

Study on Chinese Varieties of English in the Era of Online Video

Jiawen Yang¹, Ying Xu^{2,*}

¹ Department of Business English, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, 312000, China

² Department of Translation & Interpreting, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, 312000, China

* Corresponding author: Xu Ying (Email: 20021018@zyufl.edu.cn)

Abstract: English has a long history in China, and Chinese English varieties can be traced back to the 17th century. China English combines Chinese culture with English to form a standardized English expression with Chinese characteristics. With the booming development of online video platforms in recent years, the influence of online video on the dissemination and driving force of China English has been valued. This helps to promote China's foreign exchange activities, facilitate Chinese culture to "go global", enrich the diversity of world languages, and strengthen the cultural confidence of the Chinese people.

Keywords: China English, English varieties, Online video, Cultural confidence.

1. Introduction

Language variation refers to the changes and developments that occur in the pronunciation, vocabulary, utterance grammar and sentence structure of a language under the influence of different social environments. English, as one of the most widely used languages in the world, pervades all walks of life in China and has a tremendous impact. China English is the embodiment of the localization of English in China. China English fills the gap in translation between Chinese and English, introduces Chinese culture to the world in English with Chinese characteristics, and demonstrates national confidence of China.

In recent years, online video, especially short videos and medium-length videos, have become popular. Online video software such as Bilibili, Douyin (Tik Tok), and YouTube gather netizens from all over the world and provide them with platforms for sharing and socializing. Therefore, online video is an effective way of cultural output. China can use the power of online video to tell its story with China English to the world. This article focuses on the study of Chinese varieties of English in the context of online video era and proposes strategies and suggestions to overcome the limitations of exporting China English through online video.

2. China English vs. Chinese English

Kachru (1985) proposed the theory of the three concentric circles of world Englishes, which includes the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle, has been proposed to account for the variation of English spoken around the world. Kachru (1992) suggests that English has two aspects: nativisation and Englishisation, and two features: inclusivity and pluricentricity.

In their book *The Handbook of Asian Englishes*, Kingsley Bolton, Werner Botha, and Andy Kirkpatrick (2020:516) stated that "The most salient features of "Chinese English" (or "China English") are those linguistic features which are most distinctive of localized usage by Chinese users of the language, typically features identifiable at the levels of phonology, lexis, grammar, and pragmatics." They consider China English and Chinese English to be interchangeable

concepts, both referring to varieties of English spoken in China, similar to other outer circle English varieties such as Indian English, Malaysian English, and Philippine English, even though their meanings are actually quite different.

2.1. Chinese English/Chinglish

In her book "The Translator's Guide to Chinglish," Joan Pinkham (2003:1) defines Chinglish as a language that is misshapen, hybrid, and neither English nor Chinese. Chinglish is a negative transfer phenomenon of the mother tongue (Chinese in this case), where language learners subconsciously use their mother tongue learning and usage habits to help themselves learn the second foreign language (English in this case). However, the knowledge system of the mother tongue is different from that of the second foreign language, which has an adverse effect on foreign language learning.

In this context, the concept of the Chinese-English Interlanguage (CIL) is introduced. This concept was first proposed by American linguist Selinker (1972). Its earliest definition is "The separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages." Selinker (1972) believes that there is a language fossilization phenomenon in the process of second language learning. This phenomenon refers to the fact that language learners are mainly influenced by the knowledge system and language habits of their mother tongue in the learning process, making certain mistakes that are difficult to break through, thus stagnating or even regressing, and always staying in the interlanguage stage, unable to fully achieve the acquisition of the target language.

From this perspective, China English belongs to the category of interlanguage. It's the expression that combines the syntactic structure and sentence patterns of Chinese with English words, assuming the thought patterns of Chinese native speakers as the premise. However, this type of expression can only be understood by Chinese people or those who know how the Chinese expression is, and can be confusing to people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Chinese English is an incorrect expression of language and does not belong to the standard English category.

2.2. China English

China English is a variant of English that is different from English-speaking countries in terms of historical background and cultural environment. English in China conflicts, collides, assimilates, and absorbs with Chinese cultural factors in the Chinese environment, and new factors are injected into the early English expressions imported into China, resulting in China English. Therefore, China English carries Chinese culture and has Chinese characteristics. It introduces and explains unique Chinese items, policies, and phenomena, introducing some cultural-related expressions that were not previously covered in English and filling gaps in the translation between Chinese and English in mainstream English. Thus, China English is a part of the standard English category and a branch of world English variants. On the premise of respecting English expressions, China English enriches English vocabulary and expression, and expands the scope of English application, demonstrating the inclusiveness of Chinese and English towards world culture.

Nowadays, China is the second-largest economy in the world, second only to the United States. China's strength in international trade, politics, science and technology, among other areas, is not to be underestimated. China's status in the international community is also constantly improving. China needs to actively promote Chinese culture and better integrate into the international community. The international community also needs to have a more comprehensive understanding of China. English, as one of the most important international languages in the world, is the main language for China's foreign exchanges. Combining English with Chinese characteristics to form China English is a good way for China to introduce itself to foreign countries.

2.3. Chinese Englishes

The work of Kingsley Bolton (2003), titled "Chinese Englishes: A Sociolinguistic History", utilizes the term "Chinese Englishes" to refer to the varieties of English present in China, as well as the Chinese-based pluricentric English. The use of "Englishes" in the plural form highlights the diversity of English variants present in China, indicating the coexistence of various forms of English. The concept of Chinese Englishes can be traced back to the Chinese Pidgin English (CPE).

3. China English Enriches English Vocabulary

In the book "A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary of Chinese Proper Names and Terms" edited by Zhang Zhenjiu and Yuan Xianjun (1994), approximately 30,000 entries were selected, covering various aspects. As of 2018, according to statistics from the dictionary editorial department, "Oxford English Dictionary" included 250 China English words. The following are some common China English vocabulary and phrases:

Food-related: hoisin (sea food), moo shu pork (fried pork with scrambled eggs and fungus), shumai (steamed pork dumplings), wok, dim sum (snacks), yum cha (drink tea), longan, hot pot, baozi (steamed stuffed bun), zongzi (a pyramid-shaped dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves), jiaozi (dumplings), mooncake, goji berry, pekoe, bok choy, chop suey, ginseng, loquat (pipa), won ton, ketchup, chow (food), kung bao chicken, tofu, lychee, dai pai dong, siu mei, char siu, chow mein.

Political/economic-related: guanxi, hukou, chengguan, lianghui, one country, two systems, gaokao, the Theory of Three Represents, the great cause of Chinese socialism, the great new project of Party building, iron rice bowl.

Traditional/Cultural-related: cheongsam, qipao, samfu, qigong, tuina, hongbao, wuxia, feng shui, yin yang, mahjong, kowtow, Confucian, Kungfu, siheyuan, hutong, tai chi, paper tiger, pinyin, typhoon, feng shui, chop chop, kaifong, Taoism, addoil.

Others: long time no see, lose face, no can do.

In the above example, from the lexical perspective, these words are mainly composed of two forms of Chinese source English loanwords (transliterated words) and borrowings.

Transliteration method refers to the vocabulary produced according to Chinese pronunciation. Early English transliterated words were mainly influenced by Cantonese pronunciation, most of which belonged to early pidgin English. For example, dim sum and yum cha are typical Cantonese transliterated words, and also reflect the culture of Guangdong-style morning tea. In the later stage of the development of Chinese English variants until now, with the popularization of Putonghua (Mandarin) and the in-depth dissemination of the English language, Putonghua has also become one of the sources of transliterated words. For example, gaokao, feng shui, yin yang, guanxi, etc. all have specific cultural meanings, especially the word guanxi, which shows the interpersonal communication culture of the Chinese nation. The word "relationship" runs through all aspects of the Chinese nation, including relatives, friends, business and politics, and its unique significance to China and even the international community helps to showcase the charm of Chinese culture.

The method of borrowing translation, which is to translate based on the meaning of words using corresponding English vocabulary one by one, is more focused on conveying the meaning of words and easier to be understood by foreigners compared with transliteration. This method is mainly used for translating national policies, leading ideologies, and political-related words, as well as dish names, such as "one country, two systems" (一国两制) and "stir-fried rice with egg" (蛋炒饭). There is also the phrase "no can do" (做不到), which originally belonged to the category of Chinglish. "No" means "not", "can" means "able", and "do" means "to do". At the grammatical level, it is completely wrong, but this phrase has now been integrated into English-speaking society and gradually become an authentic expression.

To put it in detail, China differs from other countries in terms of geography, history, culture, society, economy, international relations, and many other aspects. Each country has its own unique situation, resulting in China's political policies and diplomatic methods being highly distinctive, with many specialized terms. Additionally, China has a vast territory and abundant resources, with eight major cuisine styles and various cooking methods such as steaming, frying, boiling, braising, and pan-frying, most of which are unique to China, making translation a great challenge. To address this issue, a borrowing and transliteration approach is employed, introducing China English, which not only make foreigners easy to understand but also helps to promote Chinese cultural characteristics, achieving an efficient connection and transition between Chinese and English.

4. China English and Cultural Confidence

China English are standardized expressions based on Chinese culture. With the increasing national power and rising international status of China, the international influence of Chinese culture has significantly increased. Chinese culture radiates outward and blends with foreign cultures, stimulating more and more foreigners' interest in learning Chinese and Chinese culture. China English can help them better integrate into the life of China and promote the effective dissemination of Chinese culture. Additionally, China English can solidify the confidence of the Chinese people in their own culture. Chinese often hesitate to speak English due to fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed by native English speakers. The rise of China English can make people realize that China English can also be a valuable way of expression, containing rich Chinese spirit and cultural connotations. This enhances the confidence of Chinese people in English communication and promotes communication between multiple cultures.

The term "guanxi" has been involved in various fields of interpersonal relationships, business, politics, and social affairs in China and is highly characteristic of China. In the news article "The importance of 'guanxi' in doing business in China" published by Arirang News (2017), it is mentioned that "It pays to put in the effort building and nurturing strong business networks in China as 'guanxi', or 'relationship', has a big impact on business in the country."

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the term "cultural confidence" has been deeply rooted in people's minds, demonstrating China's increasing attention to its own culture and history. The continuous introduction of China English is conducive to strengthening national and cultural confidence, displaying the diplomatic image of a great power, and also reflecting the diversity of world languages. The "export" of online videos has become an important medium for China to communicate with the world, promoting China English and Chinese culture to "go global," and giving the world more opportunities to understand and experience China.

5. The Impact of Online Video on China English

Online short videos are popular among internet users worldwide due to their advantages, which include:

(1) Short videos fit the "fast food style" reading experience of the Internet materials, and just match the attention of netizens. Short videos can often convey the content of the creator completely in a short period of time, and will not be too long to make users feel bored.

(2) Short videos are easy to make, and everyone can become a content creator. Users do not need professional shooting equipment and photography knowledge to complete the creation of videos, and can shoot anytime and anywhere.

(3) Diversified and professional short video content. Due to the simplicity of short video creation, large user base and diverse audience, short video covers a wide range of fields and tends to be specialized in content.

(4) Short videos facilitate the interaction between creators and netizens. Short video platforms have various ways of interaction. Apart from the basic Sanlian (likes, favorites and comments), there are also live streaming, gifts and interactive

questions and answers, which can narrow the distance between creators and netizens, strengthen users' sense of participation, and meet users' psychological needs.

(5) Short videos are easier to share and spread quickly. With the rapid development of short video platforms, various social platforms cooperate to realize the rapid spread and sharing of short videos on social media.

(6) There is a large space for the development of short video. Nowadays, there are novel videos combining AR, VR and other new technologies, which make the content of works move from plane to the extension of three-dimensional, and gradually dissipate the mist between the virtual world and the real world. It arouses users' curiosity and is very interesting, which increases users' participation.

(7) The supervision system is gradually improved. The National Radio and Television Administration has carried out comprehensive treatment and rectification in the field of culture and entertainment, including short videos. The National Copyright Administration has also launched a special action of "Sword Net" together with relevant departments to crack down on online infringements and strengthen the responsibility of platforms. Today's short videos are in the stage of strong supervision.

Thus, the transmission power and influence of short video can not be underestimated. But on online video platforms such as YouTube, videos on popular Chinese culture-promoting accounts like Li's are usually between five and 25 minutes long, which is longer than the typical length of a short video. According to the 48th statistics report on China's Internet Development, the length of short videos is generally controlled within 5 minutes, and the length of medium videos is generally within 30 minutes. Li Ziqi's videos can be considered a combination of short and medium-length videos, which inherit the advantages of short videos while extending the length to provide more comprehensive content without being too long. Recognizing the vast market of medium-length videos, various online video platforms have taken measures to enter this market. For example, in the early stage of Douyin, only the longest video of 60 seconds was supported to be released, which was extended to 15 minutes in June 2021. Using medium-length videos to carry out external communication activities is also an important method for mainstream media to attract overseas users.

Take the video account "YChina" for example. The videos of this account are mainly short and medium-length videos, and they release separate short videos on YouTube Shorts as well. The main content of this account is to interview foreign friends in China and experience life in China. The account is active on many domestic and foreign platforms such as Tik Tok, Little Red Book, YouTube, Bilibili, etc. promoting communication between China and foreign countries, reducing foreigners' misunderstanding of China, promoting Chinese characteristics, and narrowing the information gap. Gao Yousi (2022), founder of the "YChina" account, shared in the second issue of the International Situation and Youth Responsibility Cloud Forum that "I first came to China because of my father. My father came in what we call the 1.0 era of foreigners in China. Because of the economic development of China at that time, a lot of foreigners came to China to do business, trade, or invest here. But for foreigners like me, who were born in the 1990s, this is the 2.0 era of foreigners in China. What attracts us here is the culture, life and safety of China. We come to learn, immerse, experience and feel Chinese culture." Indeed, this is also supposed to be

the 2.0 era of the development of China English, where Chinese culture is combined with English and exported through online videos.

There are also many China English expressions used in the videos, most of which are buzzwords at present. Although they have not been officially included in authoritative dictionaries, they are also widely accepted and used abroad. This paper statistically analyzes the China English words mentioned in the videos published by this account in 2022. The data shows that the videos released by "YChina" included about 30 China English words in their videos in 2022, such as Luosifen (river snails rice noodles), shansong (FlashEx), sanlian (Likes, Comments, and subscriptions), tangping (skate-by mentality), shouchong (pour over coffee), star child, Liushen (florida water), Cha Bai Xi (Assorted Art of Tea), Yan Gao Cha (grinded tea), Dian Cha (tea whisking), xiaolongbao (little buns steamed in baskets), Po fang (heartbroken), Double 11 Shopping Carnival, Kuerle pear, Tianjin pancakes, baijiu, etc. These expressions involve Chinese tea culture, specialty cuisine, buzzwords, and popular industries, all of which reflect China's cultural output to the outside world.

Previously, the bilingual dictionary project manager of the Oxford English Press said that popular Internet words such as Tuhao" (nouveau riche), "Dama" (middle-aged women) have also been on the OED's radar, and that the inclusion of these Chinese-related words in the authoritative English dictionary reflects China's growing international influence. According to the Survey of Overseas Discourses on Chinese Discourse released by the China International Communications Group in 2018, overseas people's cognition and understanding of Chinese discourse have greatly improved, and the Chinese words that have entered the English discourse system in the form of Pinyin continue to increase.

6. Conclusion

Online video can help the acceptance and dissemination of Chinese varieties of English, but there are also limitations, mainly reflected in the following points:

(1) Due to geographical limitations, application restrictions and network blocking and other factors, domestic Internet users are usually unable to log in and use foreign online video platforms, similarly, foreign netizens are generally unable to use domestic applications. Internet users have limited channels for information transmission and information reception, which can easily lead to ineffective or inaccurate information transmission and is not conducive to the spread of Chinese culture and the development of China English.

(2) Some China English expressions, such as "add oil" (go for it) and "guanxi" (relationship/connection), are not widely popularized in native English-speaking countries, and most people's cognition of these new words is inaccurate and imperfect. In addition, there are more authentic and commonly used expressions in their native countries, so people rarely use China English in daily communication.

(3) In recent years, foreign countries have become very sensitive to cultural invasion from other countries. The spread of Chinese culture and the development of China English will, to a certain extent, lead to the assimilation and destruction of other countries' cultures and provoke the rejection of foreign countries.

(4) The development of Chinese varieties of English

requires native speakers to have a certain English foundation, and the two languages will influence each other, which may lead to a certain extent of squeezing the use scope and influence of English and Chinese in their respective countries, including people's way of thinking and the way of word and sentence formation, which may mislead language learners.

In view of the above limitations, the following suggestions are put forward:

(1) Online video platforms should strengthen supervision to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of video content as well as the positive dissemination of content related to Chinese culture and Chinese varieties of English.

(2) Online video platforms should actively cooperate with overseas MCNs to enter overseas video markets, broaden the export channels of China English expressions. These platforms should also increase promotion efforts, and improve the netizens' acceptance and frequency of China English.

(3) The generation of China English should take into account the language environment of English-speaking countries and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and create China English expressions under the premise of abiding by English language norms. Respect other cultures, seek common ground while reserving differences, neither blindly pursue nor excessively reject them.

(4) Chinese people should strengthen cultural centripetal force. In the process of the collision and integration of Chinese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries, Chinese culture should be regarded as the mainstream culture and on this basis to develop Chinese varieties of English and enhance the national cultural identity and cultural confidence.

Acknowledgment

We thank Li Mengnan from Zhejiang Yuexiu University. This work was supported in part by a grant from 2022 Zhejiang Provincial Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program for College Students.

References

- [1] B. B. Kachru, "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: the English Language in the Outer Circle," in R. Quirk and H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- [2] B. B. Kachru, "Models for Non-native Englishes," in B.B. Kachru (Eds.), *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.
- [3] B. Kingsley, B. Werner, and K. Andy, "The Handbook of Asian Englishes". Wiley Blackwell, 2020.
- [4] J. Pinkham, "The Translator's Guide to Chinglish". Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2003.
- [5] L. Selinker, "Interlanguage". *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 1972.
- [6] L. Wenzhong, "The History and reality of Chinese English - An introduction to Chinese English in Various Forms: A Sociolinguistic History". *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2005(01).
- [7] L. Caixia, "Analysis of Chinglish". *Science and Technology Information*, 2013, No. 457(36): 73+77.
- [8] G. Chuangui, "Rambling by Chinese-English Translation Problems". Chinese translation, 1980 (02).