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1 Introduction

In this paper, I examine the impact from English upon Mandarin Chinese in computer-mediated communication in mainland China. I argue that with the ever increasing use of electronic communication, the influence from English upon Chinese will become more robust, which in turn will have implications for the change in the Chinese language.

2 The Development of Electronic Communication in China

Since the Internet became available in 1962, particularly since the worldwide Internet service was officially launched in the U.S. in 1983, Internet communication has become increasingly widespread throughout the world, partly thanks to the rapid development of the computer technology, especially the networking know-how (Yu, Xiong, Liu, Sun, and Zhang 2001). In China, since the Internet service became available in 1994, it has been developing very rapidly. According to the July 21, 2003 report by the China Network Information Center (henceforth CNNIC) (http://tech.sina.com.cn/focus/cnnic_12), in October 1997, there were around 620,000 Chinese netizens.¹ Approximately three million computers were connected to the Internet. And in December 2000, there were approximately 265,000 web sites in China.

Also according to the report by CNNIC, most of the statistics above have changed dramatically over recent years, with all the numbers enlarged staggeringly. Specifically, as of June 30, 2003, there were roughly 68 million netizens in mainland China, a more than 100 times increase since October 1997. Nearly 26 million computers had been connected to the Internet, more than an 84 times increase in less than six years' time. And there were nearly 474,000 web sites in China, an increase of more than 78 percent over December 2000.

In addition, the Internet has penetrated various spheres of Chinese people's lives. When online, people often do such things as sending and receiving

¹In mainland China, a netizen is defined as a person who stays online for at least one hour per week.

ing e-mails, searching for information, downloading software, chitchatting, reading news, reading online literatures, playing games, buying and selling stocks, and shopping². The Internet has been so pervasive in China that the sentences “上网了没有? 下岗了没有?” (‘Have you been online? Have you been laid off?’) have currently become the most commonly uttered when Chinese people, especially citizen dwellers, meet on the streets (Lu, 2002).³

3 The Emergence of the Chinese Internet Language

With the rapid development of computer-mediated communication in China, there has emerged a distinctive variety of Chinese online, which is generally termed the Chinese Internet language (henceforth CIL). In the following, I will provide a description of the linguistic features of CIL. The account is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

3.1 Lexical Exponents

Many researchers have attempted to provide an all-inclusive description of the form of the CIL lexis, among whom Liu (2002) is one of the most successful. Liu (2002) divides the Chinese Internet lexicon into three main categories. They are 1) words solely composed of Chinese characters, 2) words that only consist of *pinyin* (‘Chinese phonetic alphabet’), English letters, Arabic numbers, or paralinguistic symbols, and 3) words of mixed sources. Liu further divides words in the first category into those coined in four major ways, viz., 假借 (‘meaning transference’), 合成 (‘compounding’)⁴, 仿拟 (‘analogy’), and 译借 (‘borrowing’). Examples of words formed in these four ways are given in (1–4) below.

²According to the CNNIC report, approximately 70% of Chinese netizens would like to do online shopping. Around 64% netizens have visited online shopping centers. And 41% netizens plan to purchase merchandise or services online within a year.

³Another piece of information that shows the rapid development of the Internet in China is that whereas Chinese newspapers started to be put online first in January, 1997, with People’s Daily being the first that went online, by 1998, more than eighty newspapers had an online version (Lu, 2002).

⁴The term compounding is not used in its traditional sense, as is shown by the examples. In its traditional sense, compounding is a means of word formation that involves combining two semantically full words. In addition to its traditional sense, I also intend compounding to mean the combination of a semantically full word with a suffix.

The way of 假借 ('meaning transference') in (1) involves words of a single character, words of more than one character, and words formed by repetition. The means of 合成 ('compounding') in (2) involves words of various structures, specifically, of the subject–predicate, modifier–noun, verb–verb, adjective–complement, and noun–suffix construction.

- (1) 假借 ('meaning transference'), for example, 猫 ('modem') from 猫 ('cat')⁵, 灌水 ('posting low-quality articles on the BBS') from 灌水 ('irrigation'), 青蛙 ('an unattractive male netizen') from 青蛙 ('a frog')
- (2) 合成 ('compounding'), for example, 点对点 ('computer to computer'), 网民 ('netizen'), 卸载 ('download'), 酷毙 ('extremely cool'), 帅呆 ('extremely handsome'), 伊妹儿 ('an e-mail')
- (3) 仿拟 ('analogy'), for example, 钓虾 ('females chasing males') from 钓鱼 ('males chasing females'), 汉托 ('Chinese proficiency test') from 托福 ('TOEFL, Test of English as a Foreign Language'), and 红客 ('a just and noble hacker') from 黑客 ('a hacker')
- (4) 译借 ('borrowing'), for example, 恰特 ('chat'), 酷 ('cool'), 奔腾 (Pentium), 笨三 ('Pentium III'), 糠母 ('.com'), 赛博空间 ('cyberspace'), 主页 ('homepage').

Examples of words that only consist of *pinyin* letters, English letters, Arabic numbers, or paralinguistic symbols are given in (5). Examples of words of mixed sources are given in (6). In (5), *JS* consists of *pinyin* letters, *E*, *ICQ*, and *cookies* are in English, *668* and *886* are in Arabic numbers, and the components of *:-)* and *^0^* are only paralinguistic symbols. In (6), *^B* and *^K* both consist of a paralinguistic symbol and an English letter, *b2b*, *b2c*, *f2f*, and *MP3* are each composed of English letters and an Arabic number, and *BIG5 码* is a mixture of English letters, an Arabic number, and a Chinese character.

- (5) Words that only consist of English letters, Arabic numbers, or paralinguistic symbols, for example, *JS* ('shrewd businessmen,' from *jianshang* in *pinyin*), *E* ('electronic'), *ICQ* ('I seek you.'), *cookies* ('small files'), *668* ('Let's chat.'), *886* ('Bye-bye.'), *:-)* ('to smile'), *^0^* ('laughing out loud')

⁵For the reasons why there are many animal-related CIL words, see, for example, D. Li (2001).

- (6) Words of mixed sources, for example, ^B ('to say good bye with tears'), ^K ('to kiss stealthily'), b2b ('business to business'), b2c ('business to customer'), f2f ('face-to-face'), MP3 ('An MPEG standard used especially for digitally transmitting music over the Internet'), and BIG5 码 ('the big 5 code')

3.2 Syntactic Exponents

Web sentences also involve substandard or out-of-the-ordinary usages (e.g., Bo, 2001; J. Li 2002), which are usually represented by change in sentence word order, use of redundant words, change in word category, and use of an unusual sense of a word. Some of the examples are given in (7–11) below. The sentence in (7) involves the change in sentence word order. The sentence in (8) involves the use of superfluous expressions. The sentences in (9–10) involve the change in word category. And the example in (11) involves the use of a very uncommon sense of a word.

In (7), the adverbial prepositional phrase 在图书馆 ('in the library') was erroneously moved from before the verb phrase 看书 ('reading books') to after it. In (8), the expression 的说 ('to say') was redundant. In (9), the adverb 很 ('very') was used as an adjective to modify the noun 阳光 ('sunshine'). In (10), the noun 伊妹儿 ('e-mail') was mistakenly used as a verb. And in (11), an atypical usage of the expression 非常 ('very; unusual') in the sense of 'unusual' was used.

- (7) 我看书在图书馆。 ('I was reading books in the library.')
- (8) – 去哪儿? ('— Where are you going?')
- 回家的说。 ('— Going home.')
- (9) 她很阳光。 ('She is very happy-go-lucky.')
- (10) 她常常伊妹儿我。 ('She often e-mails me.')
- (11) 她是非常宝贝。 ('She is an extremely lovely girl.')

3.3 Discursive Exponents

In many cases, the Internet discourse in China is marked by 1) Chinese-English codeswitching, 2) a written spoken style, 3) a joking style, which is represented by, among other things, use of overly concise and straightforward language, unusual and sometimes even grotesque homophones, enigmatic folk similes, and other rhetorical devices, and 4) certain other features, such as use of paralinguistic codes, local varieties of the Chinese language, and unconventional expressions.

3.3.1 A Bilingual Code

As Qi (2002) notes, one of the most striking characteristics of the Internet communication in China is the prevalence of Chinese-English codeswitching, which occurs on the discursive as well as the sentential level. In addition, among the CIL lexis, terms with English elements stand a large proportion. For example, among the about thirteen hundred lexical entries collected in the dictionary <<中国网络语言词典>> ('A dictionary of the Chinese Internet language'), 224 items, approximately 18 percent, involve the use of English in one way or another (Yu et al., 2001). The example in (12) below, which was posted on a BBS, features Chinese-English codeswitching.

- (12) 开始看错成 dolt 了, 还以为这厮主动冒头领 kick 呢, 哈哈 ('I was mistaken in the beginning. Thought it was "dolt" and that this guy is looking for trouble. Ha, ha ...')

3.3.2 A Written Spoken Style

Yu et al. (2001) examine an excerpt from the web novel <<英雄时代>> ('The age of heroes') by Mikko (2000), which is given in (13) below. Their analysis indicates that although this novel was published in the written form, it is yet characterized with an oral style. According to Yu et al., the expressions 他妈的 ('to fXXX his mother') and 猪脑子 ('pig's brains') are primarily used in spoken discourse, which are used to swear and to describe a foolish person respectively, but they were used in this passage. Moreover, the expressions 仨 ('three') and 大晚半晌儿 ('in the dead of the night') are almost exclusively used in spoken discourse, but they also appeared in this excerpt. These usages provide this passage with an oral style.

- (13) 真他妈的都是猪脑子!"我苦于说不出话, 气得一个眼珠乱转。"我又不是有病! 大晚半晌儿的, 一个人找人家仨持刀的见义勇为? 我脑子又没进水! 没常识!!" 这时去现场的警察走了进来, 几个人低声地交谈了一会儿, 证实了现场情况和小小的陈述基本一致。 ('"Stupid pig's brains!" I was too upset to be able to talk but just moved the apple of one of my eyes frantically. "Was I insane? I myself fighting against three hooligans with knives in the dead of the night? I'm not that stupid! This really doesn't make any sense!" At this moment, several policemen walked over, who had been to the scene of the crime. They whispered for a while and confirmed among themselves that what they found out at the scene was consonant with Xiaoxiao's statement.')

3.3.3 A Joking Style

Internet discourse features a joking style on many occasions, which is usually achieved through being overly terse and straightforward and use of unusual homophones, enigmatic folk similes, and other metaphorical devices. Yu et al. (2001) examine the language use in (14), an excerpt from a web novel by X. Li (2000). They demonstrate that this passage features a joking style. According to Yu et al. (*ibid.*), the use of the enigmatic folk simile, 21天不出鸡 – 坏蛋, in (14) helps to provide it with a joking style.

- (14) 她说俗话说“女到嫁时必有路”，对于像你这样忧国忧民的人我到想起一个歇后语。我说我这个人最虚荣了，你快说来听听。她说就是“21天不出鸡”。我说怎么讲。然后我就看见她在屏幕上打出一行大字：“21天不出鸡—坏蛋！！！”
 ('She said, "It goes that a woman will find a way to get married when it's time to do so. Actually, I think of an enigmatic folk simile for such a worrisome person as you." I said that I was very vain and asked her to tell me what it was. She said that it was "It fails to give birth to chicken even after twenty-one days of hatching." I asked her what that means. Then I saw her typing a line of big words on the screen: "It fails to give birth to chicken after twenty-one days of hatching – bad eggs!!!"')

4 The Englishization of Chinese in Online Communication

4.1 The Data

The data were collected primarily from five Internet sources – online BBS's, chat rooms, Internet literatures, which are original novels recently written particularly for online publication, personal e-mails, and other postings on public websites, such as news and advertisements. Among these sources, BBS's and chat rooms were the major ones. The BBS's from which the data were collected include that of Sun Yat-Sen University (Zhongshan University), South China University of Technology, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai International Studies University, Peking University, and Tsinghua University. The chat rooms encompassed those at the web site <http://chat.sina.com.cn>, <http://chat.chinaren.com>, and <http://www.china.com>. The Internet literatures include nine online novels, particularly those published at the web site <http://rongshuxia.com>. The source e-mails are 37 personal e-mails. The web sites from which the data were collected include <http://www.sina.com.cn>, <http://sohu.com.cn>,

<http://www.china.com>, <http://chinaren.com>, <http://www.263.net>, and <http://www.tom.com>. Aside from these five Internet sources, data were also collected from both spoken communication and non-electronic publications in Chinese, including magazines, newspapers, and academic journals.

4.2 Data Analysis

Earlier influences from English upon Chinese have been documented. Hsu (1994a, 1994b) examines the impact from English on modern Chinese morphology and syntax in Taiwan, which was initiated by the translation of Western literary works, mainly from English into written Chinese. With the Internet as a facilitator in its spread throughout the world, English seems to be exerting more robust influence on other languages, at least in the Chinese situation.⁶ The impact from English is seen not only on Chinese vocabulary but also on its grammar and even discourse.

4.2.1 Lexis

On the lexical level, plentiful Chinese terms used primarily online have been borrowed from English, such as the word 猫 ('modem'), and the now almost hackneyed usage 伊妹儿 ('e-mail'). In addition, Chinese netizens frequently use letter words online, such as DVD, WTO, and BP 机 ('beeper').⁷ Furthermore, Chinese netizens have modeled on English in the creation and use of certain expressions, such as the abbreviations *MM* ('sister,' from *meimei* in *pinyin*) and *BT* ('abnormal,' from *biantai* in *pinyin*). In other words, Chinese netizens not only borrowed words but also the means of word formation, or morphology, from English (cf. Zhou and Feng, 1987).

4.2.2 Syntax

On the syntactic level, Zhong (2001) observes that as a result of the influence from English, the online use of Chinese has been affected, which involves change of sentence word order and change of word category. Sentences (15–18) are four cases in point. In (15), the prepositional phrase 在图书馆 ('at the library') was moved from before the verb phrase 看书 ('to read books') to after it. This probably derives from the English sentence "I was doing some reading in the library." In (16), the time phrase 明年 ('next year')

⁶Of course, the Internet also serves as a facilitator in the localization or acculturation of English, although in most cases on a smaller scale.

⁷As Cao (2000) argues, letter words are also Chinese words.

was moved from before the verb phrase 去美国 ('to go to the U.S.') to after it. This probably derives from the English sentence "I'm going to the U.S. the next year." In (17), the noun 雅虎 ('Yahoo') was used as a verb. This probably derives from the usage of the word "Yahoo" in English as in the sentence "Do you Yahoo?" In (18), the adjective 黑 ('dark') was used as a verb, meaning 'to hack.' This usage probably derives from the English verb "to hack."

- (15) 我看书在图书馆。 ('I was reading books in the library.')
- (16) 我去美国明年。 ('I am going to the US the next year.')
- (17) 你雅虎了吗? ('Have you visited Yahoo?')
- (18) 美国政府网站被黑。 ('The web site of the U.S. government has been damaged by a hacker.')

4.2.3 Discourse and Pragmatics

As Kachru (1994) argues, the influence from English on other languages not only takes place in the lexis, phonology, morphology, and syntax but also in discourse, register, and style. Jin (2000) documents the impact from English in the domain of Chinese discourse and pragmatics, such as in terms of answering questions, expressing greetings and wishes, and showing appreciation. Although Jin does not specifically discuss the influence that occurs on the Internet, it is clear that the Internet has sped up the contact between Chinese and English and hence its influence on the Chinese language, including its discursive dimension. For example, it is commonly observed that when being engaged in online communication, Chinese people are more ready to express and accept compliments.

5 The Implications of Use of CIL for the Change in Chinese

Language is constantly in the process of evolution. The change is either caused by language-internal factors (e.g., Anttila, 1989), which is exemplified by the first Germanic consonant shift known as Grimm's Law, a consequence of the language-internal pressure, or various language-external or social forces (e.g., Bright, 1997; Labov, 2000), which is exemplified by the simplification of the Chinese writing system in Mainland China, a result of the governmental edict (Cheng, 1979). According to Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968), language, especially the vocabulary of a language, is closely entwined with diverse social cultural dimensions of a society in which it finds itself. When the society changes, language as a sign that mirrors the

reality of that society will also undergo transformation. It is then no wonder that the arrival of the digital age in China, one of whose consequences is the beginning of computer-mediated communication, should lead to a change in the Chinese language. In this section, I argue that the use of CIL has implications for the change in the Chinese language. I first discuss factors that are favorable for the exertion of influence upon standard Chinese from the online use of CIL by young Chinese netizens. Then I discuss the mechanism for the potential CIL-initiated change in the Chinese language.

5.1 The Factors Conducive to CIL's Influence

5.1.1 The Prestige of CIL

Given that CIL is used mostly by educated Chinese (Yu et al., 2001) and that it is usually associated with many desirable traits such as modernity, it is considered a prestigious language variety, especially among young people (Zhang, 2001). The emergence of such a unique linguistic variety has significant sociolinguistic implications. As Chambers (1995:185) puts it, "variability in language often indicates instability" and hence linguistic change. Moreover, according to variationist sociolinguists (e.g., Labov, 1972, 2000), the language variety with high social prestige, be it overt or covert prestige, is likely to show its impact upon people's language use and to be emulated by people who seek prestige. This suggests that CIL may exert its influence upon the linguistic behavior of those who do not have access to computer-mediated communication or who do not belong to the young and educated group.

5.1.2 The Role of Youths in Language Change

As Wardhaugh observes, "the young are usually in the vanguard of most [language] changes" (1998:202). This observation, which is underpinned by his experience, constitutes another supporting factor for the possible impact from the use of CIL on the Chinese language and hence its change. For one thing, up until this stage, users of CIL are predominately young people in their late teens or early twenties (Yu et al., 2001). One more piece of supporting evidence is that the electronic language used by young Chinese netizens is usually more dynamic, vivid, and richer in creativity than non-electronic language. Generally speaking, such a vibrant variety of language is contagious. People are usually not very resistant to the use of such an innovative variety of language.

5.1.3 The Possibility of Cross-modality Influence

As is noted in Baron (1984), cross-modality linguistic influence is quite possible. Take English as an example, many instances of usage clearly show that speech and writing, two different modalities of communication, have been influencing each other. In terms of speech affecting writing, there is, for example, written use of contractions like “haven’t.” Concerning writing influencing speech, there is, for example, professorial talk like the sentence “But it is now widely recognized that we must make a distinction between the formal objects licensed by a grammar and feature descriptions, which are used to impose constraints on these structures.” Likewise, CIL, language used in computer-mediated communication, may also gradually spread to the domain of non-electronic communication, both spoken and written, and consequently lead to the change in the Chinese language.

As a matter of fact, as is documented in J. Li (2002), CIL has already been used outside of the Internet domain. According to Li, the following two passages in (19–20), which both feature the use of CIL expressions (in italics), appeared in a composition by an elementary school student and in a conversation between two college students respectively.

- (19) 昨天晚上, 我的 *GG* 带着他的恐龙 *GF* 到我家来吃饭, 饭桌上, *GG* 的 *GF* 一个劲的向我妈妈 *PMP*, 那 *薜紫* 真是好 *PT*, 7456。
我只吃了几口饭, 就到 *QQ* 上 *打铁* 去了。(‘My brother brought his unpleasant girlfriend home for dinner yesterday evening. At the table, the girl kept flattering my mother from time to time. Her behavior was so abnormal. I was really fed up with it. I only ate a few mouthfuls before I left the table to post messages via the caller machine.’)
- (20) A: 咳! 干嘛去? 又去 *灌水*? (‘Hey! What’s up? Going to post trash messages again?’)
B: *N!* 是 *造砖* 去, 顺便找个 *美眉* 聊聊。(‘Nope! I’m going to post quality messages. Meanwhile, I’ll find a beautiful girl to chat with.’)

All the above three factors favor the potential exertion of impact from the online use of CIL on the Chinese language and hence its change. Of course, by arguing that CIL may exercise its influence upon the Chinese language, it is not meant that all the components of CIL will turn into part of the conventionalized Chinese language. Instead, some of the electronic expressions may be more likely to be accepted than others. In addition, certain expressions may die out soon and hence will never be conventionalized. More-

over, although certain components of CIL seem to be more favored by the general public and language authorities as well, the linguistic unpredictability of change (e.g., Hock, 1991) makes it difficult to predict exactly which elements will eventually stay and which elements will be discarded in the end.

Furthermore, although up until this stage CIL has been primarily used on informal occasions, whether or not it is also acceptable in formal contexts boils down to a matter of attitude. In other words, there is nothing intrinsic in CIL *per se* that forever prevents it from being used in formal writing or speech. At the present stage some people may be reluctant or even resistant to the use of CIL in formal contexts, but when the current negative or skeptical attitude changes to a positive or even favorable attitude, CIL will be used in formal writing and speech as well, which also signifies the completion of language change initiated by the online use of electronic language.

5.2 The Mechanism of Change

If CIL-initiated changes in the Chinese language are inevitable, then what is the mechanism of these changes? According to the wave theory (Wang 1977), linguistic change usually starts from a certain center, for instance, a certain age group, a certain geographical area, a certain class of people, etc.⁸ Under favorable circumstances, the change then spreads to other age groups, geographical areas, classes of people, etc. When the new usages initially found in the numerically few are gradually recognized and accepted by more and more people and consequently become part of the repertoire of a language, language change materializes. Such a process of linguistic conventionalization is altogether possible considering the observation by Ferguson (1983:170) that “in human language, processes of conventionalization are always operating.” In this case, young and educated Chinese netizens who are fond of making use of CIL constitute such an innovative center, while other groups of people constitute peripheral areas to which CIL may spread.⁹

⁸The Wave Theory of Wang (1977) was developed to explain phonological changes, but this does not prevent it from being able to be applied to explain changes on other linguistic levels.

⁹Regarding the proliferation and conventionalization of the CIL lexis, Gao (2002) holds a similar viewpoint.

6 Conclusions

This paper examines the Englishization of Mandarin Chinese in computer-mediated communication in mainland China. I argue that the online use of Englishized Chinese may have implications for the change in the standard variety of the Chinese language, not only on the lexical level but also on the syntactic and even discursive levels.

As Crystal (2001:238–9) observes, the Internet language, which he terms “Netspeak,” is “a development of millennial significance” given that “a new medium of linguistic communication does not arrive very often, in the history of the [human] race” and therefore must be documented. This paper examines CIL from the perspective of language contact and convergence. Perhaps more importantly, this paper investigates a new type of contact, one without immigration or emigration as a precondition, which distinguishes it from language contact in its traditional sense (c.f. Weinreich, 1963). In this sense, this study sheds light on linguistic consequences of language contact.

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