ΜΕΤΑ

"He 'catch no ball' leh!" Globalization versus localization in the Singaporean Translation Market

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Résumé de l'article

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"He 'catch no ball' leh!"
Globalization versus localization in the Singaporean Translation Market

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RÉSUMÉ

S'il existe bel et bien un anglais et un chinois de Singapour, ni l'une ni l'autre de ces langues régionales n'est vraiment utilisée par les interprètes ou les traducteurs. L'exception confirmant la règle, on trouve parfois ces variantes en interprétation judiciaire ou dans les traductions pour le théâtre. Cela démontre bien combien le marché repose davantage sur des forces extérieures que sur les besoins de la région. Qui plus est, localement, les autorités gouvernementales et les médias contribuent à maintenir le statut prestigieux de l'anglais britannique et du mandarin en exigeant ces formes canoniques dans leurs traductions. En conséquence, il faut enseigner les idiomes de Londres et de Beijing aux futurs traducteurs de Singapour si l'on veut qu'ils soient concurrentiels sur le marché de l'emploi.

ABSTRACT

Despite the existence of local versions of English and Mandarin Chinese in Singapore, these non-standard languages are not widely used by translators and interpreters. Simultaneous court interpretation and (some) drama prove by their exception to this rule that Singapore's translation market is driven mainly by foreign, not local demand. Further, local demand by the government and the media points to the continued prestige of "standard" English and Mandarin, where those standards are London and Beijing, respectively. Training for local translators and interpreters, then, must continue to provide students with "standard" models of these languages if they are to compete successfully for jobs in the marketplace.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

globalization, localization, Mandarin Chinese, simultaneous court interpretation, Singapore

Introduction: The Global and the Local

The terms "globalization" and "localization" seem to be everywhere in academic discourse lately, a phenomenon in itself perhaps proof of the power of globalization. The disparity in definitions of these terms, on the other hand, reveals the endurance of localization and suggests to what degree these two terms are co-dependent.

For the purposes of this paper, globalization refers loosely to the rapid increase of interconnectedness between virtually all human communities; first on the level of world markets for the circulation of goods, second on the level of the circulation of information. Accompanying this interconnectedness is standardization and convertibility of the conduits of such exchange, both physical (weights, measures, computer file protocols) and conceptual (language). Thus the terms "standard English" and "standard Chinese" used below are linked to globalization.

Localization has at least two senses. First, it is a general term used in a love-hate oppositional relation to globalization; "love-hate," because it can be used in a sense that suggests synthesis and harmony between the terms, as in the slogan "think global, act local," or it can be seen as an antidote to globalization when that term carries a negative valence. In both cases, localization or "the local" refer to anything which is specific to a particular group of people; regionalization is thus a closely-related term.

A more recent and restricted sense of localization refers to a mix of computer and translation skills which are used to create "localized" versions of software, web pages, or other electronic information. I will not be using the term in this sense for this paper, and only mention it to avoid confusion; I use localization in the more general sense.

In terms of translation practice, globalization has had an enormous impact on Chinese-English translation; ease of communication has meant that one's location (Singapore, Beijing, Toronto) no longer need limit one's potential market. How this globalization has affected the translation market in Singapore, including its impact on local translation practice, is one of the main questions of this paper.

Standards for Mandarin Chinese and English in Singapore

Singapore's economy took off in the 1970s mainly thanks to its port facilities; in 2000, Singapore ranked first in terms of shipping volume and second behind Hong Kong in terms of container traffic (Infoplease 2004). The idea of Singapore as a clearing-house for goods being shipped between Asia and North Atlantic countries has, in turn, become a powerful metaphor applied to many facets of the Singaporean economy, including translation. Singapore has positioned itself culturally and linguistically between Asia and the North Atlantic countries.

Part of this effort has been directed at achieving standardization of the linguistic tools used by Singaporeans in order to fight for a share of this global market which requires global language skills. The perception that Singaporeans need to master "standard" languages, then, is both a response to global markets and a reaction against the localization of both English and Mandarin in Singapore.

Mandarin, like English, has had regional variations for quite some time. Anyone who has lived or worked in different provinces of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, or any other countries with sizeable Chinese populations can tell you that there is no one Mandarin used by all native speakers, although Beijing Mandarin, like the Queen's English, continues to be perceived as the standard.

Officially, Singaporean Mandarin aspires to be as close to standard Beijing Mandarin as possible. News reports, for example, "sound" fairly standard, although the accent is not pronouncedly Northern. It is difficult to tell whether a news item is being read by a local broadcaster, one from Taiwan, or Southern China, and in fact some Singaporean newscasters are recruited from these areas. From 1978 to 1988 there was a Committee on Standardized Translations of Common Names (under the Ministry of Education); their decisions were adopted by all government agencies and mass media (see bibliography for publications). Since 1991 members of Singapore Press Holdings; Mediacorp; The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MITA); and one parliamentary interpreter have formed the Committee for the Standardization of Chinese Translations of Proper Names in the Media. There have

been various "speak Mandarin" campaigns to promote Mandarin over other dialects (chiefly Hokkien, but also Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, and Hainanese); further, all "mother tongue" language instruction in the school system for ethnic Chinese is in Mandarin, regardless of dialect group.

Despite these considerable efforts to promote standard Mandarin, Singaporean Street Mandarin remains distinct from that spoken in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or China. After having lived in Singapore for one year, I was able to pick out a Singaporean among a group of Chinese speakers in Tokyo's Narita Airport while waiting to change planes. Likewise, it is possible to identify Mandarin speakers from China on the campus of the National University of Singapore.

Like its better-known counterpart Singlish, Singaporean Mandarin is distinct on at least three levels: accent, lexicon, and grammatical constructions. I will not be dealing with accent very much in this paper, since most of my data is gathered from written sources. It is, however, one of the factors which translators list as distinguishing Singaporean Mandarin in the survey I conducted.

For vocabulary, Singaporean Mandarin has been influenced by a wide variety of languages. Various Chinese dialects (see list above), Malay, Tamil, and English have all contributed vocabulary. It is common for a Mandarin speaker to include one or more words from various other languages in a single sentence. These words are by no means limited to loan words for new or exotic items for which Mandarin has no equivalent. English conjunctions such as "then," "but," "after that" are often used in a sentence along with such basic Malay terms as "*makan*" (to eat) or "*kaki*" (buddy) and various Chinese dialect expressions like "*sian*" (to be bored/fed up) or "*suay*" (unlucky). Furthermore, names of many common items are different, although this is not necessarily due to borrowing: the names for guava (*fanshiliu*) and pineapple (*huangli*), for example, differ from those used in Taiwan (*bale* and *fengli*, respectively).

Many modes of expression are different. When asked the time, a Singaporean may tell you that it is "*jiu dian san ge zi*" (nine and three characters), which is the Cantonese way of saying 9:15 (where 5 minutes = 1 "character," or mark on the face of a clock/watch). Or when counting numbers over 10,000, many Singaporeans use 1000 as the basic unit (following English practice) rather than 10000, the basic unit in China/Taiwan. "*Yi wan san qian*" (one ten-thousand, three thousand) becomes "*shi san qian*" (thirteen thousand). Percentage in standard Mandarin is expressed as "*bai fen zhi* X" (out of 100, X); in Singapore they say "X *baxian*" (X percent), where *baxian* is a transliteration of the English "percent," originally borrowed through Cantonese.

On the level of grammar, certain expressions vary from standard Mandarin; it is not always clear if this is the influence of English or of dialect. So for example "turn left" in Taiwan/China is "*zuo zhuan*" (left turn), while in Singapore it is "*zhuan zuo*" (turn left); while "you go first" in Taiwan/China is "*ni xian zou*" (you first go), in Singapore this becomes "*ni zou xian*" (you go first).

I will not go into detail concerning Singlish here, as it has been extensively studied and described (see Foley, Forbes, Ho, Kwan-terry, Low, Ooi, and Platt). Suffice to say that most of what I say about Singaporean Chinese applies equally, if not more, to Singlish. Below is a short humorous poem on SARS circulating on the Internet which shows borrowing from Malay and various Chinese dialects (in bold), as well as various typical Singlish grammatical constructions (underlined):

"Ah Beng Speaks – on S.A.R.S."

Aiyoh-yoh, the news nowadays <u>are</u> really bad,   [exclamation]
many people are dying of SARS it's so very sad.

Doctors and nurses work very "**siong**" and very tough,   [hard-working]
I hope they don't complain that their <u>salary no enough</u>.

They <u>no care</u> whether you're rich or just a simple **Ah Beng**   [uneducated Hokkien
                                                                                          male]

suspect you're infected, **kena** send straight to Tan Tock Seng.   [unlucky enough to be]
                                                                                          [name of hospital]

If exposed to SARS they give you 10-day quarantine,
kena stay at home, no food to eat, just drink Ovaltine.   [you have to]

Now if you <u>anyhow</u> cough or spit in public place,
people all "**chow**" from you like running a race.   [flee]

The illness has even gone to West from East;
<u>also know how to migrate</u>, this smart disease.

Here we're scared the foreigners all dare not come,
though we're very friendly and mean them no harm.

This will be really bad for our weak economy,
and graduates will end up selling Hokkien **Mee**.   [Hokkien-style noodles]

Or run around the streets selling masks;
this type of business <u>sure won't go bust</u>.

But looking at gals will no longer be any fun;
all covered, <u>cannot</u> see their pretty face <u>one</u>.

<u>Now I received</u> a lot of tips from sms,
each telling me their advice is the best.

<u>One say</u> I should not wear **SARong** or **SARi**,   [two types of clothing]
but <u>wanna buy</u> new clothes, <u>where got money</u>?

Tao SAR Pao I also should not eat;   [Chashao bao (steamed
                                                                                          stuffed bun)]

donno why, maybe it's got no meat.

Also I should avoid going to the **SARabat** stalls;   [sweetened ginger brew]
this one <u>where got logic</u>, I really <u>catch no ball</u>.

Another <u>say</u> it's good to drink plenty of SARsi;
drown all the viruses, then quickly go and pee.

One warned if I don't listen it's my own **paSAR**,   [problem]
but so much advice which one to follow <u>lah</u>?

I hope they identify the culprit and find a cure fast;
if not, we'll all join the earthworms and become dust.

But down here you'll end up in an urn
because <u>cannot bury</u> so <u>all must burn</u>.

If you <u>got</u> fever or cough, go <u>see doctor</u> quick;
don't wait until you are Sick, Ah … Really Sick.

Otherwise, you're really a "**SARbo**" king,   [sabotage]
so big already also donno how to think.

But living on earth we'll always face the risk
from the tiny germ, the world's first terrorist.

Some say SARS is Saddam's All-out Retaliatory Strategy,
He **kena** damn "**chiat lat,**" so want the whole world to **mati**.   [unfortunately was]
                                                                           [unlucky]   [die]

For the purposes of this study, I have read/listened to the following kinds of translations: commercial, literary (poetry, fiction, drama), and official interpretation (Parliament and the Subordinate Courts). Any known Singaporean Mandarin or Singlish expressions were noted for each type of translation. I also interviewed or polled by questionnaire eighteen translators and interpreters; the survey included questions concerning the types of source language they dealt with, as well as what type of language they believed that they produced.

The purpose of this study is fivefold:

A. to map out what types of English/Chinese are used by translators and interpreters in Singapore
B. to examine in depth two sites of translation/interpretation which exhibit the most variations from standard Mandarin/English
C. to attempt to explain why standard Mandarin/English is still the norm for most translation/interpretation activities in Singapore
D. to examine the role of translation in establishing a hierarchy of Mandarins and of Englishes in Singapore; who speaks standard or non-standard language?
E. to draw tentative conclusions regarding how the answers to the first four points might affect the way which translation is taught in Singapore. In a global market, what sorts of language skills do students need?

A & B The Map/Special cases

For interpretation, all commercial simultaneous interpreters and Parliamentary interpreters[1] stated that they strove to use an international standard of Mandarin, where "international" meant resembling educated speakers from China and/or Taiwan, as well as standard English. The reasons were simple. First, for conferences, virtually all of their target listeners were from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, not Singapore. Of the six simultaneous interpreters I know (and who report that they know of no other active SI practitioners based in Singapore), three are "local" (born/educated in Singapore/Malaysia) and three are Taiwanese/Asian American. One of the local interpreters, for example, went to great lengths to document the fact that his Mandarin was so standard that he was mistaken for a Beijinger at a conference held in Beijing. In a global market where most of the jobs are overseas, local Singaporean Chinese is not desirable.

Second, for Parliament, following government policy, the Chinese they produce is as standard as possible. In a total of four afternoon sessions I observed, I could not catch a single "local" expression in either their Chinese or English output. This is particularly important when a Member of Parliament speaks in Chinese, because it is the interpreter's English translation of the speech which is recorded in the

Parliamentary records, not the original Chinese. In such cases, the interpreters go back over the speech after Parliament has finished for the day and polish the English. Again, the interpreters are quite proud of the high standard of their English; while observing in the booth, one of the local interpreters wrote down an ungrammatical phrase spoken in English by an MP and then beneath it the grammatically correct phrase for my benefit. Here state policy seems to be a more important factor than globalization, although on another level that policy can be seen as an outcome of the perceived need for globalization.

Consecutive interpretation in the Subordinate Courts could not be more different. Each defendant is assigned an interpreter according to race (Malay, Indian, Chinese). In the case of a Chinese defendant speaking a dialect, if the interpreter does not understand that particular dialect, another is substituted (all Chinese interpreters must know Hokkien plus one other dialect). Regardless of the language which the defendant chooses to use, English or his/her "mother tongue," the defendant does not speak directly to the judge; he or she speaks to the interpreter, who then speaks to the judge, saying, for example "The defendant pleads guilty in English." On one occasion I witnessed a defendant who, having first used Malay, switched to English and tried to address the judge directly to plead for leniency. The judge rebuked him and instructed him to continue his plea in Malay, which the interpreter then translated into English for the judge.

It is the duty of the interpreter to make sure that the defendant understands everything the judge or lawyers say, the nature of the charge, possible sentence, etcetera. Whatever language is necessary to accomplish that aim – Malay, Tamil, Singlish, Mandarin, Teochew, Hokkien, or a mixture of several – is used. So for example, if the judge asks "How does the defendant plead?," the interpreter might turn to a Chinese defendant and say "*salah boh*?" which is a mixture of Hokkien and Malay meaning "guilty (Malay) or not (Hokkien)?," because "*salah*," a Malay term, is commonly used among older Hokkien speakers. Or they might say "are you guilty?" in English, or "*ni ren zui ma*" in Mandarin, depending upon circumstances. In another case I witnessed, wherein an elderly man, his son, and daughter-in-law were all being charged together, the interpreter spoke Hokkien to the father and Mandarin to the son and daughter-in-law. Interpreters reported that if a defendant showed signs of being confused, even though they might say "yes, I understand," the interpreter would rephrase the message one or more times until they were satisfied that the defendant really understood. Thus even with English speakers, they see themselves as possessing specialized knowledge of legal English which they translate into local Singlish when necessary for the defendants.

Needless to say, I observed a high percentage of both Singlish and Singaporean Mandarin in the four court sessions I attended while the interpreters were speaking to the defendant. Both grammatical structures and lexical variants were observed, and of course the accent was local (all court interpreters I met were local Singaporeans). The use of 1000 as a base for counting over 10,000, "*baxian*" for percent, and the switching in order of various components in the sentence all occurred.

Conversely, when addressing the judge, the English they used was much more standard; I detected only two instances of Singlish in their exchanges, both being uttered by the judge, not the interpreter. Again, the interpreters see their role to be taking whatever Singlish, Singaporean Mandarin, or dialect that the defendant

produces and turning it into proper legal English for the court to record. If a defendant says "I did it," the interpreter produces "I plead guilty, Your Honour." Court interpreters thus guarantee comprehension on the part of the defendant (represented by local language) and at the same time are expected to maintain the purity of the legal record in standard English (as with Parliament, only the interpreter's English is recorded by the court).

Finally, I will give two short anecdotes to show the fluidity of language in less official interpreting venues. One simultaneous interpreter reported that, when she had been hired to interpret for a banquet held by a local company, the situation became extremely complex as the meeting proceeded and speakers began drinking. Someone might start off in Mandarin, then switch to Hokkien, throw in a few words in Teochew, and then switch to Singlish. In the end, the interpreter was often not clear which languages should be translated into what – should the Hokkien be rendered in English or Mandarin? Should the English be rendered into Mandarin or Hokkien? "It was a linguistic nightmare, " she reported.

The second anecdote concerns a question and answer session held between a Taiwanese choreographer and a Singaporean audience after a performance in Singapore by the Taiwanese dance troupe Cloudgate in early 2003. A local enthusiast acted as consecutive interpreter; if a question were posed in Mandarin, he translated it into English for the benefit of the rest of the audience, and then translated the choreographer's reply. Since the choreographer was fluent in English, however, he sometimes chose to answer in English (in which case the interpreter switched direction), sometimes corrected the interpreter, and sometimes answered in a mixture of English and Chinese. By the end the interpreter was exhausted and confused, at one point paraphrasing a few sentences in English instead of translating them into Chinese.

In sum, interpreting for local audiences in Singapore demonstrates that in the local market, interpreting is seldom the traditional switching back and forth between two watertight codes (standard English and Mandarin, for example). Dealing with mixed and multiple codes, (Singaporean Chinese, English, Singlish, Hokkien, Malay), interpreters must be creative and highly sensitive to local variations. Global standards do not apply, as the Taiwan-born, U.S.-educated interpreter in the first example discovered.

For commercial translation and subtitling (interviews only; no texts examined), not surprisingly, the language observed was quite standard, and really there is little I can say except that, like the market for simultaneous interpretation, a high degree of standardization is expected, since many clients are either multinationals, state organs, or mass media, none of which want local language.

The area of literary translation was the most interesting to me because, contrary to my expectations, a high degree of conformity to standard English and Chinese was observed in both poetry and fiction. A range of texts was examined dating from 1967 to 2002 (see bibliography). One of the earliest translators from Chinese to English was Ly Singko, who translated two anthologies, one in 1967 and one in 1980. His first anthology, *Modern Malaysian Chinese Stories*,[2] contains a sprinkling of loan words from Malay, Hokkien, and Cantonese for culturally specific items (such as parang, sarong, kampong, sampan…). There are 33 occurrences of 26 different terms, with a glossary being provided at the back; but actually 7 of these terms occur in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (including the four listed above) and thus may be regarded as

having entered standard English already. There is also one term locally coined which is not a loan word, "five-foot way" (meaning the covered sidewalk formed by the overhang of 2-4 storey buildings along a street). There are three cases where he transcribes a phrase or sentence in Malay; these all occur in dialogue, and translation is provided (pp. 63, 113, 173). In the last case, for example, a Chinese man addresses a woman half in Malay, half in English, because he is not sure she understands English. On pages 160-161 a character addresses another character as "sister" rather than by name: "Hurry Sister, come and help Mom!," which seems to be a result of "word-for-word" translation from Chinese. Finally, I counted only six examples where the grammar or usage of vocabulary was non-standard (pp. 86, 144, 173, 174, 177, 194).[3]

His second collection, *Reunion and Other Stories* has even fewer departures from standard English. One sentence in Malay is translated immediately after in parentheses; (p. 40) one Teochew term, "*angpow*" (red envelope – p. 89) has an explanatory footnote, and one story set in India has explanatory footnotes to three Indian terms. (pp. 48 and 60) I found only two grammatically peculiar sentences, one where the verb "to wonder" is used in an atypical fashion, (p. 107-8) and one in which "each other" is an unnecessary addition. (p. 170)

What is true for these two collections holds generally for the other collections of fiction and poetry examined: only names of objects culturally specific to Southeast Asia are likely to be introduced into otherwise standard English texts (often with footnotes or glossaries); the few grammatical peculiarities seem to have "slipped through" rather than been introduced for local flavor. Almost all of the few occurrences of non-standard English which seem purposeful occur in dialogue; in other words, it is only acceptable to use Singlish/Malay/dialect terms when trying to represent the spoken language.

The same holds true for English-Chinese translation in this period. Moreover, even when the original English poem contains the deliberate use of Singlish, Malay, or dialect, the Chinese translation almost never tries to duplicate such effects in Singaporean Mandarin. Take for example the poem "Speaking in Tongues – Singapore Style" by Goh Sin Tub (in Singh and Wong, 2000:201), which contains Hokkien, Bahasa Malay, Japanese, and Mandarin:

In days of yore Grandpa laid down the law,
Speak mother tongue he used to say:
"Hokkien lang kong Hokkien way."

Though Grandma from Java spoke only Bahasa,
She followed Grandpa's rule to kong Hokkien way,
And she saw to it we grew up kong-ing Hokkien way.

Then we moved from Chinatown to Emerald Hill
Our friends now Muthu, Dollah, Bongsu,
So (*boh pien lah!*) we also chakap Melayu.

At school, Sir insisted: "Speak English!"
So, apa lagi, we anyhow speak English too,
Chin-chye, Chap-chye, choba kind also can do.

Then Japanese came and we benkyo Nippon-go;
Their ABC kata-kana: Ah, ee, oo, eh, oh,
No problem, we just champor: Kaki lu bengko'.

And now (*kao peh*!) Speak Mandarin campaign!
Must jiang hua yu, Hokkien way no can do.
Kena again: t'ak ch'e, belajar, benkyo, study, du shu.

At first we may swear at those campaign mandarins:
"Dammit, sial only, so suay one!"
But being kiasu, soon it's Xian Sheng zao an!

操母语――新加坡式

旧时阿公定下规矩，
他说：讲母语，
"福建人讲福建话。"

瓜哇来的阿婆虽然只说巫语，
遵守阿公的规矩也讲福建话，
还要我们都讲福建话张大。

后来我们从牛车水搬到翡翠山
这儿的朋友叫穆都，多拉邦苏，
所以（没办法啦！）我们也讲马来话。

在学校先生坚持："说英语！"
那么，没办法，我们也乱乱讲英语，
随随便便，拉拉杂杂，都可以。

然后日本人来了，我们又勉强日本语；
他们的片假名字母：ah, ee, oo, eh, oh,
没问题我们就照渗：khaki lu bengko。

现在呢（我的爸！）讲华语运动！
福建话不行，必须"讲华语"。
又中了：t'ak ch'e, belajar, benkyo, study, du shu。

起初我们可能咒骂那些运动官吏：
"该死的，倒霉，真衰！"
但因为怕输，很快就"先生早安"！

In the translation, all Hokkien words in stanzas 1-4, 6-7 except *t'ak ch'e* have been translated into Mandarin, and most of the Malay (*chakap Melayu* in the third stanza, *apa lagi* and *choba* in the fourth, *champor* in the fifth and *kena* in the sixth) are all rendered into Mandarin; even the Malay names are transliterated using Chinese characters. The Mandarin words in the sixth and seventh stanzas are also of course transcribed into their equivalent Chinese characters. The Singlish grammar in the fourth, sixth, and seventh stanzas is also rendered into standard Mandarin.

In only four cases does the translation use foreign constructions. First, for *benkyo Nippon-go* the translator used the equivalent Chinese characters, resulting in a sentence in Chinese which is intelligible but not "standard"; *benkyo* (pronounced *mianqiang* in Mandarin) does not mean "to study" in Chinese, as it does in Japanese. In two places the translator retains Roman letters for pronunciation (stanza 5). Perhaps most interesting, the translator chooses to use romanization for all five versions of "study" in the sixth stanza, when the first (Hokkien), third (Japanese) and fifth (Mandarin) could easily be written in Chinese characters; this is perhaps to avoid the reader using Mandarin to pronounce the Hokkien and Japanese characters.

This is not to say that the translation is a failure. The translation of the title, for example, contains a clever double-entendre: the verb used for "speak" can mean "to use, to have mastery of"; yet it also is slang for "screw, fuck." Thus the title of the Chinese can be understood as "Screwing one's mother tongue," which of course is the main theme of the poem. But the interplay between the various languages has been flattened out in the translation. The only local Chinese expression is the term for Mandarin, *huayu* (language of the Chinese); in China and Taiwan it is commonly called *zhongwen* (the language of China), *guoyu* (national language) or *putonghua* (common speech).

One other example from the same anthology is the English poem "*wo shi* (I am)" by Paul Tan (p. 243). Here the author uses two Chinese characters as the title of an English poem, with a translation in parentheses. The translator could have chosen to use this title for the translation; however, he chose instead to change it to simply "*wo*" [I]. This is because "*wo shi*" is not normally used as a stand-alone sentence in Mandarin; it is being used by the poet in the same sense as the verb "to be" is used in English to indicate existence. In other words, "*wo shi*" is really a word-for-word translation of the English "I am," not the other way around, and the translator has quietly "corrected" the author's use of Chinese in the title. So the translation, again, is more "standard" than the original.

The situation for dramatic texts is quite different. Although probably the majority of plays written, performed, and translated in Singapore continue to use standard English or Mandarin, many plays set in contemporary Singapore make extensive use of non-standard language of all forms. Pao Kun Kuo (1939-2002), probably Singapore's most famous playwright, provides two excellent examples of the extremes one may find. "The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole" ("*Guancai tai da, dong tai xiao*" English version in Kuo 1990; Chinese version in Kuo 1995) was written and performed in Mandarin in 1985, then translated into English by the author and staged later in the same year. The entire play (a one-act monologue) is written in extremely standard Mandarin; I found only two expressions which sounded unusual when shown to native speakers from Taiwan and China (*shou ren can guan*, p. 8; *xingjue dao*, p. 12). The English contains slightly more non-standard expressions (sixteen), six of which have to do with sudden changes in verb tense (for example, "The coffin won't get into the grave because the hole was so small." p. 34). Again, as with the poetry and fiction, these seem to be infelicities, not deliberate stylistic choices; Kuo was a native speaker of Chinese, not English.

One year later Kuo's "No Parking On Odd Days" ("*Dan ri bu ke ting che*") was first performed in English, and then in Chinese in 1987. There is internal evidence that the Chinese text is the original however, because the doggerel verse which the man's son recites rhymes in Chinese but not in English. The language of both the Chinese and English texts are markedly different from "Coffin" discussed above. The Chinese text contains numerous Malay words, English words, Hokkien expressions and, in one case according to a footnote, "Singaporean style Mandarin" (p. 39). Here is a sample sentence from page 31: "*Dangran la! Ni de undang-undang you mei you pass*?" (Of course lah! Don't you know your law?) *La/lah* is an exclamation much used in Singaporean Mandarin and English; *undang-undang* is Malay for "rules," and "Pass" is English. Moreover, in certain cases English words used in Singaporean Mandarin

have a different meaning from that in standard English. On page 28, "traffic" refers to "traffic police." In all these instances there are common Mandarin equivalents available, but the author has chosen not to use them.

I began by trying to list all the Singlish expressions in the English translation, but quickly gave up because there were too many; there were eight on the first page alone. Again, however, there tended to be more in sections of reported dialogue, especially when the son is speaking (the play is a monologue with the main character narrating past events, including dialogue, relating to his various run-ins with the traffic police for parking violations). On pages 50-51, for example, we have:

> Let me start with this parking offence – that time I got a ticket when I left my car at the end of the street when I went to visit this friend of mine in Bukit Timah. He lives in a rented garage of one of those pre-war old bungalows. When I came out, there was this ticket waiting for me tucked under the windscreen, you know how they do it. The ticket said I committed an offence leaving my car too close to the end of the street.
> "'Alamak! Father, kena again?' my son asked me. See, he was with me that time. He and my friend's son are also good friends, same age.
> 'What's wrong this time, father? No parking lots here, what?'"

The father's English when not quoting his son is closer to standard English. The son's speech (quoted by the father) contains the most colloquial expressions, including the local usage of "parking lot" for "parking space."

One more contemporary example should suffice to make my point. Alfian Bin Sa'at's *Fugitives*, written in English and Malay, was translated into Mandarin by How Wee Ng, with parts of the dialogue left in English, and performed in December of 2002. The original script has a high percentage of Singlish expressions in the dialogue, although sections where the characters are speaking monologues to the audience are more standard. For example, compare the mother's opening monologue:

> Mother: This morning I took the bus to church. When I entered the bus, I noticed that everyone was smiling at me. So strange. I looked to see if there was maybe some famous actor or actress standing behind me, but there was no one. I thought, ah, finally after so many years, our Courtesy Campaign is now successful. In front of me are all these bright and shiny teeth, welcoming me as if I was some long-lost friend. But you know what, maybe the campaign wasn't so successful. Because I didn't smile back. I was too shy to smile back.

with a short dialogue between the father and his former employee:

> Samad: Aiyah, around here where got bus? Must walk far-far then can find bus stop.
> Father: Never mind. Can take taxi. (p. 14)

Also, certain characters tend to use more Singlish expressions than others; Samad (an Indian) and Zainal (a Malay) use the most; the father and the son tend to use more Singlish when speaking with these two characters than at other times.

The Mandarin translation is, if anything, more colloquial than the English original. In the mother's opening monologue quoted above, for example, the translation uses one English word (bus) and two Hokkien expressions, (*hor* – an expletive; *paiseh* – "bashful"). The mixing in of words from other languages occurs much more frequently than in the English original, and there was so much Malay and English used that it was decided to provide intertitles on a screen for the audience.

In sum, translation of drama in Singapore exhibits the greatest use of experimental language for literary translation, although again there is a tendency for such experimentation to be concentrated in the dialogue.[4]

C. Why so standard?

Individual poets, essayists, and novelists all make use of Singlish occasionally in their works. Several of the poems in the collection *Journeys* edited by Edwin Thumboo (1995) experiment with Singlish expressions. "A Poem Not Too Obiang" by Jason Leow (p. 138), for example, explores the question of what language is proper to poetry in Singapore:

> From fiddlesticks and By Jove
> I pick my words to find
> Alamak
> stirring spicily on my tongue –
> like the first bite
> of green chillies that sends
> tentative excitement
> popping out of their seeds.
>
> Why should I not drink
> teh tarek and discuss
> Lee Tzu Pheng
> (without putting them in italics)
> among friends who read but
> tread on the trappings of blind
> Miltonic and Shakespearean worship?
>
> Like the prata man's
> flips and flaps of the dough,
> taking shape with each dose
> of local flavour,
> I look for my place
> in a Singaporean life….

The poem "Farewell to Sumana" by Leong Liew Geok (p. 67-8 of the same collection), about a Singaporean family sending their pregnant Sri Lankan maid back home, contains many typically Singlish expressions. Indeed, an entire novel, *Spider Boys*, by Ming Cher was written in Singlish several years ago. Why, then, are literary translators so timid in regard to language except when translating plays?

There seem to be a variety of factors at work. First, despite individual experiments in using Singlish, the bulk of Singaporean English literature is still written in standard English; the Chinese literary scene is perhaps even more conservative. Experiments with Singlish tend to be confined to the representation of speech, often of uneducated Singaporeans: *Spider Boys*, for example, is about street gangs. Thus there is the related question of status. The low status of Singlish and Singaporean Mandarin is reinforced by government policies outlined at the beginning of the paper. Non-standard language is what is spoken by the accused, not the judge; non-standard Mandarin is spoken by street gangs, not poets. Only when attempting to mimic those voices can

Singlish or Singaporean Mandarin appear in literature, often within quotation marks, italicized, with footnotes or glossaries – thus Jason Leow's plaintive "why should I not drink/teh tarek and discuss Lee Tzu Pheng/(without putting them in italics)."

The use of footnotes and glossaries point to another factor, which is audience. If these works were translated for a local audience there would be no need for such apparati. Due to the limited size of the local market, almost no literary publications make money in the Singaporean market; in fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of local writers and translators receive subvention grants from government or private endowments to cover printing costs; other authors choose to pay for part of the printing costs themselves.[5] Therefore all authors and translators hope to market their works overseas, and this perceived global audience puts pressure on the translators to use standard Mandarin or English. The exception of dramatic translation is instructive here, because the imagined audience in this case is often local, not global. *Fugitives* was written, translated, and produced for a local audience; there are currently no plans to take it overseas.

Personal background is also a factor. One of the translators who did some of the work for two different multilingual anthologies is from China (Bao Zhiming) and another spent almost seventeen years living in Northern China (Ho Chee Lick). That the editors of these anthologies should pick people with this type of linguistic background speaks volumes for the prestige standard Mandarin still commands today.

Finally, the educational system is also a factor to consider. Beginning in my second year of teaching at the National University of Singapore, each year I have offered an honours seminar in translation, wherein students work on the translation into English and compilation of anthologies of Chinese writers from Singapore and Malaysia. When I first suggested that the students might want to consider using Malay, dialect terms, or Singlish grammar for parts where the original deviated from standard Mandarin, I was surprised to find that the students were resistant to the idea. Had they not been told for the past fifteen years at school always to use "correct" English when writing compositions and homework assignments? Ultimately, some of the students used a certain amount of Singlish in the collection *KIV*, mainly for sections of dialogue or where the narrator was either a child or, in one case, a foreign maid ("Guest from Afar," "3 Notes," "Four Extremely Short Stories"). Some of them eventually became enthusiastic about the process, but none of them initiated it. Instead, they assumed that, as a foreigner and as a teacher, I would expect them to produce standard English in the translations.

These reasons tie in with explanations offered by commercial translators and interpreters as to why they use standard Chinese and English. Singaporeans perceive their country to be a tiny bilingual city-state perched linguistically between China and the West. Their market is not at home, but abroad; the majority of simultaneous translation jobs, for example, are overseas, and the target audience for Chinese is mainly from China and Taiwan. It is assumed by contrast that Singaporeans, even if their first language is Mandarin, know enough English not to need an interpreter. Thus in Chinese-speaking countries their knowledge of English is an advantage, and in English-speaking countries their Chinese is an advantage. Since their clientele is global, their language must also be global; a Beijing firm does not want a Singaporean interpreter to speak Singaporean Mandarin to them, or Singlish to their Western customers. By contrast, the local market for translation is either negligible or tends

toward standardization itself (Parliament, poetry, fiction). Only in very limited settings of local consumption (subordinate courts, local drama) is Singaporean Chinese and English used. In the first case the interpreters are reproducing the type of language that the "man in the street" uses; in the second case, the playwright and translator are imitating such speech patterns, mainly in dialogue.

Globalization thus has had a large impact on the translation market in Singapore. First, there is a tendency in interpretation to confine local language to very specific venues (mainly the courts), versus the standard language used by international venues/meetings. Further, there is little crossover; court interpreters do not work in the international market, and international interpreters seldom work locally, Parliament being an exception because the government wishes standard language to be used. The anecdote of an international interpreter finding a local job to be "a linguistic nightmare" highlights this split.

For written translation, the use of localized language seems almost non-existent. All the translations of dramatic texts using Singaporean Mandarin and English were produced either by the playwright himself (Kuo, Quah), or by another playwright working in cooperation with the original playwright (Ng). In other words, no professional translators report themselves to be working with local language

D. Language and Social Hierarchies

Thus we can argue that translation practices in Singapore participate in maintaining a hierarchy of Mandarins and Englishes. This should be clear from my description of where non-standard language is used: when speaking with people accused of crimes, when representing the speech patterns of maids, *Ah Bengs*, street gangs, (lower-class) Indians and Malays. Singlish and Singaporean Mandarin are thus portrayed as the language of lower class, uneducated groups. Standard English and Chinese are spoken by judges, by poets, and the educated classes in general. As long as the government, media, and educated classes perceive "standard" English and Mandarin to be more prestigious, there will be pressure on translators and interpreters to produce such language, even in local contexts, when local usage would be perfectly intelligible.[6]

E. Pedagogical Implications

Idealistically, then, the teaching of translation might be viewed as an opportunity to overturn such stereotypes and encourage students to experiment with using non-standard language (the language they use most of the time, in fact) in their translation. Why shouldn't they write like they speak? Isn't that what the May Fourth reform of the Chinese written language and the creation of modern Mandarin were all about?

Sadly, however, if the perceived goal of training in translation is a job by which someone can make a living, this would be a cruel joke to play upon students. Anyone in Singapore hoping to establish himself or herself as a translator or interpreter who cannot produce standard English and Chinese will find it impossible to retain clients. Even in the Subordinate Courts, if the translator does not speak proper English to the judge they may quickly find themselves in contempt of court and out of a job. Global market forces, reinforced by government policy, demands that translators in Singapore be conversant with global standards of the languages they use.

Any training programme in translation for Singaporeans, then, must take into account the market which the students will enter upon graduation. If client read translation catch no ball, how can? Guess who lose, what?

St. André, "He Catch No Ball, Leh!"

NOTES

1. There is great overlap in these two fields; five of the six conference interpreters work regularly (3) or occasionally (2) in Parliament, which is why I consider them together.
2. Singapore became independent only in 1965, two years before the publication of this anthology; for this generation of writers, then, Singapore and Malaya (later Malaysia) are often subsumed under the adjective "Malaysian." To this day many people move back and forth frequently between the two countries.
3. Note especially the usage of an added measure word: "a piece of sarong," (p. 177) where standard English would simply say "sarong." This is the influence of Chinese, which requires "measure words" for all nouns when they are counted.
4. Sy Ren Quah's *Invisibility* is another good example which I do not have space to discuss in detail here.

    It is tempting to see parallels with the emergence of Québécois as a written dialect, which also first occurred in theatre. The playwright Michel Tremblay was one of the first writers to use it extensively in his work, and the success of his and subsequent dramatic productions was one of the factors leading to Québécois establishing itself as a legitimate language. To date, however, neither Singlish nor Singaporean Chinese has had much success in establishing themselves as legitimate languages in any official venues. Furthermore, although Singlish enjoyes a certain vogue as a language of protest, Singaporean Mandarin has no observable status on any level that I could determine. For an unofficial venue which celebrates the use of Singlish for the purpose of social and political satire, see http://www.talkingcock.com.
5. Private conversation with local author Quah Sy Ren, as well as personal experience publishing four anthologies of translations in Singapore. This is partly because print runs are very small, 500-1000 being considered normal, and prices low.
6. This fear of linguistic hybridity seems to be linked to a more general postcolonial mentality, but this topic is beyond the scope of the present paper.

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