

Chinese Diglossia and the (Un-) Translatability of Literary Linguistic Variation

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ABSTRACT

The present paper addresses the (un-)translatability of linguistic variation pertaining to literary translation of diglossia and investigates relevant issues of potentiality and importance. Discussion is carried out through reference to Anthony Pym's (2000) notion of "syntagmatic alteration of distance", which offers an alternative to the frequently employed but discourse-restrictive notion of "translatability of dialect". An example from Lu Xun's (鲁迅, 1881-1936) novella *The True Story of Ah Q* (阿Q正傳, A Q Zhengzhuan) (1921) provides an argument for potentiality and importance. It focuses on the interaction of parody and linguistic variation, qualities of the novella's main antagonist and his biographer, the narrator, as translated out from the historicized Chinese context into the English-speaking world. Analysis is carried out across two translations: Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's *The true story of Ah Q* (1956) and William A. Lyell's *Ah Q — The Real Story* (1990).

KEYWORDS: diglossia, historiography, linguistic variation, Lu Xun, standard-with-dialects.