

Translating Chinese culture into English discourse: A proposal for China English within the framework of English as a lingua franca

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, translation research has developed a diversity of theories and methodologies revolving around the issues of language, culture and identity.¹ The ‘linguistic turn’² the ‘cultural turn’³ and the criticism on the idea of ‘the translator as the writer’⁴ combine to reveal the tension among the three aspects. Interestingly, whereas translation researchers, for example Lawrence Venuti, and post-colonial translation researchers such as Susan Bassnet and Harish Trivedi, criticise the dominance of English translation-oriented methodologies in translation, the global spread of English motivates sociolinguistic researchers’ question of native speaker norm as the default norm of English around the world, especially in what Braj Kachru categorizes into Expanding Circle countries.⁵ In postcolonial translation studies, the value of Indian English is discussed in terms of the identity of the author of and the local ‘flavour’ embedded in source works.⁶ Simultaneously, in the field of sociolinguistics, the research on World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) points to the interlock of language, culture and identity.⁷ Thus it is hypothesized that localized varieties of English help reduce the conflict among language, culture and identity in translating works from other languages into English.

Proceeding from this point, this paper proposes the use of China English in translation. Unlike Indian English, which is accepted as one of New Englishes, the concept of China English is often associated with learner

¹ J. S. Holmes, ‘The Name and Nature of Translation Studies’, *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti, (ed.), (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 172-185; L. Venuti and M. Baker, (eds.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

² K. Malmkjær, ‘Translation and Linguistics: what does the future hold?’, *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, Alessandra Riccardi, (ed.), (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 111-119.

³ D. Bachmann-Medick, ‘Introduction: The Translational Turn’, *Translation Studies*, vol. 2, no.1, (2009), pp. 2-16; M. Snell-Hornby, ‘What’s in turn? On Fits, Starts and Writings in Recent Translation Studies’, *Translation Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, (2009), pp. 41-51.

⁴ M. Booth, ‘Translator v. author (2007) Girls of Riyadh go to New York’, *Translation Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, (2008), pp. 197-211. S. Bassnett and P. Bush, *The Translator as the Writer*, (London: Continuum, 2007). Venuti, Lawrence, *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1992).

⁵ L. Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: a History of Translation*, (London: Routledge, 1995). S. Bassnett, and H. Trivedi, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). B. Kachru, ‘Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: the English Language in the Outer Circle’, *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, Randolph Quirk and Henry Widdowson, (ed.), pp. 11-30, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁶ G.J.V. Prasad, ‘Writing Translation: the Strange Case of the Indian English Novel’, *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, (eds.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 41-57.

⁷ B. Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 2nd edn., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). Jenkins, Jennifer, *World Englishes*, 2nd ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

English.⁸ This paper will discuss China English as an emerging variety in its own right from a sociolinguistic perspective and examine the application of this variety in translating Chinese works into English. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate how China English can contribute to that which is ‘found’ in translation.

The Spread of English and World Englishes

Given the phenomenal spread of English, the sociolinguistic landscape of English is changing. While the use of English was limited to native speakers in Britain in Elizabethan times,⁹ it is now widely acknowledged that non-native speakers of English greatly outnumber native English speakers.¹⁰ This is despite the controversy over the definitions of L2 (second language) speakers as opposed to L2 learners.¹¹ According to the functions and statuses of English in diverse localities, Kachru, in his essay ‘Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle’ provides a three-concentric-circle model and categorizes the localities into three groups: the Inner Circle where English is used as a native language, the Outer Circle where English is used as a second language for national communication, and the Expanding Circle where English is used as a foreign language for international communication.¹²

The changing sociolinguistic profile motivates the reflection on the native speaker norm of English as the default norm of English in non-native speaking contexts. Given an increasing voice that English belongs to all users of it,¹³ a body of research has recently been conducted by Rubdy, McKay, Alsagoff and Bokhorst-Heng to demonstrate that non-native English speakers use English in their own way to show their multilevel identities and that their use of English has the roots in their local cultures and their first languages.¹⁴ In this sense, their use of English which ‘deviates’ from native speaker norms cannot be considered as erroneous but innovative. Given that the use of English in the Outer Circle results in the nativization of English in different

⁸ B. Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 2nd edn., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); J. Jenkins, *World Englishes*, 2nd ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁹ J. Jenkins, *World Englishes*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁰ Kachru, *The Other Tongue*; H. Widdowson, *Defining Issues in English Language Teaching*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); B. Seidlhofer, ‘A Concept of International English and Related Issues: from ‘real English’ to ‘realistic English’? (2003), [Retrieved on October 5, 2008]. <http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Source/SeidlhoferEN.pdf>.

¹¹ V. Cook, *Portraits of the L2 Learner*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004); A. Firth and J. Wagner, ‘On Discourse, Communication and (some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA Research’, *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 81, (1997), pp. 285-300; B. Norton, ‘Language, Identity and the Ownership of English’, *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, (1997), pp. 409-429.

¹² Kachru, ‘Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism’.

¹³ B. Seidlhofer, ‘Common Ground and Different Realities: World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca’, *World Englishes*, vol. 28, no.2, (2009), pp. 236-245; Widdowson, *Defining Issues in English Language Teaching*.

¹⁴ R. Rubdy, S. Lee McKay, L. Alsagoff, and W. D. Bokhorst-Heng, ‘Enacting English Language Ownership in the Outer Circle: a Study of Singaporean Indians’ Orientations to English Norms’, *World Englishes*, vol. 27, no. 1, (2008), pp. 40-67 and J. Jenkins, ‘Points of View and Blind Spots: ELF and SLA’, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 16, no. 2, (2006), pp. 137-162. Traditionally, the trace of first language or native culture is criticized as L1 interference.

localities,¹⁵ Kachru calls for the shift from monocentrism to pluricentrism, which justifies localized varieties of English in Outer Circle countries.¹⁶

By contrast, Expanding Circle Englishes are considered as learner Englishes.¹⁷ Kachruvian researchers owe this contrast to the difference in functions and statuses of English in the two circles, which was mentioned earlier.¹⁸ On the one hand, international communication reveals ‘acrolectal’ use of English featuring the ‘absence of local and indigenous linguistic and sociocultural aspects’.¹⁹ To put it differently, the use of English does not reflect sociocultural reality in the Expanding Circle as it does in the Outer Circle. On the other hand, while intranational use of English on a daily basis allows the development of ‘functional’ native speaker intuition, international use of English appears limited and, even if possible, develops Expanding Circle speakers’ ‘semi-functional’ nativeness.²⁰ In this sense, while Outer Circle speakers’ use of English gives rise to English varieties belonging to ‘them’, Expanding Circle speakers are using the ‘foreign language’- in Kachru’s view- which belongs to ‘us’.²¹ In turn, whereas Outer Circle speakers’ different use of English indicates bilingual’s creativity, Expanding Circle speakers’ Englishes which ‘deviate’ from native speaker Englishes are ascribed to their ‘poor performance’.

It is not difficult to infer from Kachruvian researchers’ discussion that three issues get in the way of the legitimatisation of Expanding Circle Englishes: firstly, the exposure to English is limited; secondly, English is used as a foreign language; and thirdly, international communication disconnects English users from the sociocultural contexts they are from.

What follows will introduce the framework of English as a *lingua franca*, which allows reflections on these issues.

English as a Lingua Franca

As points out, ‘conceptual adjustments’ are ‘required by the rapid changes the globalizing world has been undergoing’.²² Given the undergoing English globalization, Jenkins proposes the concept of English as a *lingua franca* to reconsider the issue of Expanding Circle Englishes.²³ *Lingua franca* is commonly defined as the contact language between speakers who share no first language background for the purpose of communication.²⁴ Thus, English

¹⁵ B. Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: the Spread, Functions and Models of non-native Englishes*, (Oxford: Pergamon, 1986).

¹⁶ Kachru, ‘Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism’.

¹⁷ Seidlhofer, ‘Common Ground and Different Realities’.

¹⁸ For example Kachru, *The Other Tongue*; Y. Yano, ‘World Englishes in 2000 and Beyond’, *World Englishes*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2001), pp. 119-131.

¹⁹ Yano, ‘World Englishes’, p. 123.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kachru, *The Other Tongue*.

²² Seidlhofer, ‘Common Ground and Different Realities’, p. 238. Cf. Y. Yano, ‘English as an International Lingua Franca: From Societal to Individual’, *World Englishes*, vol. 28, no. 2, (2009), pp. 246-255.

²³ J. Jenkins, *World Englishes*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁴ See H. and R. Kahane and A. Tietze, *The Lingua Franca in the Levant: Turkish Nautical Terms of Italian and Greek Origin*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1958); V. Ramos, *A edição de língua portuguesa em França (1800-1850): repertório geral dos títulos publicados e ensaio crítico*. (Paris:

as a lingua franca can be interpreted as English for international communication.

While one can find a comprehensive discussion of ELF in Jenkins's book *World Englishes*, this paper will use the ELF framework to examine the three issues mentioned in the previous section.²⁵

1. Exposure to English

There is a growing awareness of the increasing use of English in the Expanding Circle. Estimates suggest that the Expanding Circle tends to boast the largest population of English users among the three circles.²⁶ In China, the 2008 Olympic Games has motivated more users of English and opened up more channels of English use.²⁷ The awareness of the trend justifies a dynamic view of English use and, in turn, a view of Expanding Circle Englishes in the process developing into non-native varieties with peoples' increasing exposure to English. As Seidlhofer puts forward, the perception of Expanding Circle Englishes as learner varieties resonates the 'myopia', a term firstly used by Kachru in defence of Outer Circle Englishes.²⁸ To the least extent, therefore, Expanding Circle Englishes vis-à-vis learner varieties and vis-à-vis legitimate varieties deserve reconsideration in the context of increasing use of English, especially in China, which is seeing a dramatic change in its exposure to English.

2. EFL vs. ELF

Jenkins makes a distinction between English as a lingua franca (ELF) and English as a foreign language (EFL).²⁹ While EFL falls into the field of modern foreign languages, ELF belongs to the family of World Englishes.³⁰ The notion of foreign languages suggests that exonormative norms come into play, as a foreign language belongs to those who are originally native speakers of the language. By contrast, the concept of World Englishes highlights the diversity of English and thus integrates endonormative norms of Englishes.

ELF as a part of World Englishes does not mean that ELF is a particular variety of English.³¹ As Seidlhofer puts forward, ELF is a concept overlapping the WE paradigm in terms of pluricentricity, non-native speakers' linguistic rights and creativity, and cultural and identity issues in the use of English.³² However the ELF framework aims to address the issue of English for international communication, and thus the WE paradigm was originally put forward to justify Englishes for intranational communication.³³ In her book

Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centro Cultural Português, 1972); K. Knapp and C. Meierkord, *Lingua Franca Communication*, (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2002); J. Jenkins, *World Englishes*.

²⁵ Jenkins's book *World Englishes* (2003, 2009).

²⁶ D. Crystal, 'Two Thousand Million', *English Today*, vol. 93, (2008), pp. 3-6; Jenkins, *World Englishes*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Seidlhofer, 'Common Ground and Different Realities'; Kachru, 'The Paradigms of Marginality', *World Englishes*, vol. 15, (1996), pp. 241-255.

²⁹ Jenkins, 'Points of View and Blind Spots'.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Cf. M. Berns, 'English as Lingua Franca and English in Europe', *World Englishes*, vol. 28, no. 2, (2009), pp. 192-199. See Seidlhofer, 'Common Ground and Different Realities' for a detailed discussion of the ELF misconceptions.

³² Seidlhofer, 'Common Ground and Different Realities'; Kachru, *The Other Tongue*.

³³ Cf. Jenkins, *World Englishes*.

World Englishes Jenkins integrates the ELF model with the WE paradigm and considers all varieties as equal no matter which circle they are from.³⁴ In this sense, ELF is a concept rather than a particular variety.

Therefore, within the ELF framework, the use of English in Expanding Circle countries is not judged upon Inner Circle Englishes but upon the realization of communicative purposes. In other words, Expanding Circle Englishes exist autonomously on their own.

3. Sociocultural Context of English Use

The ELF framework provides a dynamic perspective on sociocultural context. As Seidlhofer puts forward, a context of ELF use consists of a mix of global communities.³⁵ That is to say, the notion of context is not restricted to geographical localities in a traditional sense but defined in international settings. This points to the fluidity of ELF context.³⁶ On the one hand, ELF context appears temporary due to the mobility of interlocutors against international background. On the other hand, ELF context appears dynamic due to the flexible nature of international communication where certain communication strategies are used to accommodate interlocutors on the cline of proficiency and from different sociocultural backgrounds.³⁷ Thus, the ELF framework provides an alternative insight into English in relation to its sociocultural context.

A body of corpus research on the use of English as a lingua franca, for instance, the VOICE project initiated by Barbara Seidlhofer and the academic corpus project undertaken by Mauranen (2003), effectively demonstrates distinct features of ELF use in a multitude of sociocultural contexts.³⁸ To put it differently, Expanding Circle speakers' use of English yields systematic patterns in different sociocultural contexts. This thus further justifies Expanding Circle speakers' use of English vis-à-vis sociocultural contexts.

Given the alternative insight into the issues raised in the previous section, the reconsideration of English in new contexts opens up the possibility of Expanding Circle Englishes to emerge as varieties in ELF use.³⁹ In what follows, this paper will discuss the legitimacy of China English as a part of Expanding Circle Englishes based on the ELF framework.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Seidlhofer, 'Common Ground and Different Realities'.

³⁶ S. Canagarajah, 'Lingua Franca English, Multilingual Communities and Language Acquisition', *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 91: Focus Issue, (2007), pp. 923-939.

³⁷ Jenkins, *World Englishes*.

³⁸ Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, <www.univie.ac.at/vocie>. B. Seidlhofer and the academic corpus project undertaken by A. Mauranen, 'The Corpus of English as Lingua Franca in Academic Settings', *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, (2003), pp. 513-527.

³⁹ Seidlhofer, 'Common Ground and Different Realities'.

Conceptualizing China English

This paper argues that China English is an emerging variety of English as a lingua franca. An historical overview of English use in China justifies the replacement of the EFL model with the ELF model in interpreting the English in this country today. While English was used by a small population of Chinese speakers in restricted domains to communicate with interlocutors who were mainly from Britain or the United States, a growing number of non-Chinese speakers have arrived in China for different purposes since the launch of the opening-up policy in the 1970's, among whom non-native English speakers greatly outnumber native speakers.⁴⁰ Whereas English was used by Chinese speakers to access native speaker communities or English culture, both Chinese speakers and non-Chinese speakers are becoming aware of Chinese culture and language. This implies the advantages of the ELF model over the EFL model in interpreting the English in China today, as the ELF framework encapsulates how non-native speakers assert their identities and cultures through their use of English.

A body of research has been done to identify some distinct features of Chinese speakers' use of English. For example, at the phonological level, a schwa is added after a final plosive, as *and* sounds like /ændə/;⁴¹ at the lexical level, *snakehead* is created by Chinese speakers to mean the gang involved in human smuggling;⁴² and at the pragmatic level, Chinese speakers greet each other with 'Have you eaten?'. While traditionally these features are considered as fossilized errors, the ELF framework allows the reconsideration of these features as expressions belonging to the family of China English rather than expressions 'deviant' from native-speaker Englishes.

As opposed to established varieties, it is appropriate to consider China English as an emerging variety. On the one hand, while some features are confirmed, others might emerge due to the increasing use of English among a growing number of Chinese speakers. In order to identify more features, corpus studies will be needed.⁴³ On the other hand, the establishment of non-native varieties goes through an attitudinal process.⁴⁴ Despite the general negative attitudes towards Expanding Circle Englishes, a growing group of academics are arguing for the legitimacy of Expanding Circle Englishes and conducting China English studies.⁴⁵ As both non-standard Inner Circle Englishes and Outer Circle Englishes went through the same process until being accepted, there is every reason to predict the bright future of China English.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ K. Bolton, *Chinese Englishes: a Sociolinguistic History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁴¹ D. Deterding, 'The Pronunciation of English by Speakers from China', *English World-Wide*, vol. 27, no. 2, (2006), pp. 175-198.

⁴² D. He, and D. Li, 'Language Attitudes and Linguistic Features in the 'China English' Debate', *World Englishes*, vol. 28, no. 1, (2009), pp. 70-89.

⁴³ B. Seidlhofer, 'Closing a Conceptual Gap: the Case for a Description of English as a Lingua Franca', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 11, no. 2, (2001), pp. 133-158.

⁴⁴ Kachru, *The Other Tongue*; J. Jenkins, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Seidlhofer, 'Closing a Conceptual Gap'.

⁴⁶ Jenkins, *World Englishes*.

The Application of China English in Translation

Given China English as an emerging ELF variety, it is possible to discuss what advantages China English has in terms of translating practice. Firstly, China English helps to address the issue of equivalence by enriching English expressions. Secondly, China English helps to reserve the Chinese culture. Thirdly, China English allows the identities of Chinese authors and the characters in source works to be well represented. In what follows, two examples will be given to illustrate the above three points.

1) 饺子 vs. dumpling

The traditional Chinese food ‘饺子(jiaozi)’ is likely to be translated into ‘dumpling’. A search for ‘dumpling’ through the google engine ends up with a diversity of dumplings, among which ‘饺子’ is the Chinese cuisine of dumpling. That is to say, ‘饺子’ does not equal ‘dumpling’. Simultaneously, the translation into ‘dumpling’ fails to distinguish the Chinese food from other cuisines, for instance, tortellini.

On the other hand, the translation ‘dumpling’ makes the Chinese culture opaque and lends itself to the representation of the identity of the author who writes about ‘饺子’ or the character who talks about this kind of Chinese food in source works. In China English, ‘饺子’ will be translated into jiaozi. This will allow the translator to distinguish this kind of Chinese food from other cuisines of dumpling, to preserve Chinese culture and to represent appropriate identities, for instance, the author’s national identity.

2) 人家是醋罐子, 她是醋缸, 醋瓮! (Ren jia shi cu guang zi, ta shi cu gong, cu weng!)

This is a line from Chinese classic works *the story of the stone* by Cao Xueqin. The market has seen many translated versions of the works, among which we can find:

Version 1: If other women are jealous, she’s a hundred times.⁴⁷

Version 2: They call jealous people ‘vinegar bottles’, don’t they? Well, she’s not just a bottle full of vinegar; she’s a storage jar – a whole cistern – full of it!⁴⁸

The two versions are different to a large extent, but sharing the common ground that they accommodate English readers’ way of understanding, at the expense of Chinese culture and the character’s identity which the author Cao Xueqin attempts to represent. The first version is easily accessible for English readers, avoiding the idiomatic expression of ‘vinegar’. The way that the character speaks in the original works is adapted to the narration in the translated version and thus compromises the original ‘Chinese flavour’ to some extent. In the second version, the translator explains Chinese culture in which vinegar bottle refers to jealous people. The change of discourse and lexis results in the change of the voice of the character in the original works. As Ivanič and Camps argue, ‘I am how I sound’.⁴⁹ That is, the way people speak exhibits their attitudes and personalities. Thus, the identity

⁴⁷ J. Wu, ‘Towards Translation Strategies and their Application’, (2006), <<http://spdc.shnu.edu.cn/1000011102/benkeshenglunwen/001.doc>>, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ R. Ivanič, and D. Camps, ‘I am how I sound: Voice as self-representation in L2 Writing’, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 10, (2001), pp. 3-33.

of the character is badly represented. In China English, it can be translated into the following:

If other people are vinegar bottles, she is a vinegar jar, or a vinegar cistern!

The discourse appropriately follows the original sentence and retains Chinese culture regarding 'vinegar' and containers. It should be pointed out that understanding this sentence requires the necessary knowledge of 'vinegar' and containers in Chinese culture. Given that translation is a way of inter-culture communication, China English serves the purpose of enhancing inter-culture communication rather than hindering it. In cases where China English expressions are new to target readers, how to compensate becomes an issue. A possible solution lies in footnote: in Chinese, vinegar bottle is a metaphor for jealous people; in China, bottles are smaller than jars and jars are smaller than cisterns. With the footnotes, readers can understand how jealous 'she' is.

It is fair to say that China English can be a double-edged sword, leading to both the lost and the found in translation. While it helps to enrich English expressions, to construct Chinese culture and to represent appropriate identities, it can raise intelligibility problems due to the culture embedded. Therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind that China English is the means but not the ends. While China English serves the purpose of translation, translators should use China English appropriately. Compensation might be needed when China English cannot fulfil the communication.

Conclusion

To address the conflicts among language, culture and identity issues in translation, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach and applies sociolinguistic research ideas into translation. The ELF framework addresses the fast-changing sociolinguistic reality by providing a dynamic view of English and revolutionary interpretations of some traditional concepts such as 'English as a foreign language' and 'context'. Based on the reconceptualization of sociolinguistic issues within the ELF framework, China English is justified as an emerging ELF variety. Examples demonstrate that China English has its advantage in taking language, culture and identity issues into account. While China English has Chinese culture embedded into it, certain compensation skills are needed to promote the intelligibility of the culture-loaded expressions.

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Visual Translation

