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AND

To -Er Is to Err: A Case of Code-switching in Standard Mandarin

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Since coming to Santa Barbara, my job description has been "comparative East Asianist," rather than historian of China or Japan; as a result, I have had to do a great deal of reading in the histories of the other countries in the region. Among the many things that have struck me in this connection over the past few years are not only how so much of what I initially learned in Chinese history classes has startling resonances with the other major areas influenced by Chinese culture (everybody knows that), but also how remarkably similar was the conceptualization of pressing issues in those countries with China as well as how much less extraordinary China’s historical experience becomes through comparison. The differences as well as the similarities are thrown in a fascinating relief and potentially tell us much about not only high Chinese culture but also the social and economic systems in which it found a home.

I am still very much in the process of sorting all this out toward writing a much longer work in the general area. Here I would like to focus tightly on two manifestations of the larger problem: the linkage between the rise of nationalism and the emergence of the vernacular as a literary vehicle; and the East-West mix in the conceptions of modernization. These issues were faced by all four East Asian civilizations and in remarkably similar ways.

Let me say just one further thing by way of introduction. I think this sort of comparative analysis, whether or not I do it well, leads us to far more important and interesting conclusions than does the imposition of all the foreign-origin theories that have been sweeping the field of late—the infestation has been most grotesque in the Japan field in this regard. By the same token, I want strongly and openly to disassociate myself from the regional-cultural approach that has been applied principally by social scientists using hypocoristics like NICS and NIES and Pacific Rim and whatever else.

**Modernization and the Rise of the Vernacular**

Many scholars in East Asia and elsewhere have identified the rise of nationalism with the transformations characterized by the modern experience. Nationalism has usually been seen as a positive force in China, as well as in Vietnam and Korea, whereas in Japan it has been seen as antecedent to imperialism. I think a more meaningful comparison, which is impossible here, would start with a level playing field and look at
Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese nationalism in comparative terms, examine their mutual interactions, and look at the consequences of their emergence over the entire course of the 20th century, not just the first few decades.

One manifestation of nationalism that can be found in all four East Asian nations is the rise of the vernacular in its relationship both to literary Chinese culture (even in China) and to modern political movements. In China the rise of *baihua* (the vernacular) in the New Culture Movement is usually understood as part of the rising tide of nationalism, demonstrating a concern on the part of early Chinese radicals to bring culture to the people, and usually ignoring the fact that China already had traditions of vernacular drama and fiction that had made major strides several centuries before Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu claimed to be pioneering it.

Scholars have tended to stress to excess the differences between *baihua* and *wenyan* (literary Chinese), probably because the latter is so extraordinarily difficult, but in comparison to what readers and writers in the other countries of East Asia were working with, the differences recede rapidly. After all, both *baihua* and *wenyan* are Chinese; they are members of the same language group; they occupied clearly delineated spheres as languages; and while use of one or the other might raise political or cultural issues, it brought into question no issues of national or ethnic identity. The effort to bring *baihua* into a monopolizing position as linguistic hegemon early in the 20th century reveals much more of a conscious political assault on the elite culture that had so long used (many different varieties of) *wenyan* to communicate.

In the other countries of East Asia, what had taken one step in China would require two or more steps. First, a native written language had to be invented to compete with the imported literary Chinese—this occurred before the putative modern period—and later, a written vernacular had to be developed to contest with both the domestic literary language and Chinese. But we should keep firmly in mind that, until recent times, Chinese literary culture was East Asian literary culture to a large extent, and even into our own century it remained the medium of international discourse within East Asia.

The Japanese were not the first people on the Chinese periphery to imbibe Sinic culture, but they were the first to develop their own written language, the *kana* syllabaries, in general use among the Heian elite by at least the early 10th century.
Initially, kana were considered fit only for women and were known also as onna moji (women’s script), whereas Chinese characters remained the realm of men and were called otoko moji (men’s script). But this distinction was never an inseparable divide; high-born women often learned Chinese, and men did in fact write, on occasion, in kana.

Skipping ahead to the Edo period, we still find women primarily writing in kana and men using both mediums as well as mixtures, though Confucian scholars often wrote in Kanbun (literary Chinese) or prepared versions of their writings in both Kanbun and bungo (literary Japanese), and some even managed to have their Kanbun works circulate in Qing China (as did some Koreans and Vietnamese). In response to the need for a uniform educational curriculum taught nationwide in an accessible style, a movement developed over the course of the 19th century to bring the written Japanese language into accord with the vernacular. It aroused acrimonious debate. In 1866, Maejima Hisoka called for the complete abolition of Chinese characters from Japanese textbooks. In part such calls were efforts to spread education, in part they reflected a rising aspiration for Japan to find its own distinctive identity separate from Sinic culture.²

The movement took the name genbun itchi (combining the vernacular and literary languages). In its initial stages, it emphasized the great value of a vernacular in everyday life. Later, in its better known phase, it became the medium for the development of a modern Japanese literature, first and foremost in the pioneering vernacular style of Futabatei Shimei, who published Japan’s first modern novel in 1887.³ For all the many efforts to bring the written language into harmony with the vernacular in Japan, though, even when Kanbun was most on the defensive, we see few or no demands for the Japanese people to stop writing Chinese characters altogether because they were Chinese; Kanji may have come from China, but they had long become the shared property of all East Asians. We should note as well that this was precisely the period in which the famous 1000 or more two-character neologisms were being coined in Meiji Japan and imported back into China, an event that helped create the vernacular Chinese language.⁴

The Japanese never resorted to Kanbun for fiction, perhaps because Japanese fiction owed its origins to women, and women wrote primarily in kana. Of course, the Chinese themselves never developed a sustained tradition of wenyan fiction either. But they were not the only countries in East Asia. There was recently published a seven-volume series
titled (in Chinese) *Yuenan Hanwen xiaoshuo congkan*. The series represents the bulk of the extant novels written by Vietnamese in literary Chinese, usually based on Chinese vernacular fiction or drama and Vietnamized (by changing place names, personal names, and settings). Before the Vietnamese developed their own written language, known as *chữ nôm* (or *nôm*), in the 13th century, and before the Koreans invented the *han’gül* alphabet in the 15th century, and indeed well afterward in both cases, both used literary Chinese as the medium for written fiction. A recent Korean scholar’s estimate puts the number of extant novels written by Koreans in literary Chinese at about 600. In fact, the high point of *nôm* lyric poetry came only in the 18th century, and *han’gül* literature really dates from the 17th century.⁵

Koreans developed their own written language much later than the Japanese or the Vietnamese. King Sejong’s explicit purpose in having a written Korean language devised was to enable his people to express themselves in their everyday lives in a medium of their own, because Chinese, he believed, was so difficult for them. The Korean historian Yi Ki-baek has termed the *han’gül* alphabet "the proudest cultural achievement of the Korean people." While the government and the Confucian *yangban* elite continued to use literary Chinese, many works of a wide variety—including women’s writings—now began to use *han’gül*.⁶

Traditionalists were never particularly happy with *han’gül*, and *han’gül* was explicitly used by patriotic groups from the late-19th century as a way to make their publications accessible to large numbers of people, just as the baihua movement would attempt several decades later in China. The founder of the Korean vernacular movement, Chu Sigyong, aimed at "ending aristocratic cultural slavery to Chinese culture." He was not attacking the Chinese or even their culture but rather the elite in his own society for trying to remain a class apart from and above ordinary Koreans. Past Chinese dynasties may have demanded tribute, but the inferiority complex attached to the idea of *sadae* (serving the great) was, like the two-character term itself, a Korean innovation. Under the Japanese colonial regime from 1910, only the Japanese language was taught in Korean schools, and thus the thrust of any movement to keep Korean alive was nationalistic by definition. With Japan’s defeat in 1945, the nation returned as a whole to *han’gül* (mixed with
Chinese characters in South Korea, though fewer than in postwar Japan, and solely han'gul in North Korea).

The Vietnamese case bears similarities with Korea and Japan, but Vietnamese followed an even more tortuous path. I noted that the Vietnamese invented their own written language, nôm, in the 13th century. An individual nôm character was usually created out of two Chinese characters, giving it the appearance to Chinese-trained eyes of familiarity and strangeness all at once, much like the Xixia script. Nôm was arguably more easily integrated with Chinese than kana or han'gul because, while Japanese and Korean are highly inflected, S-O-V languages, Vietnamese more closely resembles the lack of inflection in Chinese although with an altogether different word order. There was no division of language usage along gender lines, though literary Chinese (Hán văn) was used by Vietnamese Confucians for "serious literature" and nôm for "pleasure."^8

Like the conservative yangban who disliked use of han'gul, Emperor Minh-mạng of the Nguyễn tried to oust nôm from official documents at court, largely to bring order to the Vietnamese central government. Still, nôm remained in use in elementary education (often to facilitate the teaching of Confucianism to youngsters) and in literature, undoubtedly because it was the closest thing to a written vernacular that the Vietnamese had. At the same time, nôm had the capacity to undermine the state orthodox culture or at least offer alternative avenues for expression closer to native feelings.\(^9\)

In the 17th century, the famous missionary Alexandre de Rhodes devised a romanization for vernacular Vietnamese, later modified and dubbed quốc ngữ, a two-syllable expression that can be found in all four East Asian countries, meaning "national language" and hence four different things. As a medium of written discourse, however, only under the French colonial regime in the latter half of the 19th century did quốc ngữ come into its own. The French authorities saw it as a means of severing Vietnam culturally from the rest of the Sinic sphere, because they wanted to draw the Vietnamese elite into the French sphere. They hoped that with the continued use of quốc ngữ the texts of the literary Chinese heritage would recede into the dusty past.

Logically precise, but wrong! In the hands of Vietnamese reformers, nationalists, and revolutionaries, quốc ngữ—a complex alphabet in which the tones are written as diacriticals but still far simpler to learn than an ideographic language (be it Chinese or
nôm)—though initially hated because of its origins, became the medium of vernacular access directly to the Vietnamese people. Within a generation, by the early years of the 20th century, quôc ngữ' newspapers and journals began appearing in major cities, and quôc ngữ' was closely linked to rising nationalism and radicalism.¹⁰

In addition to having two languages of their own (nôm and quôc ngữ') and one on long-term loan from the north, the French conquest introduced yet another language necessary for social advancement. Unlike colonial Korea, where the Japanese banned the teaching of the native tongue, the French encouraged both quôc ngữ' and French. While French was the language of the hated conqueror, the Vietnamese had had a long experience in the use of a language borrowed from a hated conqueror. Furthermore, French was indeed the language of an oppressive, unwelcome regime, but it also turned out—upon further investigation—to be the language of Victor Hugo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and 1789. Major debates ensued in the 1910s and 1920s over which language—French or quôc ngữ'—was appropriate for Vietnamese to write in, while literary Chinese and nôm did in fact gradually decline in usage.¹¹ All modern Vietnamese nationalists and radicals who came of age in the first half of the 20th century have been at least bilingual in French and Vietnamese; many (including Hồ Chí Minh) knew a fair amount of Chinese as well.

Of the four East Asian countries, then, China was the last to adopt the use of the vernacular as a means of reaching the masses in the modern period. The extent to which May Fourth intellectuals may have been influenced by China’s neighbors, perhaps through contacts made in Japan, remains an important scholarly desideratum. Many of the leaders of the New Culture Movement had been students in Japan; and Liang Qichao, who lived in Japan for fourteen years and whose writings were highly influential among Chinese and Vietnamese there and later at home, was principally responsible for encouraging linguistic borrowing from the new, rich Meiji vocabulary. I think a crucial link here is the rise of a modern, vernacular press in all the countries of East Asia.

**Mixing East with West in Modernization Schemes**

Another issue for comparative analysis is the manner in which the elites in each of the four major East Asian countries envisioned the modernizing process, the project of
borrowing from the West while retaining the core of their own native civilization. In China this attitude is usually summed up by a phrase attributed—I think incorrectly—to Zhang Zhidong: Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong. In this late-19th-century conception, Western technology would be grafted onto or simply used to protect Chinese civilization. It was an implicit statement of China’s weakness in science and technology, though turned around so that "science" appeared unessential to what was basic or ti. Several decades later, Chinese students were still calling for science (Sai xiansheng), though they were now linking it with a failing at the core of Chinese culture, the lack of democracy (De xiansheng).

In the generation before Zhang Zhidong and the self-strengthening movement, Japanese reformers were similarly looking for a way to open their country, save it from the fate visited upon China, and yet preserve their own ethico-moral values. Sakuma Shōzan coined the term that typified this approach: Tōyō dōtoku Seiyō geijutsu (East Asian ethics and Western technology). Since the Chinese movement apparently failed to produce modernization, its bifurcated approach of mixing East and West in discrete spheres has been seen as a failure by some, reactionary by others, while the perceived "success" of the Meiji Restoration has afforded the Japanese approach a more hospitable reception. However, Professor Min Tu-gi of Seoul National University has demonstrated the remarkable similarity in the intellectual frameworks of the two. If something went wrong with the yangwu movement in China, in other words, it must lay elsewhere.

Another slogan coined in the Meiji period, though less widely used, was Wakon Yōsai (Japanese soul, Western talent). This phrase derives interestingly from a much older one, allegedly dating to the Heian period, Wakon Kansai (Japanese soul, Chinese talent). In the earlier era, when Japan had been borrowing heavily from China, the slogan was meant to remind Japanese of the need to retain their inner core. Adapted to the later 19th century, Yō replaced Kan, though the force of the slogan in the respective ages of "modernization" remained remarkably similar.

We find a similar development in Korea. In the aftermath of several decades of anti-foreign calls by the yangban elite to ‘reject heterodoxy’ (ch’oksa), inspired by Western and later Japanese aggression, Koreans of a self-styled 'enlightenment' (kaehwa) mind began in the 1880s to see the need for some accommodation with things Western
while retaining a basic Confucian core. This new idea materialized in the phrase *Tongdo Sogi* (Eastern ways, Western instruments).\(^3\) Again, the identification of this dual approach to modernization with enlightenment thought and a rejection of xenophobia bears a strong resemblance to the Chinese and Japanese cases. Korea, though, bore the added brunt of being the victim not only of Western expansionism but Japanese as well.

In 19th-century Vietnam, a permutation of this slogan was not bandied about by the elite, but debate over this *tiêng* (or *thê đặng*) style of thinking was possibly more trenchant than elsewhere throughout East Asia. Being a French colony from the 1860s, the issue of whether to resist the French wholeheartedly or adopt their technology so as to be able to expel them at a later date was of much greater immediacy. The Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were facing a threat of future humiliation; the Vietnamese already had to deal with a conqueror. As Ralph Smith summed it up some years ago: "What attitude ought the Vietnamese to take toward their conquerors? Could anything be gained by cooperation with the West, by seeking to learn from the West? And if so, what was the proper relationship between the culture and institutions of the past, and the ideas and institutions to be borrowed from the West?"\(^4\)

**Conclusions**

More generally, I think our understanding of many other themes in the evolution of modern China can be enriched through this sort of comparative perspective. Being on China's cultural periphery has allowed the other nations of East Asia a range of options not always available in China, although it has often come at considerable psychological, even physical cost. Using Chinese characters as opposed to a native written language or speaking a language of foreign origin as opposed one's native tongue were rarely choices that Chinese intellectuals were compelled to make, even during periods of foreign conquest, with the possible exception of the early decades of the Qing. As a result, the issues such concerns forced to the surface—issues of national and cultural identity, issues of determining where one's own culture ended and Chinese culture began, major issues of self-definition—had, I would argue, less of an impact on the Chinese until perhaps the confrontation with the West in the 19th century. By that time, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam had been working through these kinds of self-definitional problems for centuries,
even millenia (the Japanese still are). China simply had no "other" against which to see itself.

The overwhelming influence of high Sinic culture in the other countries of East Asia was not only incredibly beneficial to their individual maturations as societies and cultures, but it also provided a natural straw-person against which a nativist movement more directly concerned with issues of self-definition could react. As Maruyama Masao and many others since have shown for Japan, the kokugaku (nativist) movement also shared much with the Sinic tradition at which it took aim in Japan; that it perceived its lack of a written textual tradition as a lacuna was due to the fact that both the major continental imports, Confucianism and Buddhism, had readily accessible and very thick canons. Without China as "other," nativism had no meaning in Japan.

No comparable movements developed in Korea or Vietnam, though the absence of a native response to Chinese culture of this sizable sort means neither that such movements were snuffed out in their infancy nor that Chinese culture simply overwhelmed the Vietnamese and the Koreans. Both are logical possibilities, but much more likely are two other scenarios. First, as the case of Korea seems to make clearer, Confucian culture on Korean soil was never seen as an unwelcome or alien intruder. It was not perceived in the same manner as Japanese efforts in the first half of the 20th century to replace Korean culture with Japan’s own. Confucianism was "international." Second, as the case of Vietnam seems to make clearer, Confucian culture barely reached below the level of the elite, having little to do with the everyday lives of the agricultural populace for a variety of complex reasons. The Vietnamese elite did indeed engage in the discourse of Neo-Confucian commentaries and criticism across what we would now call national boundaries, but not (apparently) as prolifically as their East Asian neighbors.15

Students of Chinese history need not all become comparativists to realize that fresh light is cast on China’s historical evolution through comparisons with her cultural neighbors. I would like to go one step further and to argue, though, that little light is shed on our understanding of China’s historical development by comparing this or that element or institution with some superficially similar element or institution outside the Sinic cultural sphere. If one is looking for reasons to explain why China failed to develop along Western lines, then comparisons with the West would certainly be in order;
however, such questions are fundamentally self-serving and at best turn up conclusions of a highly dubious quality.

NOTES


5. Tanaka Yūko, "Nihon Chūgoku Betonamu" [Japan, China, Vietnam], *Gekkan Shinika* 2.2 (February 1991), pp. 8-10.


12. Min Tu-ki (Min Tu-gi), "Chinese ‘Principle’ and Western ‘Utility,’ a Reassessment," in his *National Polity and Local Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 51-62, 85-88. The salient difference between the Chinese and Japanese slogans for self-strengthening should be noted; namely, the moral values to be preserved in the Japanese case were identified with East Asia and this assumed a Sinic core, while in the Chinese case the fundament was identified with China alone. Both cases bespeak the ongoing acceptance of a common Sinic basis to the entire East Asian ethic realm.


14. Ralph Smith, *Viet-Nam and the West* (London: Heinemann, 1968), pp. 25, 30, quotation on p. 29; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, pp. 200, 261. In discussing the Vietnamese students sent to study in China and Japan in the movement pioneered by reformer Phan Bội Châu from 1905, Professor Tai notes that "the students brought by Phan to China or Japan had conceived of Western learning essentially as a technique to fight colonialism; they sought to contain ideas in a strictly functionalist framework, leaving intact their fundamental values and sense of self." Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, p. 170.
To -Er Is to Err:
A Case of Code-switching in Standard Mandarin

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The purpose of this paper is to propose a new method for the analysis of code-switching. Code-switching, one of the most prominent language phenomena in the study of language in contact, is defined in this paper as the change from one language to another in an on-going discourse. By treating the suffixual -/r/ in Standard Mandarin as a socio-culturally constructed symbol rather than as an invariant and well-bounded linguistic code, this paper probes into the many forces—economic, cultural and political—acting upon and within a multi-lingual speaker in performing the act of code-switching.

**Introduction**

As linguists of Chinese have noted, the northern speech variety of Chinese often contains word final -erization, as in fanguan-r (restaurant) and chaguan-r (tea house). Dayle Barnes (1974, 1977) defines this language phenomenon from a socio-structural perspective. Like Chao Yuan Ren (1968), Barnes treats the word final -erization as a well-defined linguistic feature most prominently displayed in Beijing speech. To scholars such as these, it is a linguistic feature associated with prestige and knowledge that was adopted as the standard for both Putonghua (the common language) in Beijing and Guoyu (the national language) in Taiwan in the 1940s.

Through my own experience as a linguist trained in the 1980s in the United States and as a Chinese citizen born and raised in Taipei in the 1960s, I have come to notice some of the blind spots created by such a normative approach in treating word final -erization in Chinese as governed solely by internal lexical rules. This approach neglects a multilingual speaker’s concerns over a language choice, a choice which often comes with a great deal of cultural and political baggage. The tumultuous history of modern China and the complexities associated with the Chinese diaspora—as well as issues of power and identity within Chinese communities in places such as Hong Kong, Beijing and Taipei—have implications and consequences even for the most seemingly objective linguistic choice as "to -er or not to -er."

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1. Thanks are due to the many people who have commented on the previous drafts of this paper: Charles Bird, Martha Kendall (without whose encouragement this piece would be nothing but passing paragraphs in a lost diary), Frederic Blake, John DeFrancis, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Cornelius Kubler, Robert Sanders, Bonnie Urcioli, Bill Graves, Elise Breene, Aathea Gupta, Kris Hongladaram, Zhang and Lo.
I propose an interactional approach rather than a structural or correlational approach to the study of this issue. I suggest that it is best to probe into the translinguistic context of creating a standard language in Chinese in order to understand this linguistic phenomenon. Following Bakhtin (1981), Hill and Hill (1986) and Heath (1983), I argue for a dialogic model in order to deconstruct this issue from a viewpoint of "epistemological relativism." The meaning of suffixual -/ɾ/-comparable to that of the postvocalic -/ɾ/ in English in the United States or the "received" uvular /ɾ/ as opposed to the rolled /ɾ/ in French—is local and contingent. I conclude that what a multilingual speaker faces in a code-switching situation is more characteristic of an ideological contest rather than of a well-defined linguistic exercise where, presumably, an absolute line can be demarcated within a static system of forms and meanings.

The Example

This perspective came home to me when I was working on a dissertation project on Chinese-language choices and adaptations in New York City. I had long been fascinated by how speakers of Chinese adopt from an array of language choices to act out their social identities, and a range of questions puzzled me. What’s on their mind when they switch from one language to another? How do they react to varieties of spoken or written Chinese, especially those different from the ones they are using? What kind of symbolic capital do they have in defining or defending one set of varieties but not the other? How would I know?

My mind was constantly occupied by these interrogations even when I was engaged in conversations with an American student of Chinese at Columbia University. The conversation warmed up with our discovery of similar interests: Chinese languages, social discourse, language and power. I was drawn to him by the way he talked, assuming that

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2. The change from one language to another in a discourse is better understood in the linguistic literature as code-switching. According to Monica Heller, this language phenomenon is so prominent that even those who code-switch can be unaware of their behavior and vigorously deny doing anything of the kind (Heller 1988, 1).

3. The term symbolic capital is from Pierre Bourdieu (1977) who uses it to refer to non-material resources which are socially valued within a community, such as honor, reputation, good breeding, or talent.
he was well-educated, good mannered, and knowledgeable. I thought that he could be more than just a casual acquaintance; he could be a friend, a companion, an ally. After a short time, our conversation shifted to our plans for the summer. "Wo yao zai jianguan-r dagong" (I will work in a restaurant), he said. Hearing that -erized\(^4\) word, which is characteristic of Beijing speech, I immediately felt a gulf between us. Our potential friendship instantly ended in perplexity and silence, because there was no way, given my background, that I could achieve friendship with a man who talked in this fashion.

To say I suspended this potential friendship because I did not or could not understand his Mandarin would be false. I understood it only too well. I am keenly aware of the sensitivity of people who refrain from demonstrating -erization because they recognize this linguistic feature as an ideologically charged sign. Being born and educated in Taiwan, my impulse was to identify with those who, like myself, have been labeled as "non-standard speakers of Mandarin." This has everything to do with my anxiety about Taiwan’s future and my grievances towards China’s past. "To -er or not to -er" is hardly a question in my mind: to -er is to err.

My point is that the contested social meanings embedded in this linguistic sign \( r \) have taken on specific social valuations and are perceived at a very conscious level (Labov 1972). It is more than an issue of correctness or a demonstration of linguistic competence. It is an act of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). In other words, my cultural self\(^5\) as a Taiwanese female and my language self as a "non-standard speaker of Mandarin" were in conflict with my linguistic self as a "competent and objective professional." It was more than a choice of a code, which still implies a set of laws which doom a speaker to obey; thus, his or her free will or language adaptations can only be surrendered under a set of prescribed patterns. I do not mean to challenge the laws; I want to point out the duel of socio-political forces that act upon and within a speaker in

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4. This paper only focuses on the word final retroflexion, termed as suffixual erization by Barnes (1977), which occurs frequently in Northern Chinese speech.

5. Following Rabinow, the notion of self described here is defined as "... neither the purely cerebral cogito of the Cartesians, nor the deep psychological self of the Freudians. Rather, it is the culturally mediated and historically situated self which finds itself in a continuously changing world of meaning (1977, 10).
his or her making of a linguistic choice. Mine was an ideological calculation of "how I should behave against what I want to be." It was a consciousness, as Susan Gal proposes, of "how speakers respond symbolically to relations of domination between groups within the state, and how they understand their historic position and identity within a world structured around dependency and unequal development" (1988, 248).

My silence at that time to the Standard Mandarin of a linguistic student only reminded me of the many silences from other people, like myself, well-educated, sensitive, and sympathetic, yet labeled as non-standard speakers of Mandarin. I chose silence in order to identify with the linguistic others. This act of code-switching cannot be understood apart from the socio-political evolution of the linguistic symbol -/ʃ/ and its representations in various Chinese communities.

The Evolution of Standard Mandarin

Word final retroflexion, termed -erization by Barnes (1977), occurs in the northern variety of Chinese, which was adopted by the authorities in Beijing and Taiwan in the 1940s as the linguistic norm for Putonghua and Guoyu, respectively. However, -erization appears on the whole to be absent from the speech of many other Mandarin-speaking areas (such as Singapore) and completely absent from the distinct linguistic varieties of Chinese indigenous to the provinces of southeast China, such as Guangdong, Hong Kong and Taiwan where the Yue and Min varieties of Chinese are practiced. The selection of a linguistic norm as a national language, as is the case in Taiwan, or as a common language, as is the case in China, is not a straightforward linguistic exercise. The choice of a standard variety against which other varieties are measured and valued is a prescribed linguistic phenomenon. Its codification and imposition have to do with the socio-political status of a linguistic variety at a certain time and space.

Linguistically, Yue variety (Cantonese) and Min variety (Taiwanese) of Chinese preserve more distinct linguistic traces of ancient Chinese than those of the northern varieties such as Beijing Mandarin. For example, Cantonese and Taiwanese have more elaborate tonal repertoires than their Beijing counterpart. The former also preserves word final constants from Old Chinese which are absent in the Beijing variety. In the case of Cantonese, the indirect object-direct object sequence as in the sentence of nei h bei min
ngoh⁶ (you give face [to] me) further distinguishes itself from Standard Mandarin which retains the direct object-indirect object sequence as in ni gei wo mianzi (you give me face).

According to Robert Cheng, Taiwanese (a variety of Min) differs from Standard Mandarin in the following aspects: contrast between habitual and future action, contrast between present and past tense, use of preverbal auxiliary verbs, and the obligatory use of auxiliary verbs as operators (Cheng 1985, 353-68). In addition to the grammatical differences, the dental retroflexions and suffixal -erization are also absent from Taiwanese (Kubler 1981).

Yue and Min have been widely used not only by Chinese in the southeast provinces of the mainland, such as Guangzhou or Fujian, but also in the Chinese diaspora since the end of the 18th century. In North America, Australia, and Southeast Asia, one can hear these two varieties along with other varieties of Chinese practiced daily. Cantonese has been the native language for the Chinese in Hong Kong, though it has never had an official status such as that held by British English during the colonization or that will be granted to Putonghua after 1997 (when Hong Kong returns to the People’s Republic of China).

A similar sociolinguistic situation occurred in Taiwan. According to Kubler, on two occasions in Taiwan’s recent history, non-native languages were widely promoted by central governments originally located outside the island (1985, 156). Japanese was declared the official language during Japan’s colonization of Taiwan, and Standard Mandarin replaced the official and national linguistic status of Japanese after World War II. DeFrancis provides similar observations:

The native speakers of Mandarin who took over Taiwan after 1945 comprised only 2 or 3 million people as against the 5 or 6 million inhabitants already there. Most of the latter are native speakers of what is variously called Taiwanese or Fukienese or Min, spoken in the adjacent mainland province of Fujian, from which their ancestors migrated some three centuries ago. Guoyu (the national language) was imposed on to this non-Mandarin majority as the only language of education (DeFrancis 1984, 59).

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6. The romanization for Cantonese in this paper follows Professor Parker Pok-Fei Huang’s system.
On the Chinese mainland, the standardization of Chinese, based on the northern speech of Beijing, was promoted with the circulation of the official language policy in 1956. By adopting the term Putonghua, the Chinese Communist leaders meant to play down the inherent exclusiveness of a standard language and bring the most "viable and potent" elements from the working class and peasants (Ramsey 1987, 15). However, the linguistic difference between standard Chinese, Guoyu and Putonghua appears more like linguistic make-up in appearance, marked by subtle phonetic variations such as "to -er or not to -er." It is more of a felicitous socio-political ideology termed and imposed by the authorities than a distinct linguistic exercise practiced by those who speak "Standard Mandarin."

**A Case in Chinese**

It is notable that authorities in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have opposing opinions as to what is authentic Chinese and what is merely a dialect. The definition of which variety of Chinese qualifies as the language, and which is, by default, an abbreviation, a dialect, or "non-standard" is not a straightforward linguistic exercise. Standard Mandarin, alias Guoyu in Taiwan and Putonghua in China, is a prescribed language and is based on a Beijing variety. In the general linguistic paradigm, the contesting nature of language or dialect is not an interesting issue. As Milroy and Milroy point out: "One consequence of the doctrine of arbitrariness is the linguist's working assumption that no language or dialect can be shown to be better or worse than another on linguistic grounds alone" (Milroy and Milroy 1985, 19). In reality, it is very difficult to test this scientific assumption empirically since the antithesis to this assumption, that one linguistic variety is superior to the other, is like two sides of a coin. Generally, in a linguist's mind, the *value* as opposed to the *signification* of a linguistic variety is purely *ideological*, not scientifically interesting.

Thus, all things being equal, varieties of Chinese—like those of English, Latin, or Arabic—are entitled to be qualified as standard languages, regardless of the evolution of economics, politics or history. If treating one language as superior to the other is ideological but not scientific, then this notion of Standard English, Standard Latin,
Standard Arabic, or Standard Chinese is certainly ideological too. As Milroy and Milroy write:

The spread of English is due, not to its superiority as a system of language, but to the greater economic and political success of its speakers in recent centuries. In a similar way, classical Latin became the official language of a great empire; yet, its great prestige did not ensure its ultimate survival in the face of political and economic change (Milroy and Milroy 1985, 19).

Norman compared this linguistic ambiguity of language and dialect in Chinese to that of Romance languages:

Both have their roots in a large-scale imperial expansion. In both instances the empirical languages are carried by armies and settlers to areas previously occupied by speakers of different languages; in both cases, the newly developing vernaculars existed alongside an antiquated written language and were profoundly influenced by it. In view of these parallels, it would not be surprising if we found about the same degree of diversity among the Chinese dialects as we do among the Romance languages, and in fact I believe this to be the case (Norman 1988, 187).

To call Cantonese and Mandarin major Chinese dialects is like calling French, Italian and Spanish major Latin dialects, or, worse yet, major French dialects, major Italian dialects, or major Spanish dialects (depending on which end of the spectrum one is viewing). The socio-cultural evolution of varieties of Chinese parallels that of the varieties of Latin. A change of name from major languages to major dialects lowers the "dialectal" varieties in the linguistic hierarchy, implying as well the subordination of their speakers to the speakers of "the language" in a socio-psychological ladder. This kind of labeling goes on every day in New York City's Chinatown, and it has profound consequences for the ways people view themselves and others. It colors their interactions in particular ways. Their daily linguistic transactions fluctuate as the socio-economic forces change; they are contingent on the ever-changing socio-cultural predicament. If Rome were still the political center of European power, speakers of the Italianate varieties of the Romance language might be doing just what the speakers of Chinese are doing in a multilingual community such as New York City's Chinatown. The ambiguities of a well-bounded and invariant linguistic boundary pose challenges to the structuralist paradigm.
Conflicting Meanings of Suffixual -Erization in Standard Mandarin

This paper follows Barnes (1977) in focusing only on nouns -erized in word final position. This linguistic phenomenon is characteristic in northern Chinese speech and notably in Beijing, the capital of People’s Republic of China. Not all word final nouns are subject to -erization in Standard Mandarin. Chao provides extended examples for lexical distributions of -erization (1976, 216-49). According to some of my informants from Beijing, both Beijing patois spoken by the uneducated workers and Beijing language (Standard Mandarin) demonstrate -erization. For example, when I -erized dashiguan-r (embassy), I was laughed at by a Beijing speaker who later told me that dashiguan, as opposed to fanguan-r (restaurant) or chaguan-r (tea house), is a grand place and people (speakers of Beijing language as opposed to Beijing patois) do not -erize this word. When I -erized Shifu-r (master), a term which has gained currency among people in China, she commented on the improper usage of such a fashion as "the uneducated trying to imitate the speech of the learned." I later asked this speaker what came to her mind when she heard this "mistake" from other people (those who -erize in the "wrong" manner, and therefore, by her definition, speak the patois of Beijing). "You are either not from Beijing or you are from a low class in Beijing." "To -er or not to -er" is neither a dilemma nor a mistake in her mind. According to her, only those who do not speak the Beijing language have to worry about this issue. Thus, word-final -erization for a Beijing speaker is a linguistic marker not only to differentiate who speaks the Beijing language but also to differentiate different classes. (You are either not from Beijing or you are a speaker of Beijing patois.)

As mentioned above, suffixual -erization was absent in Min dialect and has been a highly marked linguistic feature, even among those who were born in the sixties and learned to speak Standard Mandarin at school. Standard Mandarin was imposed in Taiwan at the end of the 1940s, after the independence of Taiwan from Japanese colonization. As a result of the colonization (1894-1945), most of the people over fifty years of age learned Japanese in school prior to their learning of Standard Mandarin, the language promoted by the central government in Taiwan which came from mainland China in 1949. The distinction between the Taiwanese, those who were in Taiwan prior to 1949, and the Chinese mainlanders, those who came to Taiwan after 1949, was a very
sensitive socio-political issue in the fifties. The February 28th Event in 1947, when the Nationalist Party used force to repress the discontented Taiwanese, highlighted the ethnic tensions among the Chinese in Taiwan. As a result, Standard Mandarin, characterized by word-final -erization and a set of dental retroflexions, was regarded as highly marked, not only linguistically but also socio-culturally. As one of my informants from Taiwan commented: "When I was young, if I heard people speak with -erization, I knew that person was a mainlander. None of my friends would speak in such a fashion."

Demonstration of "correct" pronunciation of Chinese is often compounded with pride and prejudice regarding one's native place: Ni(n) shi nali ren? in Taiwanese Mandarin as opposed to Ni(n) shi na-r ren? in Standard Mandarin. Suffixual -erization in this context receives a social referent in differentiating the mainlanders who came to Taiwan in the forties and the Taiwanese who came to Taiwan before that period. Over the years, interethnic marriage and the rise of the second or third generations of Taiwanese (those who were born and raised in Taiwan after the 1949 emigration from the Chinese mainland) have made the distinction between mainlander and Taiwanese less socio-culturally sensitive. The increased wealth enjoyed by the Chinese in Taiwan since the 1980s and their search for a legitimate identity on the international stage have consolidated and revised the status of "Mandarin in Taiwan" and have added a new referent to Standard Mandarin. Suffixual -erization in this context accords this sound with a group of Beijing political authorities who are distrusted and resented for their social and political actions since the 1960s.

What does suffixual -erization mean to an American student of Chinese? Is it a put-on speech act which native speakers of Chinese love to perform in order to have an upper-hand over their non-Chinese counterparts, a deja-vu sound (the post-vocalic /r/ in English or the uvular /r/ in Parisian French?) whose social referents and meanings are as intriguing as its Chinese counterpart, or is it a peculiar linguistic marker identified with a particular place, Beijing, which has great symbolic power in modern civilization and
shows a Northern Chinese bias in its political history which has been reinforced by the actions of the Chinese Communist Party.\footnote{I am grateful to Professor Fred C. Blake for sharing this insight with me (personal communication).}

When I first learned Chinese in Taiwan in the 70s, I always detested this /r/ sound. It reminded me of the way my mother spoke English. She and my dad were both from a small city between Rhode Island and Massachusetts. She tended to add an /r/ to those words ended with an open vowel, like the word, idea (/aidir/), and dropped the /r/ when the word is ended with an /r/ sound as in car (/kər/). I always felt embarrassed to hear her speak like that. One of my Chinese teachers from Beijing didn’t really use this -erization style of speaking with other people. She only wanted us, the foreign students of Chinese to learn. I felt she sounded so unnatural. Plus, nobody speaks in this fashion in the street. However, I could accept those teachers who -erized their Chinese all the time, not just in front of the foreign students. Once when I was walking in Hong Kong, I heard a person behind me -erizing almost every word. I turned around and found out that it was a foreigner speaking Chinese. He looked like us and he spoke like someone from Beijing. Someone told me later that this person’s speech sounded like Beijing patois. But my attitude has changed over the years as I met more speakers from Beijing and become friends with them. I remember that the first time I fell in love with the sound, which I think is acceptable to me now, was when I heard the six-year old son of my friends from Beijing talking. -Erized words just came out his mouth naturally. I said to myself, “This is the very thing that we are killing ourselves for and this little boy just produces it without any difficulty or confusion.”\footnote{I am grateful to Melissa Richardson for discussing this issue with me.}

**The Translinguistic Approach**

In recent years, there has been rising interest in the Russian literary scholar and linguist M.M. Bakhtin’s translinguistic approach to the study of language (Bakhtin 1981). The voice of literary prose is a central structural element in his theory, which is not a set of terms for the description of language but is instead a study of language in domains beyond the bounds of form and content (Hill 1987, 92). Such a notion, therefore, is different from the notion of meta-messages (Bateson 1972) which still implies a grammatical structure determining the shape of messages.

Central to a translinguistic approach is the identification and description of voice or, better yet, voices. The translinguistic approach regards speakers as in control of a range
of ways of speaking and writing and, consequently, seeks an account of the possibilities open to them for the juxtaposition of complementary and conflicting voices (Hill and Hill 1986). The notions of heteroglossia and polyphony are designed to capture the multiplicity of possibilities that reside within communities and within individuals.

Polyphonic discourse is characteristic of all speech communities, including the academic one. Within the discipline of linguistics, structuralists organize their metaphors so as to talk about language as a system of rules which describe ideal and invariant objects. Functionalists organize their metaphors to predict the variation in language as determined by well-defined and unchanging variables (such as gender and class) in a society where everyone defines gender and class the same way. The modes of linguistic discourse treating languages in one way or the other may also be seen as on-going dialogues where different voices come into play in shaping a contested paradigm. Several of Bakhtin’s terms and metaphors are useful in understanding the dynamics of the act of code-switching. They are dialogue, discourse, and dialogic relation.

Dialogue, apart from its normal meaning of an exchange of utterances, does not necessarily involve the speaker and the listener physically; rather, it can also refer to inner speech communication (Vygotsky 1986). For example, when I was making a choice of "to -er or not to -er," I was engaging in my mind in a dialogue with what I had internalized as "Chinese speaking" learned in years of schooling in Taiwan. In other words, I was engaged in a conversation or dialogue with my family, friends and teachers from whom I constructed a cultural identity as a middle-class Taiwanese female, though none of them were physically present. It was this dialogue that guided my language choice rather than the dialogue I had with the American student of Chinese, even though the latter was physically present. My prior social experiences organized my linguistic transactions with others according to internal voices and different social consciousnesses.

In other words, though I understand my actual interlocutor and his Standard Mandarin, I comprehend the form and content of what it represents at a given moment against previous dialogues. The prior dialogues I had during school days in Taiwan and the dialogue with a well-educated, knowledgeable student of Chinese guide my perception of the situation at hand and constitute my expectations for future interactions. Each dialogue then leads to a more complex one and is further internalized and constantly
recalled and reinterpreted to enrich the dynamics of our relationship. Each dialogue thickens understandings and complicates strategies for interactions.

Discourse in a Bakhtian sense means a specific point of view constituted by a particular social consciousness (Voloshinov 1986). For example, my graduate training in various formal linguistic discourses equipped me with theoretical insights as to what a language is and what dialects are. My Taiwanese middle-class upbringing imparted a very strong sense of what it means to be a genuine Chinese. Enduring relationships with family, friends, and teachers in a community outside Mainland China further inculcated in me aesthetic and emotional ties to various Chinese usages. These intellectual and emotional investments conditioned my language behavior, and I further internalized them as a persuasive frame of reference to interpret those who behaved differently from me, either linguistically or culturally. And this set of implicit socio-cultural ideologies underlies my social identities and guides my language choices. The notion of dialogic relation is prominent in a heteroglossic situation. That is, the meaning of word-final /t/ in Standard Mandarin is not as static or well-defined as an objective linguist would assume. Historical contexts give /t/ life and substance. As Voloshinov points out: "In actual fact, contexts of usage for one and the same word often contrast with one another... Contexts do not stand side by side in a row, as if unaware of one another, but are in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict" (Voloshinov 1986, 80).

The objective linguist throws the issue of historical context overboard along with the notion of parole, the non-standard, non-systematic speech. What is left in this analysis is a monologizing discourse where each repetition of the same word aims at the same direction. This, of course, is far from the truth. The polemic nature of a symbol profiles the dialogic relations to the interest institutions and/or individuals. Standard Mandarin typified by suffixual -erization has gained several referents over the years. The dramatic historical events that have taken place since 1949 have shaped and are still shaping the meaning of suffixual -erization in Standard Mandarin. It can signify authority, prestige, prejudice, bureaucracy, or hypocrisy in instances such as the designation of Standard Mandarin as the national language by the Chinese government in Taiwan, the elevation in social status of the working class and the peasants during China’s communization, and the designation of Putonghua as the common language for all the people in China by the
Chinese Communist Party. -Erization further signifies these attitudes as when the Nationalist Party used force to repress the discontented Chinese in Taiwan, the radicals during the Cultural Revolution denounced old values and abolished the use of native place as a reference or source for social identity, Beijing was recognized by the U.N. in 1979 as the sole political representative for all Chinese, and when the massacre took place in Tiananmen in 1989. These attitudes will take on further nuances as the 1997 deadline of capitalist Hong Kong's return to Beijing approaches and as the tensions and contentions between Beijing and Taipei take on more dramatic forms. Only by relocating -/r/ in a given socio-cultural discourse can we begin to understand its multivocality.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper points out how speakers of Chinese can create and manipulate meanings of a linguistic feature to abolish or establish a relationship with their interlocutors. By situating the suffixual -erization in Standard Mandarin in different times and spaces, we find several social referents to this linguistic phenomenon. For a speaker from Beijing, for whom suffixual -erization is an unmarked feature, it can be used to distinguish different classes (working class and the educated) or native place (from Beijing or not). For a speaker from Taiwan, for whom suffixual -erization is a highly marked feature, it can be used to distinguish those who came from Taiwan before 1949 (the Taiwanese) from those who came after 1949 (the mainlanders) or it can be used to distinguish we (the Chinese in Taiwan) and they (the Chinese bureaucrats in Beijing). For an American speaker of Chinese, who has to relativize sets of communicative rules against his/her social class background and intentions, what really marks the distinction in "to -er or not to -er" is not the formal difference in phonetics but the dynamic socio-political dimension which speaks through it.

By deconstructing the ambiguities in Standard Mandarin and presenting the indeterminacy in its practical implications, this paper tries to provide an alternative analysis to the study of code-switching, and of acts of identity. It aims to show that in the case of "Standard Mandarin" "to -er or not to er" is analogous to "to be or not to be"; what you -er is what you are as a marker of class or social status. Recognizing the inequality in access to and command of a standard language, this paper advocates locating
the study of code-switching beyond bounded forms and meanings and situating it in a context of economic and political power relations. Standard Mandarin is going through constant deconstruction and reconstruction in conjunction with the changing socio-economical transformation taking place in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Adopting the study of code-switching as a symbolic creation concerned with construction of self and other within a broader political, economic and historical context will give significance not only to the theoretical paradigm but also to the speakers of Chinese.

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