

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

Todd Klaiman

National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

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.

Introduction

Within Translation Studies literature, the issue of the (un-) translation of linguistic variation has received a certain degree of attention (Catford 1965; Newmark 1988; Hatim and Mason 1990; Brisset 1996; Sanchez 1999, 2009). This attention, however, has been quite unflinchingly focused upon the (un-) translatability of dialect — in particular, socio- and geographic dialect — and the problems associated with it. The present paper would like to suggest that the limited scope of the discussion has caused research into various other aspects of linguistic variation — bilingualism, multilingualism, and diglossia,¹ to name a few — to be left underdeveloped. The call for increased awareness and broadened scope for discourse related to translatability of linguistic variation is not new. The issue has been raised before with particular reference to diglossia (El-Badarien and Zughouli 2004; Meylaerts 2006; Anderman 2007). However, the Chinese diglossic situation, in particular, has never been considered within the Translation Studies literature.

A simple example of the limited scope of recent research upon the topic of translatability of linguistic variation may be observed in the treatment of the subject in two of Translation Studies' most general, but comprehensive, reference texts — *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies* (Munday 2009), and *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha 2011). Munday's text, for example, provides an extensive treatment — written by Basil Hatim (2009:36-53)— of register-related issues that pertain, in particular, to register and discourse analytic models imported from applied linguistics and to translation quality assessment

¹ Diglossia, the focal point of the present paper, generally describes a language contact situation in which two variants of the same language co-exist in an asymmetrical relationship — across variables of *function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, and phonology* — within a society (Ferguson 1959:325-340).

models such as those developed by Juliane House. With respect to translation of other types of linguistic variation, the book also offers a brief discussion of dialect — idiolect and sociolect — in audiovisual translation (Chiaro 2009:158-159), and a short definition of *dialect translation* as a practice characterized by general adherence to the norm of ‘homogenizing’, or standardizing, the target text language (Munday 2009:181). Diglossia as a form of linguistic variation is not mentioned. In Baker and Saldanha (2011), dialect, register, and style are all presented and dealt with extensively, yet diglossia receives only a single reference in the entry dealing with ideology and translation, where it is mentioned in reference to a promising, yet sluggish, increase in awareness of alternative perspectives on translation in non-Western cultures (Fawcett and Munday 2011:140).

The aim of this paper is to address this lacuna within Translation Studies by presenting and explaining the Chinese diglossic situation, and the discourse on translatability of linguistic variation as it pertains to diglossia. In particular, the paper will investigate both the potentiality and importance of translation of diglossia as a form of linguistic variation. In order to address issues relating to the potentiality of translation of diglossia as linguistic variation, the paper will compare and contrast popular variety-for-variety, equivalence-fidelity-based approaches to translation of dialect with more general, register-based, relative-distance styled approaches taken from Catford’s (1965) and Pym’s (2000) readings of the problem. A brief review and discussion of variation-related Translation Studies literature as presented in the following section below will function to identify an overall trend in the field toward discourse that focuses upon translation of linguistic variation issues that pertain to structuralist notions of equivalence and fidelity to source text. The trend, quite out of step with post-structuralist translation theories, will serve as comparison to infrequently referenced *relativist* notions based upon the author’s reading of Catford (1965) and Pym’s (2000) treatment of the issue of translatability of linguistic variation. Finally, analysis of a representative instance of literary linguistic variation and its translation will serve to highlight the potentiality of a more register-based, relative-distance styled approach to the translation of variation.

The importance of translation of diglossic variation will be addressed by way of analysis of a representative piece of Chinese fiction and its translation into English. Lu Xun’s (魯迅, 1881-1936) novella *Ah Q Zhengzhuàn* (阿Q正傳, *The True Story of Ah Q*) (1921) will serve the purpose.² In her examination of the translingual reinvention of the national character myth in China and its association with the May Fourth literary discourse, Lydia Liu (1995) takes as her point of focus Lu Xun’s *Ah Q Zhengzhuàn*. Liu approaches *Ah Q Zhengzhuàn*, the climactic event of the May Fourth discourse (1995:47), as a means to explore the complexity of twentieth century China’s intellectual battle with the seemingly contradictory paths of Chinese tradition and Western modernity. The present paper makes use of Lu Xun’s influential novella for a similar reason. The burden of the Chinese intellectual, as Liu refers to it (*ibid.*), is tied quite closely to the Chinese diglossic language contact situation.

² The writer known by the pen name Lu Xun was born Zhou Zhangshou (周樟壽) in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, China. Although he also used the name Zhou Shuren (周樹人), he is generally referred to in Western literature and research by his pen name, Lu Xun.

The present paper is organized into four main sections. First, ‘Translation Studies and Linguistic Variation’ presents a review and discussion of certain major trends present in the Translation Studies literature pertaining to the translatability of linguistic variation. The section helps to demonstrate the lack of attention given to translation of diglossia and the Chinese diglossic situation. Second, the section on ‘Diglossia’ provides a definition of the term and discusses its manifestation in the Chinese language contact situation in Mainland China. Unique characteristics of the Chinese diglossic situation are also considered. Third, ‘*Ah Q Zhengzhuàn*: Parody and Chinese Diglossia’ serves to introduce and situate within a historical context important background details pertaining to Lu Xun’s novella. In particular, the section addresses issues relating to Lu Xun’s manipulation of traditional language-use norms from Chinese literature and historiography as means of parody of tradition and representation of diglossia. Finally, ‘Text Excerpt: Analysis & Discussion of Two English Translations’ provides a brief description and analysis of a single excerpt from two English-language translations of Lu Xun’s *Ah Q Zhengzhuàn*. Analysis of the two texts, translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (1956) and William Lyell (1990), provides a platform for discussion of relevant issues pertaining to parodic function, language-use norms, diglossia, and translation.

Translation Studies and Linguistic Variation

The following section provides a brief overview of some of the major trends in Translation Studies research on the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation. Three specific points of focus — linguistic variation as relative deviation from norm, variation as standards-with-dialects, and variation as diglossia — will demonstrate a potential for further enquiry into under-researched areas such as translation and diglossia, bilingualism, and multilingualism.

Catford (1965) and Pym (2000): Linguistic Variation as Relative Deviation

Early writings on the subject of translation of linguistic variation, such as Catford’s (1965) *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, were concerned with the possibility of finding an *equivalent* target-side representation to match the variation found in the source text. Catford’s unique notion of equivalence with respect to language variation is concomitant to his claim that “all varieties of a language have features in common”, but that they also have “features which are peculiar” to each individual variety (1965:86). These peculiar features [phonetic, grammatical, lexical, phonological, graphological, etc] “serve as formal (and sometimes substantial) criteria or *markers* of the variety in question” (*ibid.*). As such, a distinction can be made between standard, *unmarked* dialect, which, Catford points out, “shows little variation (in its written form at least) from one locality to another”, (*ibid.*) and *marked*, non-standard dialects such as idiolect, geographical dialect, and social dialect.

Although these are the only three forms of non-standard dialect discussed by Catford, the marked-unmarked distinction makes it possible for him to assert that “equivalence is set up between *varieties* [of dialects]”, without the need for equivalence to occur across homologous features. A unique feature of Catford’s views on the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation — dialect, register and style are all classified by Catford as forms of language variation — is that “equivalence must be set up between the varieties as such, and the specific markers may be different in the SL and TL texts” (1965:91).

This point is also found in Anthony Pym's (2000) claims about translation of linguistic variation and syntagmatic alteration of distance. Pym's perspective is reminiscent of Catford's in that they both emphasize the distinction of dialect as a functional representation of variety, and as a shift away from an established norm (Catford 1965:83-86; Pym 2000:70-71). The main premise of Pym's argument is that linguistic variation is usually represented in literature in a way that approaches either parodied language at one extreme or authentic language at another. Pym's use of the term "parody" refers on the one hand to the fact that dialect, as it is reproduced in literature, is generally just a caricature of a real world variation accomplished through exaggeration of commonly acknowledged stereotypes.

According to Pym, authentic language is, on the other hand, "the multiplication of variations beyond anything that the popular imagination can identify" (2000:70). In other words, a given variety is represented in such detail that the receiver, overwhelmed by the range and depth of the reproduction, accepts it as authentic without necessarily understanding it completely. In regard to the two extremes of linguistic variation described thus, Pym explains that their creation within literature depends upon a "rapid shift away from an established norm", and that this norm is one that is established within "the particular cultural product in question" (2000:71).

Based upon these two points — dialect as a functional representation and as a shift away from a norm — as Catford did nearly four decades before him, Pym argues that it is the "relative deviation from the norm" that should be rendered in translation, not a given source-text variety (2000:72). Pym refers to this as syntagmatic alteration of distance. In order to investigate the potentiality of translation of linguistic variation, the present paper takes as its focal point syntagmatic alteration of distance as translation strategy. In particular, I will explore the effectiveness of this strategy to deal with parodic function as created through manipulation of the Chinese diglossic language scenario.

Ubiquitous Discourse: Standards-with-Dialects

Over the 35 years that separate Catford's and Pym's work, Translation Studies literature relating to the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation has focused mainly upon geographical and social dialect, and the issues relating to their translation (Nida 1976; Newmark 1988; Hatim and Mason 1990; Lefevere 1992a). A variety of issues — semantic, aesthetic, ideological, political, and ethical — have been addressed (Lefevere 1992b; Michael Cronin 1995; Annie Brisset 1996; John Corbett 1997; Gillian Lane-Mercier 1997), but the discussion has been confined to an unrealistic, single-user-single-variant context.

By "single-user-single-variant", I refer to the status of the presumed speaker of a geographical or social dialect taken as a theoretical object upon which most debate has been focused. The dichotomy created in much literature, and as such found to pervade the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation debate, is that of a mono-lingual/mono-variant speaker of one dialect — standard or non-standard; majority language or minority language, central or periphery, and so on — placed in contrast to a mono-lingual (ML)/mono-variant (MV) speaker of another. Although the community in which the interaction takes place may be multilingual, the actors within the community are usually taken to be ML/MV. The contrast between ML/MV speakers of opposing dialects is then played out upon any number of levels including, but not limited to, semantic, aesthetic, ideological, political, and hierarchical. It seems that the ML/MV speaker is

an oversimplified point upon which to base any discussion of (un)-translatability of linguistic variation because, firstly, ML/MV agents are not the only ones represented in works of literature, and secondly, many language communities are not composed of only ML/MV speaking individuals.

Translation Studies and Diglossia

Within the Translation Studies literature, there have been a few scholars who have explored linguistic variation from a point of entry other than the usual standard-with-dialects or minority-majority dichotomies. I will discuss briefly four: Shek (1977, 1988), El-Badarien and Zughoul (2004), Wilkinson (2005), and Meylaerts (2006).

Shek is one of the first to investigate the effects of diglossia on translation. Shek's research takes up the issue of imbalance in literary translation in Canada (French translated into English being much more highly represented than English into French). As a way of explaining the imbalance, Shek proposes the diglossic historical relationship between the nation's two official languages. It is important to point out that Shek explores, as he puts it, "Quebec's socio-cultural evolution", and not just a static moment, for example, in present-day Canadian society. This is an important distinction because it is not entirely clear whether or not modern-day Quebec (post-1974, when a bill passed in Quebec named French as the official language of the province) meets the requirements to be categorized as a diglossic community. However, viewed over the full course of its history, Quebec would probably make an interesting example of what Ferguson (1959) refers to as an evolution away from diglossia toward a standard-with-dialect or, perhaps, a majority-minority situation. Regardless, Shek's work helps to balance an otherwise monolingual-heavy discussion of (un)-translatability of linguistic variation.

In contrast to the questionable categorization of Quebec as a diglossic community, research on translation and the diglossic nature of Arabic carried out by El-Badarien and Zughoul (2004) can without a doubt be viewed as related to diglossia in the classic sense of the word. According to El-Badarien and Zughoul, "treatment of variation has always been restricted to 'dialect' and has not encompassed the notion of diglossia" (2004:447). In order to remedy the oversight, El-Badarien and Zughoul investigate the connection between variety (H and L)³ and context as it pertains to translation into the Arabic diglossic situation. Although it is quite prescriptive in nature, their conclusion — "use of the wrong variety in translating a text not only fails to transfer the intended meaning but also distorts the message" (2004:454) — might still be instructive in that it refers to a diglossic community that Ferguson himself described as belonging to a category in which prestige of the high language is such that "H alone is regarded as real and L is reported 'not to exist'" (1959:29).

Finally, both Wilkinson (2005) and Meylaerts (2006) shift the focus to issues related to national identity. Wilkinson explores theatre translation in German-speaking Switzerland. In particular, she discusses translation from H to L varieties within a language community that meets an extended definition of diglossia as opposed to a classical one. Ferguson's original categorization

³ According to Ferguson's (1959) classification system, separate varieties in a diglossic community are called either 'H' for the high variety — the superposed dialect, or 'L' for the low variety — standard or regional dialects. Of course, not all members of a community will hold such a view, but it surely will affect both meaning and reception at various levels of society.

(classical diglossia) did not include genetically unrelated languages. Later research in both psychology and sociology (Gumperz 1961, 1962; Fishman 1967) worked to extend the definition of diglossia (extended diglossia) to allow H and L to be represented by genetically unrelated or historically distinct languages. Wilkinson's argument, with respect to such a diglossic community — in particular, modern-day German-speaking Switzerland — holds that translation choice often reflects an L-side desire to promote local and national identity and to resist H-side culture (2005).

In a similar vein, Meylaerts (2006) delves into some of the issues relating to the struggle for equality — or perhaps dominance — that often arises between H and L language varieties in a diglossic setting. Meylaerts explores the translation of Flemish novels into French within the heteroglossic context of Belgium during the 1920s and 30s. The unique heteroglossic nature of the context is such that monolingual H-variety-French speakers comprise the target audience for which multilingual Flemish-French speaker-produced L-variety Flemish novels are translated. Much like Shek's research into "Quebec's socio-cultural evolution", Meylaerts work investigates within a diglossic setting an L-variety language in the early stages of resisting H-language-variety dominance.

The study of translation, in all its permutations, as it exists across an evolving — both in space and time — diglossic community is an interesting area that, to-date, has received little attention in the field of Translation Studies. For the time being, however, this paper will deal with just one instance of translation from a diglossic community, Mainland China, to a non-diglossic one, North America and the UK

Diglossia

In order to expand the focus of the discussion, the present paper looks at a contrasting — but, perhaps, more realistic — scenario in which speakers have access to more than one language variant at a time — namely diglossia. Ferguson coined the term diglossia in order to refer to a situation in which "two varieties of language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play" (1959:25). A more detailed definition is as follows:

A relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community which is learned largely by formal education and used for most written and formal spoken purposes but not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation (Ferguson 1959:34-35).

In his investigation of this phenomenon, Ferguson focuses upon four diglossic language communities: namely, Arabic, Modern Greek, Swiss German, and Haitian Creole (1959:26) and describes nine variables — *function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, and phonology* — across which H and L differ within a given diglossic language community. Ferguson's variables will serve to present details of the Chinese diglossic language situation in the following section.

The Chinese Diglossic Situation

Although Chinese is not one of the defining languages described in his classic paper on diglossia, Ferguson does note, “it [Chinese] probably represents diglossia on the largest scale of any attested instance” (1959:36). In reference to what he also calls “the most extensive case of diglossia in history”, Don Snow explains that “in pre-modern times, Classical Chinese functioned as the high (H) language variety in not only China, but also Korea, Japan, and Vietnam” (2010a:124).⁴ In the case of the Chinese diglossic situation in China, Classical Chinese (文言; *wenyan*) can be considered to function as the H variant of the language, and a variety of vernacular (白話; *baihua*) forms of Chinese can be regarded as L.

In *Modern Written Chinese in Development*, Ping Chen explains that *wenyan* functioned as H in China for approximately 2,000 years, until the language reform associated with the May Fourth Movement of 1919 led to its abandonment as the standard written language (1993:506-507). Although development of a written L form is not necessary for the establishment of diglossia — it may even hinder establishment in some instances — it is a unique characteristic of the evolution of diglossia in the pre-modern Chinese language community.

Consistent with defining characteristics of Ferguson’s variable of *function*, *wenyan* (H) and *baihua* (L) were clearly differentiated with respect to functional domain. As Chen points out, for most of China’s history, *wenyan* has, on the one hand, played the role of H variant as “the classical standard written language for literary, scholarly, and official purposes” (1999:68). *Baihua*, on the other hand, has “served all low-culture functions such as transcriptions of Buddhist admonitions, scripts for folk stories, and plays” (Chen 1993:507). Moreover, as will be discussed below in ‘Ah Q Zhengzhuan: Parody and Chinese Diglossia’, throughout most of China’s history, there have existed clear conventions of language use and domain, with respect to *wenyan*, in particular.

Distinct conventions of language use and domain tend to facilitate establishment of an obvious system of *prestige*, as described by Ferguson’s second variable. The classic diglossic asymmetrical relationship of prestige between H and L can be observed quite clearly in Chen’s description of the Chinese language contact situation in which “*wenyan* was considered refined and elegant, thus ideal for high-culture functions, while *baihua* was despised as coarse and vulgar, suitable only for low-culture functions” (1999:69). As Snow points out, much of the value placed upon *wenyan* as the prestigious variant arises due to its link to a system of written examinations (科舉; *keju*) established during the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) for the purpose of selection of government officials (2010a:126).

The use of *wenyan* as the language of examination in the Imperial exams, and the importance of the system of examinations for the appointment of government office, obviously served to institutionalize *wenyan* as the H variant. Of course, in a diglossic situation, variables of standardization and acquisition are quite often concomitants of the institutionalization process. Promotion during the Qin dynasty (221 BCE-206 BCE) of a unified, standardized Chinese script, and an unrelenting sponsorship throughout the history of pre-modern China of early (first

⁴ The term ‘pre-modern China’ usually refers to the historical period before formation of the Republic of China in 1912.

millennium BCE) *wenyan* texts, such as the *Analects* and *Mencius* as prototypical resources for Imperial examination preparation, led to increased *grammatical, lexical, and phonological* distance between *wenyan* and *baihua* (Chen 1993:506-509; Chen 1999:67-68; Snow 2010a:126).

Increased distance between the H and L variants fixes differences in *acquisition* as well. What Snow calls “the first mechanism by which diglossia was created in East Asia” was a widening of the gap between *wenyan* and vernacular Chinese through a process of isolation and fossilization of the former, and a continual evolution and transmutation of the latter. This solidified the diglossic disparate relationship of *acquisition* in which L is assimilated naturally in the home, while H must be learned formally at school (2010a:126-127). The distance between *wenyan* and *baihua* in China was made even greater by the fact that as a logographic (as opposed to phonographic) writing system *wenyan* was almost entirely divorced from the phonetic details of vernacular speech (Chen 1999:67). As Chen notes, the logographic nature — lack of direct association between sound and graphic forms — of *wenyan* gave it “a degree of accessibility across space and time”, and “insulated it from changes in the vernacular language” (1999:68).

As a result, Chen explains, *wenyan* was able to “serve as the medium whereby Chinese literary heritage was preserved and continued, and information could be spread across a land of great dialectal diversity” (*ibid.*). Consistent with Ferguson’s description of the diglossic variable of *literary heritage*, the unique characteristics of *wenyan* as a logographic writing system and its place in the Imperial examinations and selection of government office process have enabled it to reside at the heart of “a sizable body of written literature” that is “held in high esteem by the speech community” (Ferguson 1959:31).

Ah Q Zhengzhuan: Parody and Chinese Diglossia

Ah Q Zhengzhuan (阿 Q 正傳; *The True Story of Ah Q*) (1921) is a short episodic novella written by Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881-1936). The story traces the adventures of Ah Q, an idler and odd-jobber living in the fictitious village of Weizhuang (未莊; *weizhuang*). The story is set in China during the time that leads up to the Revolution of 1911.

Ah Q’s story was first published in the *Beijing Morning News* as a serial between December 4, 1921 and February 12, 1922. The piece is generally held to be a masterpiece of modern Chinese literature, since it captured for the first time in vernacular Chinese the struggles of the Chinese nation as it teetered at the expansive crevasse between tradition and modernity (Luo 2004:84). In fact, Lu Xun “was really striving to remake *baihua wen* into a new written language for a new literature” (Kowallis 1994:283).⁵ Lu Xun used the juxtaposition of hitherto irreconcilable language phenomena — H and L languages and the entire complement of variables and ideologies associated with them — to bring into question the practicality of traditionalists’ uncompromising adherence to defunct, traditional language practices, even in the face of China’s seeming demise at the hands of the modern West. Furthermore, Lu Xun’s intentional use of *baihua wen* creates a powerful irony “by juxtaposing ideals expressed in the classical language against the harsh realities of the present day” (Kowallis 1994:283-284).

⁵ *baihua wen* (白話文) refers specifically to “vernacular in written form,” while the term *baihua* (白話) is often used in the literature to refer to both written and spoken vernacular.

In a seminal work on the topic of Chinese traditional historiography (renowned for its complicated and rigid rules and conventions), Charles Gardner explains, “historical composition in Chinese has evolved a considerable body of conventional diction which requires special study for complete comprehension” (1961:80). In *Ah Q Zhengzhuan*, Lu Xun devotes most of the first two chapters of the book to the narrator’s first-person narrative which outlines the myriad difficulties he encounters trying to fit Ah Q’s story and personal details to the conventional demands of traditional historiography. As Huang explains, “[i]n the introduction, Lu Xun is consciously playing the conventions of traditional historiography against those of traditional vernacular fiction” (1990:433). In other words, Lu Xun offers his readers a critical investigation of the internal workings of the relationship between H (*wenyan*) and L (*baihua*) in the diglossic language contact situation. In a conventional, yet condescending tone, Lu Xun’s narrator discusses in detail the problems of finding within the historiographical tradition a proper title for Ah Q’s story.

As Huang points out, by meticulously explaining “why none of the traditional categories of biography fits his own ‘biography’ of Ah Q” the narrator (and Lu Xun) “ridicules traditional historiography” (*ibid.*). In the end, according to Huang, the narrator “finds a ‘new’ variety of historiography by which to identify, hence to authenticate, his own narrative” (*ibid.*). Throughout the process, the asymmetry of the H-L relationships of *function*, *prestige*, and *literary heritage* is foregrounded, and ultimately challenged.

It is important to remember that significant changes in Chinese historiography did not occur until the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to that time, traditional Chinese historiography wrote political and military history in an *annals-biographic* form (Wang 2001:16). This enabled historians to focus, across various biographies, upon the deeds of *important* individuals (Wang 2001:16). The traditional method, however, did not allow for a detailed telling of the stories of the Chinese people, but rather painted them all into a nondescript backdrop upon which the lives of heroic figures could be played out. Moreover, histories were written in the literary language of *wenyan* rather than in the vernacular *baihua*, the language of the people.

It was not until the revolutionary period of the early twentieth century that China began to evaluate limitations associated with traditional practices of education, literature, science, social science, and language. As Chen points out, during the first two decades of the 1900s and China’s push toward modernization, the Chinese language, blamed for widespread illiteracy, “was picked as one of the most important targets for reform” (1993:505). Under the influence of imported Western — and Eastern in the form of Japanese — notions of modernization and democracy, twentieth century Chinese thinkers such as Lu Xun began to push for changes that would lead to greater accessibility to knowledge through the replacement of *wenyan* by a language variant closer in structure to vernacular forms used and understood by the masses (Chen 1993:509).

In the preface to *Ah Q Zhengzhuan*, Lu Xun creates a situation in which the narrator, in his unwavering attachment to the conventions of the Chinese traditional historiographic system, actually lays bare the flawed nature of the system itself, and its inability to deal with the story of the common person. As Huang explains, “the life of Ah Q, according to accepted historiographical conventions, is not a subject worthy of the ‘elegant’ discourse used to tell it” (1990:435). Huang adds, “At the same time, the elegant discourse itself becomes ridiculous and

awkward when applied to the life of Ah Q. Thus the conventions themselves are seriously questioned” (1990:435).

Apart from the preface, which spans most of the first two chapters of the book and is told mostly in first-person narrative, the rest of *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* (including Ah Q’s misadventures, and his eventual execution as the town scapegoat for crimes allegedly committed in the name of the revolution) is told entirely by an omniscient, third person narrator. Tambling describes Ah Q’s narrator thus:

What sort is the narrator, then? The answer is that he is a mass of contradictions, like Ah Q himself, a mixture of pedantries and obscure traditions, which take over the prose and his thoughts, and someone who without realizing it, by writing the life of Ah Q, shows that history lies in the documents that historians have discarded. Hence everything in the narrator is digressive, the opposite of what is expected from a true story (2007: 60).

The parodic discourse that arises from the narrator’s ‘mass of contradictions’, therefore, plays a central role in my discussion of register and narrative style, as the two pertain to Lu Xun’s original text as well as to its two English translations. In particular, the recreation in English translation of Lu Xun’s juxtaposition of classical literary language with the vernacular will be analyzed in order to investigate various options with regard to translation of literary linguistic variation.

Text Excerpt: Analysis & Discussion of Two English Translations

This section presents two examples of English translations of Lu Xun’s *Ah Q Zhengzhuan*. The first example is a translation produced in 1956 by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. It demonstrates a complete lack of representation of the linguistic variation found in Lu Xun’s original. In my discussion of this translation, I will suggest possible reasons behind the Yangs’ choice not to represent the variation of the original. The second example is a translation produced in 1990 by William Lyell. Lyell’s translation provides insight into some of the possible merits and challenges of taking a relative-distance styled approach to representation in translation of linguistic variation. First, however, the following sub-section will present the excerpt chosen for analysis and explain the items to be analyzed.

Excerpt from Lu Xun’s Original Text (1921): Hybridity of Voice and Juxtaposition of H-L Language Variants to Create Parodic Function

The following excerpt is taken from the second chapter of the novella. In the passage, the narrator begins by relating the exploits of the main character Ah Q. After a brief discussion of Ah Q’s utterly unremarkable existence, the narrator starts with a scathing description of the character’s exaggerated sense of pride:

阿Q又很自尊，所有未莊的居民，全不在他眼睛裡，甚而至於對於兩位“文童”也有以為不值一笑的神情。夫文童者，將來恐怕要變秀才者也；趙太爺錢太爺大受居民的尊敬，除有錢之外，就因為都是文童的爹爹，而阿Q在精神上獨不表格外的崇奉，他想：我的兒子會闊得多啦！

(Lu Xun 2002:3, my emphases)

Ah Q also [is] very proud. The Weizhuang villagers are not worth his notice. Toward the two “young scholars”, in particular, he feels them not even worth a smile. It is said, one who is a young scholar, it seems, will become a talented literati. Mr Chao and Mr Qian enjoy the villagers’ respect, not only because they have money but also, because they are the dads of the two young scholars. However, Ah Q is alone in not being in the spirit of showing any particular worship toward them. He thinks, “**My son gonna be much more richer!**”

(my translation, my emphases)

This particular passage corresponds to an example cited in Huang’s (1990) article, ‘The Inescapable Predicament’. It will serve to direct my analysis of Lu Xun’s original text and two English translations. Huang’s analysis is directed at Lu Xun’s original without any regard for its representation in translation. As such, I have chosen to further Huang’s work in order to include notions of diglossia and translation in the discussion. This will help to demonstrate some of the difficulties and unique issues that arise in the process of translation from a diglossic language contact situation into a non-diglossic one.

According to Huang, an important feature of this particular section of text is that “the narrator introduces the discourses of ‘others’ without any apparent acknowledgement (such as typographical indication)” (1990:437). In other words, although the main voice of the passage is that of the narrator, there is also a second voice in the text, namely that of the people of Weizhuang. Huang suggests that in the underlined sentence above, and in Lu Xun’s choice of the informal ‘爹爹’ (‘dad’), the narrator is actually narrating “from the perspective of the villagers” (*ibid.*). Huang also notes that this change of voice is important because it points to the narrator’s shifting of satirical subject — from Ah Q to the villagers.

Finally, Huang explains that the success of the satire lies in the awkward hybrid construction of the villagers’ voice: literary language (‘夫文童者’; ‘young scholar’ and ‘秀才者也’; ‘talented literati’, underlined in the example) mixed with a dash of vernacular (‘將來恐怕要變’; ‘it seems will be’, bold and underlined in the example) (*ibid.*). In terms of Ferguson’s diglossia, this means H variety is used inappropriately and combined, again inappropriately, with L variety. According to Huang, “this ‘hybrid construction’ captures perfectly the typical villager’s combination of snobbery and envy: they are trying awkwardly to imitate or repeat what the rich and ‘educated’ say” (*ibid.*).

I would add that not only does Lu Xun juxtapose literary language with vernacular within the villagers’ voice, but he also juxtaposes H and L across the entire passage itself. As Victor Mair explains, literary *wenyan* and vernacular *baihua* demonstrate a stark disparity across grammatical structures (1994:709). In particular, Mair points to the difference in the grammatical function of the Chinese word *shi* (是). Under the literary *wenyan* system of grammar, *shi* has a demonstrative

use, while under the *baihua* system it is used as a copulative verb (1994:710). According to Mair, “This distinctive characteristic of VS [*baihua*] (A *shih* B {“A is B”}), which is so apparent even up to the present day, is utterly different from LS [*wenyan*], which lacks a copulative verb altogether” (*ibid.*). “Instead”, Mair continues, “LS [*wenyan*] employs the nominative sentence structure A B *yeh* (也) (“A {is} B”)” (*ibid.*).⁶ Based upon Mair’s explanation, a clear juxtaposition of H and L can be seen in Lu Xun’s employment of both nominative and copulative verb function in the passage. The underlined phrase: 將來恐怕要變秀才者也 (one who is a young scholar, it seems, will become a talented literati), employs the *wenyan* nominative *yeh* (也), while the subsequent phrase: 就因為都是文童的爹爹 (because they are the dads of the two young scholars), clearly employs the *baihua* copulative verb function of *shi* (是).

Finally, in addition to the points outlined in Huang’s article, I would also like to suggest that the final sentence of this passage, ‘我的兒子會闊得多啦’; ‘my son gonna be much more richer’ (in bold above), offers insight into Lu Xun’s treatment of the voice of the character Ah Q, and therefore will prove useful in our analysis of the two English translations. The voice of Ah Q will be discussed further in relation to analysis carried out upon the two translations that follows.

The Yangs’ Translation (1956): Possible Ideological Considerations behind a Decision not to Represent Linguistic Variation

The first translation to be discussed is Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang’s translation, published in 1956 by the Beijing Foreign Languages Press (FLP) as *The True Story of Ah Q*. Their English translation of the excerpt reads as follows:

Ah Q, again, had a very high opinion of himself. He looked down on all the inhabitants of Weichuang, thinking even the two young “scholars” not worth a smile, **though most young scholars were likely to pass the official examinations**. Mr. Chao and Mr. Chien were held in great respect by the villagers, for in addition to being rich they were both the fathers of young scholars. Ah Q alone showed them no exceptional deference, thinking to himself, “My sons may be much greater!”

(Yang 1956:82)

The voice of the villagers in this passage is entirely undistinguishable from the voice of the narrator. The only hint perhaps, that the sentence taken to be the voice of the villagers, (in bold) is in any way different from the rest of the text, is that it is offset by a comma, although, in fact, it is difficult to discern whether the utterance belongs to the narrator, the villagers, or perhaps even Ah Q. Moreover, Lu Xun’s informal ‘爹爹’; ‘dads’, as well as the mix of literary and vernacular in the villagers’ voice, which works so well in the original to highlight the ‘awkward hybrid construction’ of their worldview, are entirely absent in the Yangs’ version. It may be argued that the villagers’ voice juxtaposes a vernacular ‘though most young scholars were likely to pass the official examinations’ (in bold above) with the more colloquial ‘not worth a smile’ (underlined above). However, I would suggest that the relative distance of register between the two does not seem to befit either Catford’s “equivalence across varieties” or Pym’s syntagmatic alteration of

⁶ Due to the fact that he employs a previously popular romanization system, Wade Giles Pinyin, that differs from the Hanyu Pinyin system favored presently, Mair uses the romanized *shih* and *yeh* to represent the Chinese words 是 and 也, respectively, instead of the Hanyu Pinyin *shi* and *ye*.

distance. Moreover, the language of the Yangs' narrator is not entirely different from that of Ah Q. This is an issue that Tambling refers to in his claim that the Yangs' translation of *The True Story of Ah Q* fails to "register the different modes in which Lu Xun writes literature in the vernacular" (2007:5). As a result, contrast between narrative discourse and subject matter, as used in the original to set up a parody of traditional, Chinese historiographical conventions, fails to materialize in this sampling of the Yangs' translation.

Political ideology and publisher's agency are possible explanations for the Yangs' choice not to represent the variation of Lu Xun's original text. In a paper dealing with the issue of state commissioned publishing and translation, Bonnie McDougall explains that the Beijing FLP was modeled after the Foreign Languages Publishing House established in Moscow in 1931 (2009:3). As with its counterpart in the USSR, the Beijing FLP was a government-funded and government-run publisher commissioned to translate and publish in a number of foreign languages national literature, political (communist party) literature, and books on all subjects Chinese (*ibid.*). Established in Beijing in 1952, "the public mission of the Bureau [FLP] was always directed by the political line adopted by the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]" (McDougall 2009:5). McDougall claims that translation under the direction of the FLP "was neither source-oriented nor reader-oriented," but "served the self-defined short-term interests of the state as producer" (2009:38). In his autobiography, Yang Xianyi explains that Liu Zunqi, the first head of the FLP and a veteran Party member, recruited him in 1952 to act as head translation consultant to the FLP (2002:184-185). The Yangs' employment by the FLP, and, in particular, Yang Xianyi's position within the ranks of the state-run agency, would more than likely have had some influence upon translation choices made by the pair.

With particular regard to the Yangs' choice not to translate the linguistic variation of the original, some explanation may be found by turning to a discussion of the CCP's political use of Lu Xun and his work. According to Merle Goldman, the CCP carried out a double-edged deification of Lu Xun, that is, praising the man while condemning his work, as an attempt to win over Lu Xun's readership while continuing to promote Party ideology (1982:446-447). Mao Zedong eulogized Lu Xun as "the chief commander of China's cultural revolution," and claimed him to be "not only a great man of letters, but a great thinker and revolutionary" (*ibid.*). However, according to Goldman, the popular Party line with respect to Lu Xun's work, particularly his satirical style, was that it was inappropriate to the times and harmful to the establishment of communist ideals (1982:447). Of particular pertinence to my argument that Translation Studies take a more realistic, that is, diglossic or heteroglossic instead of monolingual, view of linguistic variation is Goldman's description of the CCP's position with respect to literature: "no longer was literature to reflect life as it is or as the individual saw it as exemplified in Lu Xun's work, but as it will be and as the Party and Mao saw it" (*ibid.*). In other words, the heterogeneity of voice and language within Lu Xun's writing was to be replaced by the homogeneity of the Party's 'monoglossic', if you will, interpretation of the world.

Lyell's Translation (1990): A Case for Linguistic Variation Represented by Relative Distance

Moving the focus back to analysis of the texts, the next excerpt comes from Lyell's 1990 translation, *Ah Q — The Real Story*, published by the University of Hawaii Press. In contrast to

the Yangs', Lyell's translation reflects a discernable effort on the part of the translator to represent the linguistic variation present in the original.

Since he thought so well of *himself*, Ah Q considered the other villagers simply beneath his notice. He went so far with this that he even looked down his nose at the village's two *Young Literati*. He didn't realize, of course, that up there in the rarefied world of scholar-officialdom *those whom one doth Young Literati name can darn well get to be those whom one must Budding Talents proclaim* – if you don't keep an eye on them. That's why Old Master Qian and Old Master Zhao were so all-fired respected in the village: they were daddies to those two *Young Literati* – and rich to boot. Ah Q, however, was less than impressed. "My son's gonna be a lot richer."
(Lyell 1990:108)

Here, we immediately observe a hybridity in the voice of the villagers. Speaking in the voice of the villagers of Weizhuang, Lyell's narrator proclaims in an overtly literary tone, "those whom one doth Young Literati name (can darn well get to be) those whom one must Budding Talents proclaim." In the middle of this lofty utterance, which Lyell has offset explicitly with his use of italics (as above), the villager's vernacular – Tambling calls it "American, racy and slangy" (2007:5) – resurfaces (in bold and underlined above), further foregrounding the juxtaposition of language varieties within the single voice. Not only is the relative distance of register between these two varieties quite well defined, but also the literary styled variety used may be regarded as a quasi-H variety of English that has not been used in spoken English since well before the time — early twentieth century — in which the novel was set, thus maintaining Ferguson's claim of disparity of function between H and L varieties.

Huang argues that Lyell's narrator speaks, throughout the novella, in a colloquial, slangy, American tone (1990:5). In the case of the passage above, this makes it difficult to discern the narrator's voice from one that could potentially represent either the voice of Ah Q or of the villagers. That having been said, however, we may, in Lyell's defence suggest that there is variation in degree of 'colloquiality' between what we know as the narrator's voice and what we have seen in the original is the hybridized voice of the villagers. The problem is that the assessment of degree of 'colloquiality' in this case is confounded by the fact that Lyell's narrator has such a propensity for the vernacular. Case in point are the following phrases underlined in the passage above: "went so far"; "looked down his nose at"; "keep an eye on them"; "so all-fired respected"; and "rich to boot". It is difficult to judge whether or not these colloquialisms are actually appreciably different in register to the two utterances, "can darn well get to be", and "daddies" — presumably, meant to represent the L-variety aspect of the villagers' voice.

Finally, although the voice of Lyell's narrator is presented in the vernacular, his representation of Ah Q's voice is such that the reader is at least still able to recognize the difference between the two. The use of "gonna" in the representation of Ah Q's mental discourse (underlined above) is, in fact, a level of colloquialism to which Lyell's narrator does not 'lower' himself at any point in the novella. In this sense, Lyell's translation strategy can be said to work on a level of relative difference — although it is overly complicated — that is consistent with Pym's syntagmatic alteration of distance and Catford's *equivalence across varieties*. However, my own feeling is that Lyell's translation choice may also be complicated by a desire to represent Lu Xun's

vernacular style through easily recognizable, stereotypical markers associated with popular ‘American’ vernacular in use close to the time in which the novel was set.

Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to identify and demonstrate a lacuna within Translation Studies literature pertaining to translation of diglossia as linguistic variation. Discussion presented in the paper suggests the need for a broadening of the scope of the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation discourse to include investigation of translation into, out of, and within diglossic, heteroglossic, and multilingual language communities and language contact situations.

An example of a potential avenue for further exploration by Translation Studies researchers is provided through reference to and brief discussion of a register-based, relative-distance styled approach to linguistic variation based upon Catford (1965) and Pym’s (2000) investigation into the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation. In order to provide a backdrop against which to suggest a potentiality for the translation of diglossia by a relative-distance styled approach, Catford and Pym’s views are contrasted with certain trends in Translation Studies literature that seem to focus upon an unrealistic, disproportionately mono-lingual/mono-variant based treatment of (un-) translatability of linguistic variation.

A brief discussion of ‘diglossia’ as a concept and its manifestation in the Chinese language contact situation have been presented in order to facilitate an exploration of Lu Xun’s parody of the Chinese diglossic scenario. In particular, the paper focused upon Lu Xun’s manipulation in the novella *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* of traditional H-L variant norms. Historical details relating to characteristics and norms of the Mainland Chinese diglossic language contact situation have been presented to help the reader understand parodic function as created in *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* through the juxtaposition of H-L language variants.

Discussion of two English-language translations of *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* — Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang’s *The true story of Ah Q* (1956) and William A. Lyell’s *Ah Q — The Real Story* (1990) — has provided an opportunity in which to examine translation from a diglossic language situation, Chinese in Mainland China, into a non-diglossic one, English in the US and the UK. Analysis has focused upon (non-) representation within the two translations of diglossia, heteroglossia, and linguistic variation as presented in the original. In particular, the discussion has related to representation of linguistic variation within the story’s narrative as it functions to foreground Lu Xun’s parodic treatment of Chinese traditional historiography and the diglossic language contact situation in pre-modern China.

Preliminary findings from the analysis of a single excerpt of text from the two translations may be outlined as follows: firstly, with respect to heteroglossia as presented in the original, only Lyell’s work shows any attempt at representation. The Yangs’ translation is entirely ‘monoglossic’. As discussed, it is quite probable that the agency and ideology of the Yangs’ CCP [Chinese Communist Party]-backed publisher the Beijing Foreign Language Press played an important role in the translators’ decision not to represent the heteroglossia of the original.

Secondly, neither translation seems able to fully represent the hybridity found *within* the voice of the novella’s villagers. Perhaps, this characteristic of Lu Xun’s narrative is difficult for the

translators to manage because it not only involves the representation of two distinct registers within a single voice, but also necessitates a third level of register in order to offset the villagers' hybrid register from that of the narrator. Obviously, the non-diglossic nature of the modern day English language situation makes it difficult to effectively represent the diglossic situation presented in *Ah Q Zhengzhuan*. It may be possible, however, to make use of archaic English grammar and lexicon in order to represent the non-vernacular characteristic of *wenyan* in the Chinese diglossic scenario. As discussed, Lyell's translation, for example, demonstrates quite effectively the use of both archaic grammar and lexicon.

Thirdly, although Lyell (1990) does provide extensive footnotes to accompany his translation, socio-historical details are not presented thoroughly enough to allow the reader to fully comprehend the historical moment at the centre of Lu Xun's parodic juxtaposition of H (*wenyan*) and L (*baihua*) language variants. Obviously, the historical context of the translator must be considered when discussing the presence or absence of any overt translator involvement. In their 1956 translation for the Beijing Foreign Language Press', the Yangs were more than likely *encouraged* by the publisher not to include too much detail regarding the socio-historical background of Lu Xun's novella.

Fourthly, in terms of creating a distinction between the language of Ah Q and that of his narrator, Lyell demonstrates some success; however, because Lyell's narrator had such a propensity for the use of vernacular, his translation was, at the same time, unsuccessful in recreating any parodic narrative function. As discussed, it seems that much of Lyell's success, although limited as it is, in representing the diglossic language contact situation presented in *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* derives from his adoption of a relative-distance styled approach to the translation of linguistic variation. As such, Lyell's translation serves to demonstrate some of the possible merits and challenges of such an approach. The present paper suggests that Catford's (1965) notion of translation of linguistic variation as attempt at 'equivalence across varieties' and Pym's (2000) notion of it as attempt at 'syntagmatic alteration of distance' may help to outline some of the theoretical particulars of a relative-distance styled approach. This, in turn, may serve as useful point upon which to begin to broaden the scope of the (un-) translatability of linguistic variation discourse.

In closing, I would like to suggest some possible areas for further investigation. First, with respect to Lu Xun and his works in translation, it may be interesting to compare his rhetoric of parody with that used in foreign (that is, non-Chinese) literature. It has been documented, for example, that Lu Xun was greatly influenced by the works of parody writers such as Nikolai Gogol and Jonathan Swift (Hanan 1974). A comparison of the parodic styles of authors who worked and lived in linguistic and socio-historical contexts quite different to Lu Xun may produce some insight into possible options for the representation of Lu Xun's parody in translation into non-diglossic language situations. Further exploration of Pym's (2000) notion of "syntagmatic alteration of distance" as a basis for discussion and translation of linguistic variation is also needed. In particular, it would be useful to investigate viability of the notion in terms of translation of texts that employ extensive non-diglossic linguistic variation, such as George Bernard Shaw's (1912) *Pygmalion*, and Mark Twain's (1884) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

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