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PAPER

Multilingual English users' linguistic innovation

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Abstract

Can 'non-native' speakers of English innovate in English? This seemly simple question bothers sociolinguists and sociolinguistic research because we feel uncertain whether the 'inventive' productions by 'non-native' speakers should be treated as evidence of creativity or mistakes. This article aims to tackle this question from a translanguaging perspective, using data from social media communication amongst multilingual English users in the Sinophone world. Examples include a range of creative expressions that mix elements of English with those from other languages and semiotic means. A translanguaging perspective raises questions about the very notion of named languages and offers a radically different way of analysing these expressions as socio-politically meaningful linguistic innovations. The theoretical and methodological implications of the translanguaging approach for the study of linguistic innovation by multilingual language users and for the study of world Englishes are discussed.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The poster in Figure 1, 'How to have a civil discourse', was posted on 4th July 2017 by the Singaporean artist Andrea Lau on her Facebook page. Two questions: Is it in English? If yes, what kind of English? It certainly looks like English and an English reader could understand quite a bit, but crucially, not all of it. And since I have said that the creator of the poster is Singaporean, anyone who has heard of the notion of Singaporean English, or Singlish, might assume that this must be Singaporean English/Singlish. Figure 2 is another example, taken from the Facebook page the *Kongish Daily*. This time the creators themselves have given it a name: Kongish, which, in this version of the text, is described as 'Hong Kong English'. A more detailed analysis of these two examples will come later. The central question that I am concerned with in this article is: should examples like these be considered linguistic innovation and change in English? The answer to this seemingly simple question may not be as straightforward as one assumes and has serious

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FIGURE 1 Poster (Image courtesy of Andrea Lau) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Our Story

KONGISH DAILY《港語日報》 · TUESDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2018

Kongish Daily is a local site sharing news in Hong Kong English (Kongish).

Kongish ng hai exac7ly Chinglish.

The site is founded bcoz we want to collect relly research how people say Kongish by looking at everyone ge replies, including you and me, and share this finding to all people who think Chinglish = Kongish. But actcholly, Kongish hai more creative, more flexible, and more functional ge variety.

PS for secondary school chicken:
If you want to learn English, Sor(9)ly, this site ng wui help you learn more English, but to share news with you in Kongish, finish.

"Kongish Daily" ge interview in various media 🙂

"港式英文未必錯 科大研究助教學". Wenweipo (Education), 26 February 2016.

FIGURE 2 'Our Story' page, *Kongish Daily* (downloaded in September 2018) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

implications for the way we treat expressions that transcend boundaries of named languages by multilingual language users.

The article is structured as follows: I begin with a discussion of what I see as key biases in the existing studies of linguistic variation and change. I then analyse the two examples above in more detail and give some further examples from the Sinophone world, highlighting the innovations multilingual language users of English make that transcend the boundaries of named languages as well as the boundaries between linguistic and other semiotic resources. This is followed by an account of the translanguaging approach. I demonstrate how the translanguaging perspective adds value to the analysis of linguistic innovation of the kind that I am especially interested in. The theoretical and methodological implications of the translanguaging approach for the study of world Englishes and of linguistic innovation are explored and discussed in the conclusion section. The focus on the Sinophone world in this article is due to the growing use of English(es) in the region. Yet, as discussed in the next section, the predominant approaches to the phenomenon tend to see the way English is used in this part of the world as deviation rather than innovation. The term Sinophone refers to individuals, communities, and regions that use varieties of Chinese as a main language of communication, which typically includes those from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, Taiwan, and Singapore (Mair, 2012; McDonald, 2011). It has also been used to describe literature and other artistic works that are produced in Chinese by Chinese-using writers in various parts of the world outside China.

2 | BIASES IN STUDIES OF LINGUISTIC INNOVATION AND CHANGE

Linguistic innovation and change has been a core area of research in socio- and historical linguistics since the beginning of these fields. In my view, though, biases persist in favour of:

- English and European languages: The English and European bias;
- One-language-at-a-time: The monolingual bias;
- Language in its convention and narrowly defined sense of speech and writing and not other modalities: The lingual bias.

2.1 | The English and European bias

The majority of socio- and historical linguistics work on linguistic innovation and change seems to be about English and European languages such as Spanish and French (Armstrong & Pooley, 2010; Penny, 2012). Other major world languages such as Arabic, Russian, and Chinese have not received the same amount of attention in international scholarship. And the dominant language of academic research in these fields, as in many other academic fields, is, of course, English. Studies of innovation and change of the English language predominantly focus on the so-called 'Inner Circle' of the English-speaking world, that is, Britain and its 'first diaspora', as in the US, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and anglophone Canada. Whilst a huge amount of research is out there on features of English produced by users of the 'Outer Circle' and the 'Expanding Circle', few studies consider them from the point of view of innovation and change. In fact, the usual approach is to compare the local features with standard forms of British English or English of the 'Inner Circle'. Part of the reason, I would like to suggest, is that people in the 'second diasporas' and in countries that have no historical connections to England are predominantly bilingual and multilingual, and they are not regarded as 'native' speakers of English. The native speaker concept is inherently entangled with being monolingual, that is, to qualify as a native speaker one is assumed to be monolingual. This is not to say that 'native speakers' of English from the Inner Circles of the English-speaking world are not or cannot be bilingual or multilingual. But having languages other than English in one's repertoire, even if from birth, somehow dilutes one's competence and raises doubts over one's entitlement to the claim of a native English speaker. Race and ethnicity seem to play a crucial role in the native

speaker concept. In Britain, for instance, if you are not white of Anglo-Saxon origin and have other languages in the family, you tend to be automatically classified as an English as an additional language (EAL) speaker/learner, even if you are exposed to English from birth and use it as your primary language of communication.

The question I want to ask is: can 'non-native speakers' – let us retain the problematic term for a moment – including learners, innovate in, and change, English? Many people seem unsure about the answer. And that includes us sociolinguists who are supposed to have a good sense and sensitivity towards such issues. Yet we have paid little attention to the contributions 'non-native speakers' have made to innovation and change in the English language. Media headlines tend to sensationalise the apparent threat posed by the peculiar ways of speaking and writing English by 'non-native' speakers, especially from the 'Expanding Circle', to the quality and purity of the English language. Here are a couple of media headlines:

> *How English is evolving into a Language We May Not Understand (Wired Magazine, 23 June 2008).*
>
> *"Chinglish" is taking over! …free-form adoption of English…is taking over the world, the entire world… (Prince Gomolvilas, 31 July 2018)*

Whilst apparently accepting that English has been changed by these 'non-native' speakers, the changes are posed as a threat to the language, not innovation. What is being warned against by such headlines is the potential claim of ownership of the English language by 'non-native' speakers. English is owned by those of the 'Inner Circle', and only the rightful owners can innovate. The English produced by speakers of the 'Outer' and 'Expanding' Circles is typically seen as 'foreigner talk', deviations, not innovations.

Even within Europe, the 'continentals', especially the bureaucrats in the European Union (that terrible organisation that Britain is desperately trying to get out of), there seems to be attempts to change the English language. Here are some examples of so-called Euro-English:

- Comitology: Committee procedure
- Conditionality
- Functionality
- Planification
- Subsidiarity: the principle that legal decrees should be enacted as close to people as possible
- To precise

Such Europeanisation of English is causing so many communication problems to the 'native' speakers of English from England that a concerted effort to lampoon it is being orchestrated by the popular press and populist politicians. Nevertheless, the sociolinguistic realities of the 21st century are such that English no longer belongs solely to one nation or one race. English, like most languages in the world, has always been a contact language, an immigrant language, and a mobile language. It is owned not just by the British, the Americans, the Australians, and New Zealanders, but also by the Indians, the South Africans, the Europeans, the Latin Americans, and the Asians, the vast majority of whom also have other languages in their linguistic repertoire. Multiple ownerships of multiple named languages are an essential part the sociolinguistic reality of today's world, renewing questions of the relationship between language and the nation-state, language and race, and a named language and the individual's identity. Another related question is: Can learners innovate in the language that they are learning? Young children, who are of course language learners, are deemed qualified to innovate in the language that they are learning. Is it because we regard them as 'native-speakers'? Can adult foreign language learners innovate? Once we label someone as a foreign language learner, their entitlement to the ownership of the language is diminished. And so is their capacity to innovate and change the language, it seems.

2.2 | The monolingual bias

Related to the English and European bias is the monolingual bias. There is a tendency to look at linguistic innovation and change from a one-language-only or one-language-at-a-time, monolingual perspective. A key source of linguistic innovation and change is language contact. Contact means borrowing from and mixing with other languages. Is borrowing innovation? Sociolinguists seem to be unsure. Innovation from within a language is generally preferable to borrowing from without. What about language mixing? Is mixing with other languages innovation? Take English, for example; it has always borrowed from and mixed with other languages. And borrowing and mixing have been the major sources of innovation and change to English. But there is a tendency in linguistic research to treat the borrowing and mixing processes from a monolingual perspective. The participating languages are not treated as equal partners: one is the host or matrix language and the other is 'the other', guest, or embedded. By implication, if you are not a 'native speaker' of the language, your mixing, or any deviation from the standard or the conventional, cannot be regarded as innovation; rather they are mistakes or misuses. This is a very serious issue in the field of bilingualism and multilingualism research. The field has come a long way from struggling to get bilingualism and multilingualism recognised as a social reality to wide-spread acceptance that bilingualism and multilingualism is good for the individual and for society as a whole. And there is a great deal of effort in protecting and enhancing linguistic diversity across the world. But the tendency is still such that the so-called peaceful, harmonious co-existence of different languages is great, but mixing languages is not. This is epitomised in the so-called Complementary Distribution principle, which wants to consolidate the politically and ideologically laden boundaries between named languages and discriminates against individuals and communities that do not adhere to one singular, named, and standardised language but habitually mix and move between these political entities that we linguists give names to. I discussed the following example in Li Wei (2018). It is an extract of an exchange between two elderly Chinese Singaporeans.

(1)

Seetoh: Aiyoh, we are all ka ki nang [自己人], bian khe khi [免客气]. Ren lai jiu hao [人来就好], why bring so many barang barang ('things'). Paiseh [歹示]. Nei chan zanhai yausam sum [你真有心].
'Aiyoh, we are all friends, don't mention it. It is good of you to come, why bring so many things? I'm embarrassed. You're so considerate.'

Jamie: Don't say until like that. Now, you make me malu ('shame') only. You look after my daughter for so many years, meiyou gonglao yeyou kulao [没有功劳也有苦劳]. I feel so bad that I couldn't come earlier. Mhou yisi [不好意思]. I was so shocked to hear about Seetoh, tsou lang ham ham [做人 ham ham – meaning 'life is unpredictable'], jie'ai shunbian [节哀顺变].
'Don't say that. Now, you make me ashamed only. You look after my daughter for so many years, you have done hard work even if you don't want a prize. I feel so bad that I couldn't come earlier. I'm embarrassed. I was so shocked to hear about Seetoh, life is unpredictable, I hope you will restrain your grief and go along with the changes.'

Seetoh: ta lin zou de shihou hai zai guanian [他临走的时候还在挂念] Natalie (Jamie's daughter). Of all your children, he sayang ('loves') her the most.
'Before he passed away he was thinking of Natalie (Jamie's daughter). Of all your children, he loves her the most.' (Li, 2018, pp. 13-14)

This kind of fluid and dynamic linguistic practice is under threat from the officially sanctioned, complementarily distributed English-Mandarin Chinese parallel monolingualism in Singapore. A paradox here is that if we accept that language mixing could be regarded as innovation and change, then we need to ask: from whose point of view? From the multilingual language user's point of view, this may be what they do all the time; it is everyday practice. So, it may only

be innovative if we looked at it from a single-language perspective. And this is a real dilemma that those of us working in the field of language contact need to battle with.

2.3 | The lingual bias

The third bias I want to raise is the lingual bias. Linguists are traditionally trained to focus primarily on conventionalised speech and writing, paying relatively little attention to other semiotic cues that make up the meaning-in-interaction in real-life human communication. So, we traditionally maintain a distinction between the linguistic, the paralinguistic, such as gesture, and the extra-linguistic (speaker identity and voice quality). Yet, human communication is highly multimodal, and meaning is never conveyed solely in codified speech and writing in everyday social interaction. With the availability of new communication platforms and technologies, we are gaining new ways of making meaning and making sense of the world through multimodal means. It has been declared that the fastest growing human language is emoji (Evans, 2017). And language scientists, such as Steven Pinker, have all come out in favour of it, urging researchers to take it more seriously.[1] People of all ages are mixing not only different named languages and writing systems, but also conventional writing with emoji and other images to create signs (Kress, 2004) that have complex meaning-making potentials (Halliday, 1985) for others to interpret.

I recently received a WeChat posting from an old school friend of mine in Beijing, in which she used the term 果粉 *guofen*, literally 'fruit powder'. It was the first time I saw the term. But I instantly understood what it meant, because it was accompanied by an image (Figure 3).

(2)

一	家	子	都	是	果	粉
yi	*jia*	*zi*	*dou*	*shi*	*guo*	*fen*
one	family		all	BE	fruit	powder

'all the family are Apple fans'

果粉 *guofen* here means 'iPhone fans', because iPhone is usually known in China as 苹果手机 *pingguo shouji*, literally 'apple handset'; so *guo* is the short form for *pingguo* 'apple'. 粉 *fen* is the short form of 粉丝 *fensi* (literally, 'cellophane noodles; noodles made of mung bean or potato starch'), a transliteration of the English words of 'fans'. Reading the message, including the term, without the image would not lead to adequate understanding. Instead, the text and the image need to be read together, holistically as a sign.

FIGURE 3 WeChat posting 一家子都是果粉 *yijiazi dou shi guofen* [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Let me now return to the two examples I showed at the beginning of this article and show how multilingual users of English in the Sinophone world transcend the boundaries of named languages and create linguistic innovations that counter the biases I have discussed so far. I use the term 'user' instead of 'speaker' to avoid another bias – the bias in favour of spoken language. Speaking is only one modality in which language is used and language use is a multimodal process. With the advancement of communication technologies, more and more linguistic innovations are mediated through digital social media. The modalities involved in social media interaction are different from those in face-to-face interaction. The examples I am investigating all come from social media interaction amongst language users who know different varieties of English and Chinese and other languages.

3 | INNOVATIONS FROM THE SINOPHONE WORLD

Andrea Lau's 'How to have a civil discourse' poster in Figure 1 features the four official languages of Singapore: English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, in the top part.[2] The design and colour scheme parodies public notices and warning signs. The way the four headings are emplaced gives the impression that they are translations. But, in fact, they are not. Whilst the English part carries the tone of instructional discourse, the Chinese part immediately below is a vulgar imperative in a local Chinese dialect (literally, 'don't cry-father-cry-mother') used to deride people for complaining about things too dramatically. The Malay part, *Jangan tension*, means 'take it easy', resonating with the Chinese part in sense though not in register. The Tamil version is a transliteration of the vernacular expression *relac lah machi* ('relax, my friend'), where *relac* is a Singlish variant of 'relax', *lah* is a ubiquitous sentence-final particle in Singlish, and *machi* is a slang address term in Tamil used with friends. So the Chinese, Malay, and Tamil titles are not translations of, but ludic responses to, the English 'How to have a civil discourse'. The line below the four red headings, 'A Singaporean way of confronting opposing viewpoints without womiting blood', sounds like a moderately formal piece of language. Yet a deliberate corruption of an English word has been surreptitiously sneaked in: *womiting* instead of 'vomiting', playing on how the word is sometimes pronounced by Singaporeans. The rest of the piece is divided into six blocks of text, each headed by a Singlish expression in red that describes an issue. Below each heading is a text, in much smaller fonts, largely in standard English and shaped along the lines of informative writing – except that in each case one Singlish word or phrase is introduced: *confirm plus guarantee* (the words mean as they do in standardised English, but the V-plus-V structure is distinctively Singlish), *abuden* (a conflation and phonetic corruption of 'or, but then', meaning 'if not, then what?'), *lecheh* ('cumbersome'), *paiseh lor* ('to feel embarrassed'), *cheem* ('too profound to understand'), *malu* ('to make a fool of oneself'). The text under each heading can be read as a response to or resolution of the issue. For example, *zhun bo?* literally means 'Is [the information] accurate?', and the text underneath responds to this with 'Always fact-check'; *Yaya for what* means 'Why be cocky?', and this is resolved by the exhortation to 'be humble'. The result of this twisting together of registers is a hybrid and ironic discourse that is stylistically marked, even to the Singaporeans. For although all the vernacular words and expressions featured in the poster are unmarked in Singlish, the way they are deployed to intersect and interact with a more formal English register is unusual, producing a humorous effect.

Looking purely at the linguistic elements in the post, and from a one-language-at-a-time perspective, one can get an idea of what Singlish is like. Singlish is usually defined as an English-based creole in Singapore with unique words and morphosyntax, which are more pronounced in informal speech. The fact that this poster is written, designed, and visually presented, plus the use of the colour red, has its shocking value. It is not to be used to highlight the differences between Singlish and standardised English. According to the creator Andrea Lau (personal communication with TK Lee, 2018), the poster was conceived in July 2017 amidst 'a growing number of sociopolitical issues that were getting Singaporeans hot under the collar'. This prompted Lau to create the graphic 'to share practical ways on how we can navigate differing views and cultivate fruitful conversations out of them'. The work, therefore, is motivated by a critical stance toward social issues; the exuberant multilingualism and heteroglossia are meant to heighten the sensational value of the language, in the creator's words, to 'elevate the sentiment of the content and solicit an emotional response' from readers, thereby producing an interface between creativity and criticality.

Turning now to the *Kongish Daily* example in Figure 2. *Kongish Daily*《港語日報》is a Facebook page created by a group of young academics in Hong Kong, and first appeared on the 3rd August 2015. Within 24 hours, it gained more than 10,000 likes, and was hailed by the media as 'Hong Kong's hottest new Facebook page' (Yu, 2015). Many of the reports warned people: 'don't expect to be able to understand a single sentence published by *Kongish Daily*, unless you are a young, hip Cantonese-speaker'. Under 'Our Story' (seen in Figure 2), it states that 'Kongish Daily is a local site sharing news in Hong Kong English (Kongish)'. It has later been changed to read 'Kongish Daily is a local site sharing news in "Kongish"'. This subtle change is highly significant as the creators of the Facebook page have learned to reject the variety of English approach to Kongish. The text on the Our Story page includes the following:

(3) Kongish ng hai exac7ly Chinglish

This reads: 'Kongish is not exactly Chinglish', where *ng hai* is the negative form of the Cantonese verb 'to be', and *exac7ly* uses the coda of the Cantonese word for the number 7 (romanised as 'cat', but sounding more like 'chat') to stand in for the 't' sound. Importantly, the number 7 connotes silliness or stupidity in Cantonese, such that *exac7ly* embeds an ironic tone within its transcriptual construction.

(4) The site is founded bcoz we want to collect relly research how people say Kongish by looking at everyone ge replies…and share this finding to all people who think Chinglish = Kongish.

This explains the motivation for creating the website, which is to look into how people use Kongish in practice by examining their replies to posts. The form *bcoz* is contracted from 'because', *relly* is a corruption of 'really', and 嘅 *ge* is a possessive marker in Cantonese. Here the phrase 'everyone ge replies' is not a case of code-switching; rather, *ge* stands in functionally for *'s*, so this is the result of an English phrase worked through Cantonese grammar.

(5) actcholly, Kongish hai more creative, more flexible, and more functional ge variety.

Actcholly mimics the way 'actually' is sometimes pronounced by Hongkongers. Unlike the *ge* above, the *ge* here functions as a suffix to the adjective 'functional', yet we see the same translingual operation of writing/reading English-through-Cantonese: '[a] more functional variety' would work in English, but 'functional *ge* variety' transgresses ordinary English discourse by calquing a Cantonese syntactical structure (and eliding the indefinite pronoun). This kind of translingual inflection eludes the term code-switching: it makes little sense to say we are 'switching' from an English adjective into a Cantonese suffix, and then into an English noun. The phrase is essentially a Cantonese phrase calqued in English, leaving the Cantonese particle protruding as a distinctive marker of Kongish.

(6) PS for secondary school chicken: If you want to learn English, Sor(9)ly, this site ng wui help you learn more English, but to share news with you in Kongish, finish.

Secondary school *chicken* is a calque of a Cantonese slang expression 中學雞 *zunghok gai* meaning 'immature secondary school students', where 'chicken' has a mildly pejorative sense here, in addition to a possible play with its visual similarity with 'children'. Like exac7ly versus 'exactly', *sor(9)ly* gives an ironic twist to 'sorry'. The transcriptual form, pronounced sor-*gau*-ly (where *gau* is read swiftly), plays with the Cantonese sound for the number 9 (*gau*); it invokes the homophone 鳩, which in classical Chinese refers to a species of bird but is appropriated in Cantonese to refer to the male sexual organ. At the same time, this vulgar meaning is masqueraded with the visuality of the number 9, and meshed into the sound sequence of the English 'sorry'. The phrase *ng wui* means 'will not'. The closing word 'finish' stands in for the Cantonese 就噉 *zau gam* ('that's all'); and although it renders the English syntax broken, the sentence reads perfectly well when processed translingually in Cantonese. There are links to the various media interviews the editors

of Kongish Daily have done which are accompanied with emoji. Some of the headings are given in Chinese characters as they appeared in the actual publications.

It would be erroneous to understand these examples as instances of 'bad' English if they were compared to standardised English. On the contrary, the English here is being strategically manipulated to make a metalinguistic statement on the mission of *Kongish Daily*, which is to promote a Hong Kong vernacular where English and Cantonese are intermingled. Yet to say that these exemplars of Kongish discourse demonstrate a specific kind of code-switching is to miss the point entirely: there is no switching as such from one language to another; rather Cantonese grammar and syntax operate beneath the façade of English to create a kind of palimpsest, giving rise to an uncanny breed of English that both is and is not English. The innovation of Kongish lies precisely in the way it hijacks the orthographic form of English to subvert English from within. As Li and Zhu (2019) argue, this kind of playful language is an example of what Joost Raessens (2006) described as the 'ludification of culture' – the mocking of authorities, the creation of alternative meanings and realities, the subversion and deception of roles, and the breaking of boundaries through play. Moreover, as a Facebook page, the postings, repostings, and followers' reactions (including 'likes' and 'comments') on *Kongish Daily* involve various transcription systems, spontaneous transliteration, emoji and other symbols, video and audio clips, and all in a designed format with colours and different font styles and sizes.

Elsewhere (Li Wei, 2016), I have discussed more examples of multilingual innovations from the Sinophone world, especially on mainland China, where social media users have created what looks like English, but expressions that a monolingual English speaker would find hard to comprehend. Here are some examples:

(7) Geilivable: 给力 *geili* comes from *geili* 'give strength', meaning 'awesome', 'incredible', 'amazing', 'extraordinary'.

(8) Niubility: 牛逼 *niubi* comes from 牛屄 *niubi* ('cow's genitalia'), also written as 牛B, 牛X, 流弊 *liubi*, NB or NBA because it is taboo, meaning 'formidability', 'incredibility', 'awesomeness', 'boastability'.

(9) Yakshit: 亚克西 *ya ke xi* (yack + shit) comes from Uyghur (ىشخاي) *yaxshi*, meaning 'good' as in praising people and things. The Chinese Central Television station runs an annual Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) gala and every year there is one act from Xingjiang the Uyghur autonomous region, singing and dancing and saying how wonderful life is there. They almost always have the phrase *Yaxshi* in it. Yakshit is mocking the non-stop praise.

(10) Z-turn: when the former Chinese president Hu Jintao used the phrase 不折腾 (*bu zheteng*, NEG + verb) in one of his official speeches as a warning, 'Don't make trouble or cause turmoil', the Chinese social media went into a frenzy about how best to translate the verb 折腾 *zheteng* into English. And the Chinese netizens cleverly manipulated the sound, the letter shape, and the semantics and came up with Z-turn, which sounds similar to the Chinese 折腾 *zheteng*.

Other innovations manipulate direct translation from Chinese to English, a feature of Chinglish, including, for example:

(11) *How are you?* is a word-by-word translation of the Chinese expression 怎么是你? *zenme shi ni?* (how +BE + you), meaning 'Why you?'

(12) *How old are you?* is a word-by-word translation of the Chinese expression 怎么老是你? *zenme lao shi ni?* (how + old + BE + you), meaning 'Why always you?'

(13) *You can you up, no can no BB* is a word-by-word translation of 你行你上啊, 不行别逼逼 *ni xing ni shang a, buxing bie bi bi* meaning 'If you have the ability then you do it. If you don't have the ability, then say nothing'.

(14) *You ask me, me ask who?* is a word-by-word translation of 你问我, 我问谁? *ni wen wo, wo wen shei?* meaning 'Don't look at me. I have no idea'.

(15) *We two who and who?* is a word-by-word translation of 咱俩谁跟谁? *zan lia shei gen shei?* meaning 'We are the best buddies'.

(16) *I will give you some colour to see see* is a word-by-word translation of 我要给你点颜色瞧瞧! *wo yao gei ni dian yanse qiao qiao!* meaning 'I will teach you a lesson'.

These innovations by multilingual Chinese users of English are extensively circulated through social media and are extremely popular in the Sinophone world. They have received relatively little attention from the Inner Circle English-speaking scholars and media. The analytical question I want to ask is: is there a framework that we can adopt or develop that can treat such examples as linguistic innovations rather than as 'foreigner talk', 'like-alike language', or even outright 'mistakes', without falling into the traps of the biases that were discussed earlier?

4 | THE TRANSLANGUAGING PERSPECTIVE ON LINGUISTIC INNOVATION

Here I suggest that the translanguaging perspective that has emerged in bilingual education research, and in research on distributed cognition and language in particular, provides such an analytical framework. Readers can see a fuller account of the way I conceptualise translanguaging in Li Wei (2018). The key relevant points to the present discussion are as follows. First, named languages are socio-political entities and must be treated as such. All named languages are contact languages. What has become known as English, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish have always borrowed from and mixed with other named languages. The naming of languages is a political and ideological act and has been very closely connected with the creation of the nation-state. Therefore, language borrowing and mixing are essential ingredients of linguistic innovation and change. In specific contexts, language borrowing and mixing may be deliberate acts of socio-political significance. Second, human languages evolved from gestures, signs, symbols, and icons that became representations of the way human beings make meaning and make sense of each other's meaning intentions in social contexts. Multimodality is an integral part of human language evolution and essential to human communication. Technological advancement has played a key role in human language evolution, and the invention of paper, ink, pen, and the printing press have directed people's attention to writing and literacy. The recent expansion of new communication media has woken human beings' sense of multimodal communication once again and begun to shift the attention to other modalities of human communication.

Translanguaging means not only transcending the boundaries between named languages but also the boundaries between what has traditionally been regarded as linguistic and other non-linguistic cognitive and semiotic means. This approach helps us overcome monolingual and lingua biases. As an analytical concept, translanguaging also urges us to focus on the instantaneity, spontaneity, and the transient nature of human communication. The temporal aspect of translanguaging is embodied in its morphology: the '-ing' indicates simultaneous and continuous engagement with two or more entities while transcending their boundaries. Facebook postings and the circulation of the innovations through social media are spontaneous and the reactions are instant. Translanguaging aims to capture these, rather than looking for patterns with high frequency and regularity as traditional linguistic variation and change research tends to do. More importantly the translanguaging perspective helps to highlight criticality through creative acts. The subversive streak of the examples above seems fairly obvious. One of the key motivations of these innovations appears to be to cause turbulence in both a linguistic sense and a socio-political sense. It disrupts the standards of the named languages as well as the socio-cultural norms. As Lau and the editors of *Kongish Daily* themselves say, their innovations are ideologically motivated. They are extremely aware of and sensitive to the nationalist ideologies that are being promoted by the respective governments, the national and local language and social policies, and traditional norms of practice. Their creations are a response to the socio-cultural and ideological challenges that they and others in the Sinophone world face in their everyday lives. So, to them, innovation is the process of creative problem solving. Li and Zhu (2019) describe similar translanguaging practices as 'playful subversion'. They defy conventions, authorities, and ideologies by manipulating and mocking them. And they make good use of the affordances of new media technologies, which, as Cermak-Sassenrath (2018) points out, exist to be played with by ordinary users who want to take risks and are conscious of their own goals and the consequences.

5 | CONCLUSION

I began this paper with the question: should examples like those in Figures 1 and 2 be considered as linguistic innovation in English? My own answer to the question is yes and no. Yes, they absolutely should be regarded as innovation, as they cleverly challenge and change conventionalised patterns and structures, causing turbulence linguistically and socio-culturally. But also, no, I would not consider them as innovations in English or any single, named language. They challenge the very notion of language by transcending the boundaries of named languages and the boundaries between language in the narrow sense of conventionalised speech and writing and other semiotic means, including colour, scriptal system, size, space, image, and sign. For these reasons, translanguaging offers an analytical perspective that is different from the varieties of language, especially varieties of English, approaches that focus too much attention on identifying structural features that are different or deviant from some kind of standard. Despite the efforts to add a critical view on the current state of world Englishes, the variety of approaches, for me, help to reinforce the hierarchical configuration of standard English as an international language and localised variations, and fail to fully acknowledge to crucial contributions of other languages in linguistic variation and change. The translanguaging perspective focuses on the transgression, subversion, and turbulence that innovative and creative acts of the kind we have analysed in this paper promote. It overcomes the English and European bias, the monolingual bias, and the lingual bias that exist in current studies of language variation and change. Moreover, it highlights the spontaneous and dynamic nature of the innovation by giving equal weight to the *trans-* prefix and the *-ing* suffix of the term. Theoretically, the translanguaging approach invites us to rethink language not as a set of conventionalised codes, but as a dynamic meaning-making resource that carries socio-cultural and ideological significance. It does not deny the existence of named languages but urges us to consider the reasons behind the naming of specific sets of codes as a political and ideological act. Methodologically, the translanguaging perspective takes us way beyond the realm of structural analysis, comparing varieties and standards. Its focus is on how language users manipulate, and therefore challenge, the structural norms and boundaries of named languages in spontaneous acts of creativity and criticality. Such a focus is particularly helpful in studying the linguistic innovation and change initiated by bilingual and multilingual language users in complex contact situations as it offers new insights into the dynamics of language contact.

I conclude the article with one of the latest creations by the multilingual language users in Hong Kong – *yijincimal* or *yijinecimal*, which *Kongish Daily* described as 'Kongish Star of dur Month', in June 2019, where *dur* stands for 'the' in standardised English. The *Kongish Daily* page below (Figure 4) gives an image of the Wikipedia complex Chinese character version which describes how and why the word was created, with a facepalm screaming emoji and the words 數學天才拆解警方數字研究出「毅進制」'mathematics genius deconstructs policy figures and invented *yijincimal*' superimposed over it. The wiki page tells us that yijincimal is the English term for 毅進制, and is pronounced as /jidʒinsɪməl/, abbreviation YJ. It is a numerical system like decimal and hexadecimal, but one that is created by *yijin*, nickname for police in Hong Kong. The new word, which mixes the Cantonese nickname for the police and the English morpheme -*cimal*, mocks the system that is apparently used by Hong Kong police to report the number of demonstrators in major public protects. The wiki page gives specific examples, including the annual July 1st demonstrations in Hong Kong, where police reported figures were many times below the figures estimated by the organisers, for example, 54,000 versus 218,000 in 2011, 63,000 versus 400,000 in 2012, 66,000 versus 430,000 in 2013, and 98,600 versus 510,000 in 2014.

In February 2019, the Hong Kong government proposed an amendment to the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Bill. The amendment was in response to a 2018 homicide between a Hong Kong couple while in Taiwan. Hong Kong does not have an extradition treaty with Taiwan and entering into one would be difficult because mainland China does not recognise Taiwan as a separate state. For Hong Kong, to not only acknowledge that independence, but also grant Taiwan a right it has steadfastly refused to mainland China, would be very problematic. To resolve this, the Hong Kong government proposed the amendment which would establish a mechanism for case-by-case transfers of fugitives by the Chief Executive to any jurisdiction with which the city lacks a

FIGURE 4 'yijinecimal' [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

FIGURE 5 Mock *yijinecimal* converter

formal extradition treaty, including mainland China. Concerns were raised from all sectors of the community, including legal professionals and human rights groups that Hong Kong would open itself up to mainland Chinese law and that Hong Kong citizens and foreign nationals passing through the city could fall victim to the mainland Chinese legal system where the courts are under the control of the Communist Party. Public demonstrations against the amendment began to emerge in April and gathered momentum in June. On the 9th of June, a huge demonstration in central Hong Kong occurred, and the media consistently reported a figure of 1,030,000, whereas the police reported only 240,000. Another demonstration took place on the 16th of June, with an estimated figure of 2,000,001. But the police again reported only 338,000. The word *yijincimal* went viral on social media, with mock conversion systems, such as the one in Figure 5. On the 17th of July, Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced a pause in the passage of the amendment of the Bill. What this and the other examples discussed in this paper shows is that language mixing is a very productive means of linguistic innovation that multilingual language users exploit to demonstrate creativity and criticality, particularly at a time of socio-political turbulence.

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NOTES

[1] https://www.businessinsider.com/why-steven-pinker-loves-emojis-2015-8?r=US&IR=T

[2] An extended discussion of Andrea Lau's poster can be found in Tong King Lee and Li Wei (in press) and an extended discussion of the Kongish Daily example can be found in Li Wei, with Tsang, Wong and Lok (in press).

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