script ever to have successfully replaced them. "[O]nly through practice, as users themselves decide" how to transcribe their spoken languages appropriately, can Chinese and Vietnamese improve upon their respective romanization systems (1997:97). Of course, China's government must first concede that sinograms are not perfect before the possibility of replacing them becomes real.

[27] Both of these figures include supra-segmental phonemes ("tones").

Bibliography

DeFrancis, John. *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*. Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1984.

———. *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam*. Great Britain: Morton Publishers, 1977.

———. *Nationalism and Language Reform in China*. New York: Octagon Books, 1972 (originally published 1950).

Hannas, William C. *Asia's Orthographic Dilemma*. Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.

LoBianco, Joseph. "Vietnam: *Quoc Ngu*, Colonialism, and Language Policy," in *Language Planning and Language Policy: East Asian Perspectives*, ed. Nanette Gottlieb and Ping Chen. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001.

Mair, Victor H. "Modern Chinese Writing," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

———. "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Aug. 1994), pp. 707–751.

Marr, David G. *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920–1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Plum, M. Colette. Lecture notes, spring 2007.

Zhou, Youguang. *The Historical Evolution of Chinese Languages and Scripts*. Columbus: National East Asian Language Resource Center, 2003.

Since June 2006, all new issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* have been published electronically on the Web and are accessible to readers at no charge. Back issues are also being released periodically in e-editions, also free. For a complete catalog of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, with links to free issues, visit the *SPP* Web site.

www.sino-platonic.org