Translating into Oral Language:
The Case of Hong Kong-Style Cantonese
การแปลโดยใช้ภาษามุขปาฐะ : กรณีศึกษาภาษาจีนกวางตุ้ง
แบบฮ่องกง

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Abstract

Orality, often contrasted with the concept of literacy, refers to the communication of thought in cultures "untouched by any knowledge of writing or print" (Ong, 2012, p. 11). Following an oral tradition, texts are created to be memorized and delivered by way of live performance. In the context of translation studies, the discussion usually centres on how distinctive features of oral literature are preserved in a written translation. In this paper, however, I propose to address the topic from a different perspective, that is, translating a text into an oral language in

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its written form. In the light of Walter Ong's (2012) concepts of 'secondary orality' and 'psychodynamics of orality', I use Hong Kong-style Cantonese as a case in point to explore the dynamics in the translation process. Quite different from the translation *of* oral literature which aims to produce a permanent record that captures aspects of an oral text or performance, translating *into* an oral language serves to explore the meaning potential of the original by exploiting specific features of the oral language that reflect current social situations of the target community. The translation, though transient, invites the target readers to 'perform' in their act of reading, and strengthens a sense of cultural identity through their active participation.

Keywords: 1. orality 2. translating into dialects

3. Hong Kong-style Cantonese

4. cultural identity and translation

บทคัดย่อ

ภาษามุขปาฐะ (orality) หรือภาษาพูด หมายถึง การสื่อสารของความคิดภายในวัฒนธรรม "โดยไม่ได้ใช้ความรู้ใดๆ เกี่ยวกับการเขียนหรือลายลักษณ์อักษรบนกระดาษ" (Ong, 2012, p. 11) ซึ่งเป็นมโนทัศน์ที่มักจะอยู่ตรงข้ามกับแนวคิดเรื่องภาษาอ่านและเขียน (literacy) มีการสร้างสรรค์ถ้อยคำผ่านการแสดงเพื่อใช้ในการ

จดจำและส่งต่อจากประเพณีการบอกเล่าในบริบทของศาสตร์การแปลนั้น โดยมากแล้ว
ข้อวิพากษ์จะเป็นเรื่องวิธีการคงลักษณะเฉพาะของภาษามุขปาฐะไว้ในบทแปลซึ่งใช้
ภาษาเขียน อย่างไรก็ตาม งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้นำเสนอหัวข้อในอีกแง่มุม กล่าวคือ การแปล
ตัวบทโดยใช้ภาษาพูดที่อยู่ในรูปแบบของภาษาเขียน จากการศึกษาของวอลเตอร์ อง
(2012) เรื่องมโนทัศน์ของ 'มุขปาฐะระดับทุติยภูมิ' (secondary orality) และ
'จิตวิทยาพลวัตรของมุขปาฐะ' (psychodynamics of orality) ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้ภาษาจีน
กวางตุ้งแบบฮ่องกงเป็นกรณีศึกษา เพื่อศึกษาการเปลี่ยนแปลงของภาษาที่เกิดขึ้นใน
ระหว่างกระบวนการแปล การแปลโดยใช้ภาษาพูดมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาคุณสมบัติ
ของความหมายในตัวบทต้นฉบับ ด้วยกลวิธีการใช้ลักษณะเฉพาะของภาษาพูดที่สะท้อน
ให้เห็นถึงสภาพสังคมในปัจจุบันของกลุ่มผู้อ่านเป้าหมาย ซึ่งจะแตกต่างจากบทแปล
มุขปาฐะที่มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อสร้างข้อมูลถาวรและสามารถคงลักษณะของภาษาพูดหรือ
การแสดงเอาไว้เช่นเดิม แม้ว่าบทแปลที่ได้จะมีสภาพชั่วคราว แต่ก็เชื้อเชิญให้ผู้อ่าน
'แสดง' บทบาทการอ่านและเสริมสร้างการตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม
ผ่านการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้อ่านด้วยเช่นกัน

คำสำคัญ : 1. ภาษามุขปาฐะ/ภาษาพูด 2. การแปลโดยใช้ภาษาท้องถิ่น

3. ภาษาจีนกวางตุ้งแบบฮ่องกง

4. อัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมและการแปล

Orality and Translation

The notion of orality (or 'primary orality' according to Ong) has been closely associated with works originating in oral cultures and traditions which are "untouched by a knowledge of writing or print" (Ong, 2012, p. 11), such as the Bible (de Vries et al., 2015), indigenous African literature (Bandia, 2008), and South Asian oral texts which are loosely scripted for performance (Cummings, 2003; Lindsay, 2006; Fraser, 2008). Without a supporting writing system, these oral discourses are passed down through generations by means of memorization and recitation. They are characterized by linguistic features such as repetition, use of formulaic expressions that are rooted in a traditional mindset. Most of these discourses make reference to current contexts and include colloquial utterances that share communal associations among members of that community. All these features function to ease memorization and facilitate live performance and interaction with the audience.

In the context of translation studies, the discussion centres on what Bandia describes as "the treatment of the materiality of orality" (2015, p. 25), looking at how inherent oral features can be retained or reproduced in written languages for permanent records. In the introduction to his translation of Somali poetry, for example, Martin Owen highlights

the oral form of the poems, which has to be "primarily experienced through listening rather than reading" (2001, p. 12), and argues that a successful translation should reflect the oral features exhibited in the poems. Kenneth Wishnia (1995) discusses the translation of *Mister boym in Klozet* (1915) written by the Yiddish playwright Sholem Aleichem and states that the challenge of translating the play lies in the multilingual elements and code-switching commonly found in Americanized Yiddish. Such features, according to Wishnia, reveal "the historical forces that were dividing a community that had been bound together by Yiddish for nearly a thousand years" (p. 347), and must be preserved in the translation to do justice to the original play and its author.

In both cases, the source of contention is the features of an oral language that define the oral culture. Both articles hint at the inadequacy of the written word—the language of a literate culture—to represent these works which bear witness to the interaction between the speakers and the socio-cultural situations. Viv Edwards and Thomas J. Sienkewicz further elaborate this view as follows:

In order to study oral events, and relay them to other
literate people, the speech event must be transcribed, be

"written down". In the process, what is an essentially dynamic oral event becomes static, invariable or even "petrified" in written form, to use a term of Lord. (Edwards & Sienkewicz, 1990, pp. 1-2)

There is then an inherent tension between the oral language, which facilitates dynamic and transient performance, and the written language, which enables the creation of static permanent records. The dynamic and transient nature of the oral language, as Wishnia suggests, is an essential cultural quality (1995, p. 342). Rather than being treated as work of a distinctive genre, the focus should be put on its function to present and represent the cultural practices and traditions in oral communities.

Different terms have been proposed to highlight the quality of the oral culture in the discussion of orality and translation. Jennifer Lindsay (2006) uses the concept of 'performance' in her discussion of theatre translation and stage translation in the South Asian context. The same term is used by Makutoane et al. (2015) to examine the translation of the Old Testament as an oral text. The notion of 'performance translation' gives the translators the flexibility to adapt the scripts of the play and the

liturgical psalms, inscribing "new cues for embodiment and spatial realization" (Lindsay, 2006, p. 4) to be appreciated by an audience who does not share the same cultural background. The translation process itself is also seen as a kind of performance in the sense that translators actively explore the meaning potential of the original work and develop possible interpretations using the target language in a different cultural context. As Lindsay quotes from McAuley, the translators move beyond the lexical and grammatical levels to aim for "a surface manifestation which indicates a massive subterranean presence" (1994, p. 100 as quoted in Lindsay, 2006, p. 4). Lindsay further illustrates such an operation applying A.L. Becker's notion of 'languaging', which is borrowed from John Dewey. The notion depicts a process "taking old texts from memory and reshaping them into present contexts" (2006, p. 7). It is a process of verbalizing abstract ideas drawn from an unstable source text according to current situations using an established target written language that is deemed to be inadequate for the task.

But what if this languaging process is carried out in the reverse direction, that is, translating a stable written text into an unstable oral language? By selecting relevant features of the target oral language and reshaping the original text for members sharing the same cultural scripts

in the community, the translators reach out to engage the reader/audience in a performance.

The blending of oral elements in writing has been observed by scholars such as Bandia（2011）, who notices the "interweaving of both the oral and the written" in the works of post-colonial writers. The case in point here is Hong Kong, an oral community which had been a British colony for over 150 years since 1842. In the colonial period, the city developed into a bilingual community of Chinese and English[2]. Cantonese, however, has always been used as a spoken language in everyday life. According to the 2011 Population Census and the 2016 By-census, 89.5% and 88.9% of the population speaks Cantonese, whereas another 6.3% and 5.7% can speak the dialect as their second language

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[2] English had been used as the only official language until 1974 when Chinese acquired its official status. After the handover of sovereignty in 1997, both Chinese and English are adopted as official languages according to the Hong Kong Basic Law: "In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the HKSAR." (Chapter one, Article nine). The decision is documented in the Official Language Ordinance, which stipulates that "The English and Chinese languages are declared to be the official languages of Hong Kong for the purposes of communication between the Government or any public officer and members of the public and for court proceedings. The official languages possess equal status and, subject to the provisions of the Ordinance, enjoy equality of use for the purposes set out in subsection (1)." (Chapter five, Section three)

(Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR 2012, 2017). Cantonese has been generally acknowledged as a regional dialect. Standard Chinese is used in writing, and it is understood by most literate Chinese people[3]. In the last decade before the handover of sovereignty, Hong Kong-style Cantonese began to develop its own written form. That is most noticeable in the mass media and virtual space, especially through social networking services. The dialect, which was once considered to be vulgar and used mainly in writings for the lower-tier in society, has begun to be widely circulated through written texts, including published novels, film subtitles, as well as voluntary translations as seen in the Cantonese translations of TED Talks and entries in Wikipedia. This tendency fits Ong's description of 'secondary orality', which is made possible by the electronic and digital media:

> This new orality has striking resemblances to the old
> in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal

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[3] Written standard Chinese (in terms of grammar and lexis) is understood by literate Chinese people. There are, however, two sets of writing systems of Chinese characters: traditional Chinese characters (commonly used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan) and simplified Chinese characters developed in the 1950s in Mainland China (it is also used in Singapore). The two scripts are not immediately recognizable for Chinese who are not trained in the respective system.

sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas…But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well (Ong, 2012, pp. 133-134).

Translators of the Cantonese translations make a conscious effort to construct Cantonese into an oral language[4]. Relevant features of Cantonese are selected and rendered in written form, targeting the native speakers in Hong Kong society. As I will illustrate below, the characteristics of these translations overlap with translations created for oral performance. "The translators have to pay attention to the collective experience of a gathered community" (Makutoane et al., 2015, p. 19) so as to engage the target readers. The act of reading and decoding such

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[4] The term 'language' is used here to emphasize the cultural and socio-political implications. I make reference to David Crystal's (2003) definition of 'dialect', which hints at a geographical origin (298), and Pavle Ivić and David Crystal's discussion in *Britannica Online Encyclopedia* under the entry of 'dialect', which proposes that "Normally, dialects of the same language are considered to be mutually intelligible". As Hong Kong-style Cantonese is largely defined by the experiences and cultural scripts shared among the speakers in the community, it is not likely to be intelligible to those who do not share the same background (see also Shi & Shao, 2006, pp. 7-8).

linguistic traits identifies the readers as members of the same oral community.

Orality is the key concept here. It is the prism that allows us to read in a different light the Cantonese drama translations and Cantonese film subtitles. In the following, I will start by explaining how Hong Kong-style Cantonese has evolved from a regional dialect into an oral language in the past few decades. It is followed by an analysis of two Cantonese translations, focusing on the oral features exhibited in the translated texts using Walter Ong's (2012) notion of 'psychodynamics of orality', and the features of oral cultures proposed by Edwards and Sienkewicz (1990). Based on the findings of the analysis, I argue that the Cantonese translations retain, and exaggerate at times, the oral features of Hong Kong-style Cantonese to engage the audience/readers in a performance. In the conclusion, I propose to reflect on how the nature of the target language (in this case, an oral language) may affect the conception of translation as a social practice. The act of translating into an oral language aims to prompt the readers/audience to generate and reproduce meaning as they draw on their social and cultural scripts. The translations are 'transient' in the sense that they only capture current aspects of life. These fragments, however, contribute to the collective memory recorded

in their native tongue and strengthen the cultural identity of members in the community over generations.

Hong Kong-style Cantonese: From a Dialect to an Oral Language

Cantonese refers to the dialect spoken by people in Canton and the peripheral regions, including Hong Kong and Macau. Even though the same writing system[5] is used, Cantonese is different from standard Chinese on phonological, lexical and syntactical levels. For a long time, Cantonese was used only in daily conversation. Standard Chinese was, and still is, the language used in written texts, and it is taught in school and accepted as the official language for documentation. In comparison, Cantonese expressions were occasionally found in writings for the lower-tier in society, such as feature articles on sports and entertainment news in some newspapers, comic books, and advertisements targeting the white-collar and working class (Snow, 2004, pp. 127-148).

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[5] As it has been explained in the footnote on p.8, standard Chinese has two major writing systems, namely the simplified characters and traditional characters. The focus of this section is on the relationship between Cantonese and standard Chinese. As I will explain below, although new characters are created by Cantonese speakers to capture the phonological properties of Hong Kong-style Cantonese, those new words largely follow the principles underlying traditional Chinese.

The political movements in Mainland China in the 1960s and 70s brought significant influence in Hong Kong society, including the status of Chinese. In order to weaken the communist influence, the British colonial government adopted policies to construe the local identity of Hong Kong people. The subject of 'National Language' was abolished in public examinations, and it was renamed as 'Chinese Language'. English was designated as the medium of instruction in schools. The economic take-off and improving living standards in the 1980s also contributed to a sense of distinction for Hong Kong residents. Cantonese was popularized as a language not only through films, TV dramas, and Canton-pop songs, it was also used in the written media such as magazines and paperback books (Snow, 2004, pp. 157-162). In the late 1980s and 1990s, Cantonese became a language used in both spoken and written forms. Nowadays, written Hong Kong-style Cantonese, together with creative colloquial expressions and slang, represents the language of the younger generation and middle-class readership.

Hong Kong-style Cantonese has its unique features, but such features are by no means standardized. While dictionaries and grammar books on Cantonese were produced as early as the nineteenth century, they were prepared by western missionaries and colonial officials targeting

the expatriates (Hutton & Bolton, 2005, p. xvi). Researchers on Cantonese take on different perspectives. Some contrast it with standard written Chinese, highlighting the differences (Shi & Shao, 2006; Zeng, 2005). Others focus on the colloquial expressions, code-switching, and other salient linguistic features (Hutton & Bolton, 2005; Snow, 2004; Matthews & Yip, 2011). Taking a closer look, the characteristics match with Walter Ong's observation of oral languages and cultures. Shi, Chu and Shao, for example, point out that Cantonese relies heavily on the situational usage; the same quantifier can be applied to nouns of different natures, both geographical and institutional (2006, p. 27). The same verb implies both operative and receptive actions depending on the context (pp. 28-30). Zeng describes this feature as the extension of semantic meaning and flexibility of the parts of speech (2005, p. 216). According to Ong, this is a characteristic of oral languages being "close to the human lifeword", which makes close reference to the more "immediate, familiar interaction of human beings" (2012, p. 42). The anglicized use of language and code-switching between Chinese and English can also be viewed in this light, given the highly bilingual environment in Hong Kong society.

Another commonly identified characteristic is the archaic Chinese elements retained in Cantonese, including copious monosyllabic words

(Zeng, 2005, pp. 223-231), the vocabulary and its usage (Shi & Shao, 2006, pp. 24-38). This is also the main argument for its preservation as the advocators claim Cantonese to be "the tongue which preserves the most ancient and traditional Chinese culture" (Pang, 2009, preface, my translation), and that Cantonese retains the archaic style of the Tang Dynasty (618-907CE) in terms of phonology and syntax (Chan, 2010, pp. 238-247). Some of the spoken words correspond to obsolete characters and words that can be traced back to ancient China (Chan & Ng, 1998; Pang, 2009). The formulaic style and usage, especially the four-character idioms and rhyming couplets, echo the formulaic styling (Ong, 2012, p. 34), traditionalist (pp. 41-42) and homeostatic (pp. 46-47) characters of oral cultures.

One feature of oral Cantonese commonly observed by non-native speakers is the large variety of sentence particles (Snow, 2004, pp. 155-156; Matthews & Yip, 2011, pp. 389-412). Cantonese has some 30 basic forms of particles, in comparison to seven or eight in standard Chinese (Matthews & Yip, 2011, p. 389). Many of such particles, sentence ending particles in particular, can only be differentiated by appropriate intonation. The same character, when pronounced in different tones, can indicate a question, assertion, or exclamation. This feature by itself

carries a strong association of orality because the particles and the whole utterances must be spoken out for the readers/audience to acknowledge the meaning and tone of the text. In other words, the sentence particles in their respective written forms serve to engage the readers by urging them to read the text aloud in order to find the right intonation, hence the mood indicated by the author.

This last feature— one of engaging the readers/ audience, facilitating an interaction between the text and the readers/audience— is not on Ong's list of characteristics even though he mentions the importance of interaction in the process of oral communication so that the participants are "involved in the give-and-take dynamics of sound, interpersonal relations are kept high" (2012, p. 45). Speaking of the feature of 'empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced', Ong states that in the oral world, the narrators/oral performers and their audience are drawn into the same spatial dimension, all of them are "encased in the communal reaction, the communal 'soul'" (2012, p. 46). The idea of inviting all participants to take part in the performance is stressed and elaborated by Edwards and Sienkewicz. They describe both the performers and audience as "part of one organic whole". Failing to involve the audience in performance means the performers fail the task

and 'misrepresent orality and oral culture' (Edwards & Sienkewicz, 1990, p. 65). As a result, there are acts of 'oral referring' when the performers address the audience directly. Some may go so far as to abuse the audience without irritating them (Edwards & Sienkewicz, 1990, p. 82; Ong, 2012, pp. 44-45).

Translating into Cantonese

The features defining Cantonese mentioned above are by no means exhaustive. However, the wide range of options implies that the translators, when using Hong Kong-style Cantonese in their translations, have to solve two major problems. The first problem has to do with the unstable system of the target language which is a result of the non-standardized nature of Cantonese. In the process of compiling the Cantonese grammar book, Matthews and Yip observe that "Cantonese lacks a strong prescriptive grammatical tradition prescribing or stigmatizing certain grammatical constructions" (2011, p. 5.) Variations are found among the native speakers due to their personal upbringing, social class as well as the generation they belong to. The features selected will reveal the social and educational background of the speakers. In other words, because of the empathetic and communal associations of the oral

language, the translators have to decide on the target groups of audience/readers they want to address, and use relevant features that appeal to them.

The second problem involves the technical representation of Chinese characters. In contrast to English and other European languages using the system of alphabets, the Chinese writing system is predominantly logographic. The relationship between a Chinese character and its sound is often arbitrary. As Cantonese has long been used as a spoken dialect, translators have to look for corresponding characters to represent the word and sound. This is especially difficult with the sentence particles as they do not carry concrete meaning in themselves. One method is the phonetic borrowing strategy (Snow, 2004, p.173) by which the writers make up new characters. By so doing, however, the writers take the risk that the new characters may not be recognizable or understood by Chinese readers, and not even by all Cantonese speakers. As Shi, Chu and Shao observe, the average Chinese reader may understand less than 50% of a text written in Cantonese (2006, pp. 7-8).

Such are the challenges faced by translators translating into Cantonese, and indeed by translators working with other oral languages, or translating texts into oral cultures. The translators assume the position

of the performer or the good talker in the context of oral cultures and literature. By exploring and manoeuvring the dynamism of the oral language, the translators have to establish a connection with the target audience/readers who share common social and cultural scripts. The effort and considerations taken by the translators will be illustrated in the following two Cantonese translations: a drama translation and film subtitles for viewers to be read in the cinema or at home. The cases present two scenarios at different but equally significant moments in the history of Hong Kong. The drama translations by Jane Lai were first prepared in the 1980s when the British and Chinese governments began negotiations over the handover of sovereignty. The scripts were brought out in print in 2005 for general readers. The Cantonese subtitles of foreign films were produced in a more commercial context in post-handover Hong Kong. The selected animation *Shrek the Third* (2007) obviously targets the general public, especially young people, but it is chosen mainly because it is the sequel to *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004). By comparing the differences of the Cantonese features preserved in the subtitles of the three films, the analysis allows us to look at the translators' efforts to explore and exploit the oral features in written

Cantonese specific to current social situations in order to involve the target readers actively in a mental performance.

The 1980s: the Cantonese Translation of *The Comedy of Errors*

According to the general preface to the *Jane Lai Drama Translation Series* written by Martha Cheung, Jane Lai translated a total of eighteen plays from 1978 to 1993, all commissioned by drama troupes. Instead of using standard Chinese and allowing the actors and actresses to freely deliver and modify the translation in spoken Cantonese, the translator renders the text using written Cantonese so that the exact wording and expressions, intonation, rhythm and pace can be effectively monitored (Cheung, 2005, p. viii). The translator seeks to explore the rich potential and merits of Cantonese to capture the essence of the original plays. In Cheung's words, through Lai's translation, she feels that "Cantonese can do magic" (p.vi, my translation). The manuscripts of the translations were not published until 2005 because no commercial publisher would take the risk of bringing out works "in written words which are incomprehensible" (p. vi, my translation) due to the strongly oral nature of Cantonese. The publication was finally made possible with funding secured from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

As observed in the Cantonese translation of *The Comedy of Errors*, the translator preserves the semantic meaning largely intact without following closely the syntactic structure of the English original. For the sake of comprehensibility, especially for an audience watching the play, the translator rearranges the information and simplifies the structure. One strategy is to change the perspective: what is in receptive voice in the original ("by the wrongs I suffer, and the blows I bear") is changed into operative voice by inserting 'you' as the doer (你「蹧質」到我咁，打到我就散, LT: you make me suffer, beat me up)[6]. Obscure expressions in the original are often clarified, with the hidden meaning made explicit for a readable translation.

Compared with other Cantonese writings and translations (including the Cantonese subtitles of *Shrek the Third* to be discussed in the next section), Lai makes special effort to tap into the rich source of Cantonese sentence ending particles. There are about 36 different single particles and 15 combined particles (particles made up of two or more

[6] A note on glosses: as I argue in this paper, the translators select aspects of Cantonese to serve different purposes. In general, I will provide the examples in Chinese scripts with interlinear glosses (IG). In cases where an interlinear gloss (IG) is not comprehensible, I will provide a literal translation (LT). When the translators are making use of the prosodic features, Romanization or phonetic symbols will be provided with the Cantonese translations for illustration.

Chinese characters). Some of these particles have the same pronunciation and can only be differentiated by intonation（e.g. 啦 /la1/, 喇 /la2/, 嗱 /la4/）or glottal closure（e.g. 嘞 /laak/）(Matthews & Yip, 2011, pp. 390-391). Corresponding characters are not used in a discreet manner. Sometimes the 'mouth'（口）radical on the left of the character (a small 口 as in the characters of 㗎 and 呀) is missing. The two characters 架 and 㗎, with identical pronunciation / gaa3/, are used interchangeably. Different characters are used in similar situations, as is the case with 亞 and 呀, which again share the same pronunciation /aa1/ and intonation. Some characters are put in square quotation marks to indicate that they are words borrowed to represent the sound in different tones, as in '「牙」' (/ngaa4/) and '「雅」' (/ngaa5/). These sentence final particles play a significant part by signalling the mood of the utterance. As a result, they are more frequently used in witty dialogues between the two fools（Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus）and other characters. These ending particles also intensify the feelings of the speakers and enhance the tension as the story approaches the climax. These sentence particles function to create the atmosphere of individual scenes and the mood of the characters.

Formulaic styling of Cantonese opera is another distinctive feature found in Lai's translation. Stories of traditional Cantonese opera are set in ancient China. The form of address is standardized in Chinese terms according to the characters' official positions. The general is addressed as 大將軍 (IG: big/great general) the officers as 官差 (IG: official worker). The masters call the servants 奴才 (IG: slave/humble person), and the servants address the young master as 少爺 (IG: young master), the lady as 夫人 (LT: wife of a lord). There are set phrases commonly found in Cantonese opera for making requests and expressing emotions, as well as the abundant use of idioms and metaphoric expressions such as 喜樂嘅泉源，渴時嘅甘露 (LT: spring of joy, sweet dew [to quench] thirst). Some of the lines appear in rhymed couplets, sometimes in four-character structure as in 世間天上 (IG: mortal world, sky/heaven above) and 天堂樂土 (IG: Heaven, paradise). Sometimes, these phrases appear in couplets as in 無啦啦，拳打腳踢，矇查查，道理原因 (LT: out of no reason, beaten [and] kicked, fogged, rationale [and] reason). The last example is found in Act two Scene two:

Was there ever any man thus beaten out of season

When in the why and the wherefore is neither rhyme

nor reason (Shakespeare, 1972, p. 20)

The Cantonese translation retains the core meaning— the reference to being beaten with no given explanation—and reproduces the play of words and sound with alliteration and rhyme using Chinese reduplication in the pattern of ABB: 無啦啦 (*mo-la-la*) and 矇查查 (*mung-cha-cha*). The translations retain a weak superficial link between words. Both 拳打腳踢 (IG: fist-hit, foot-kick) and 道理原因 (IG: rationale, reason) are tautologous. The form and style are closely associated with formulaic expressions in Cantonese opera, which in turn largely enhance the dramatic quality of the Cantonese translation.

Apart from the couplets, the translator also renders the texts into different rhythmic patterns. Various forms of reduplication are used, including the repetition of the first two characters, such as 沙沙滾 (*sa-sa-gwan*) and 合合熙 (*hap-hap-hing*); the repetition of the last two characters, such as 日光白白 (*yat-gwong-baak-baak*); and the repetition of alternate characters as in 跛手跛腳 (*bai-sau-bai-geuk*) and 滾紅滾綠 (*gwan-hung-gwan-luk*) . Many of these expressions are metaphoric, evoking mental pictures, such as the reference to limping in 跛手跛腳

(IG: broken-hand-broken-foot, which means 'physically injured') and the action of 'to roll' in a bright contrast of the colours red and green: 滾紅滾綠 (IG: roll-red, roll-green, which refers to a man not being faithful to his spouse).

The translator makes use of figurative language to construe mental images that resonate with Hong Kong people and boost the humourous effect. This is especially desirable when the original metaphor is not known to the non-English speakers. In Act three Scene one, a wordplay is created on 'iron crow': "If a crow helps us in, sirrah, we'll pluck a crow together" (Shakespeare, 1972, p. 32). Lai uses the Cantonese term 鶴咀鋤 (IG: crane beak pickaxe) and extends the original figure to a general reference to fowl using the Cantonese idiom 雞飛狗走 (IG: chicken-fly, dog-run.) The figurative language works closely with the prosodic features, as seen in an example found in Act one Scene two:

> …For God's sake hold your hands.
>
> Nay, an you will not, sir, I'll take my heels
>
> (Shakespeare, 1972, p. 13).

In the Cantonese translation 咪打落嚟呀。請你高抬貴手，唔係我就雞咁腳走喇。，高抬貴手 (IG: high hold your hand) is a set phrase

to request someone not to do something. 雞咁腳走 (LT: run like chicken feet) is a colloquial expression which means 'to run away quickly.' The two expressions rhyme with each other (*go-toi-gwai-sau*; *gai-gam-geuk-jau*), and five of the eight characters start with the consonant /g/, creating a musical quality as one reads aloud the line. The two sentence final particles (呀 /aa1/ and 喇 /la1/) further intensify the determination of Dromio of Ephesus to resist the attack and make a run for it. Lai takes the hint from the original, uses the oral features of Cantonese so as to reproduce the impact on the audience/readers.

Apart from the prosodic and rhetorical elements, the translator also makes reference to current social issues and faddish expressions in the media in the 1980s. Expressions such as 木咀 (IG: wood mouth), 過主 (IG: shift master/household), 鑒粗嚟 (IG: impose rough do, which means 'force upon'), and 係咁先 (IG: be like front/here, which means 'so much for now') were fad words at that time, gaining currency first through television dramas starring by Chow Yun-fat and Stephen Chow, both of whom were popular television actors then. Sometimes, dated terms and expressions are used to echo life in old Hong Kong, such as the expressions of 坐花廳 (IG: sit-flower-hall, which means 'spending time in the police station or prison'), 卜卜齋 (the first two characters, pronounced *bukl-bukl*,

is onomatopoeia for hitting or beating; the last character is the word for 'studio'; the word refers to private pre-school education in the pre-war period), and 好極啦 (pronounced in Mandarin, a mockery that alludes to the increasing Mainland influence in Hong Kong society). These expressions relate the audience/readers to different aspects of life in the 1980s, cultivating a sense of belonging to the community in which they were brought up.

The 2000s: Cantonese Subtitles of *Shrek the Third*

It is not known whether the subtitles of the American animated film series *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), and *Shrek the Third* (2007) were done by the same translator or group of translators, but it is clear that the subtitles are tailored for the local audience, especially the younger generation. Compared with the first two films, the Cantonese features found in the subtitles of *Shrek the Third* are the most consistent. In *Shrek 2*, for example, Cantonese is mainly represented by Cantonese function words including possessive pronoun markers, words for negation, question words, third-person collective pronouns, as well as proximal and distal demonstratives (Lee, 2010). However, such dialectic features are mixed with standard Chinese, resulting in a hybrid text. The Cantonese used in

the subtitles of *Shrek the Third* is markedly different. There is no code-mixing of Cantonese and standard Chinese. While in *Shrek 2* obsolete Chinese characters are used to represent colloquial expressions (山旮晃王國, pronounced as *saan-ka-la wong-gok*, for 'the Kingdom of Far, Far Away'), the corresponding characters are changed to 山卡啦國 (*saan-kaa-la gok*), in which the first three characters are chosen following the phonetic borrowing strategy. The strategy is commonly used by Cantonese speakers, teenagers in particular, to represent new or faddish spoken expressions.

Similar to Lai's Cantonese translation, cultural substitution and paraphrase are commonly applied in the subtitling. In the scenes in which references are made to the royal family, slightly formulaic language is used, such as 陛下, the second-person pronoun used to address the emperor in ancient China, and 朕, the first-person pronoun used by the emperor. At the ceremony conferring knighthood, 'I knight thee' is rendered into 封汝為騎士 (IG: title thee as knight), in which the archaic second-person pronoun is used. Some expressions are clichés commonly seen in historical or martial arts drama, such as 國不可以一日無君 (LT: country cannot be one day without king), which is the translation of the line 'This kingdom needs a new king', and 刀下留人 (LT: below sword,

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spare man) translating 'Everybody, stop!' The same method of modulation is observed in Lai's Cantonese translation of *The Comedy of Errors*. Both translators render the original texts from different perspectives, making use of formulaic styles available in the repertoire of oral culture and traditions in Cantonese opera and TV drama series.

Another feature shared by both translations is the use of four-character idioms and common sayings. In the animated film, these idiomatic expressions serve a different purpose. Couplets are not used. Idioms are mostly found in scenes where the characters are engaged in serious conversations, such as (唔好)自欺欺人 (LT: [do not] cheat yourself and cheat others), a translation for 'Who do you think we're kidding?' 於事無補 (LT: not helping with [your] case) is used to translate 'it's not like your attitude is helping', and 腳踏實地 (LT: feet on solid ground) to translate 'by honest work.' The messages conveyed through these idioms are loaded with social values in the adult world. In contrast, colloquial expressions and slang are used to convey a playful and humourous mood, such as 騎呢 (no clear semantic meaning, it is usually understood as 'awkward' or 'strange'), 我明晒 (LT: I understood), 唔係講玩 (LT: no kidding), 好鬼無聊 (LT: very much purposeless), 明寸我 (LT: obviously snap at me). Some of the Cantonese expressions slightly

elaborate on the English original. Where the original says 'a world of pain with which you are not familiar,' the subtitles read 痛到阿媽都唔認得 (LT: so painful [that my] mother won't recognize [me])[7]. Another example is 你病到死死吓都仲識得講笑 (LT: you [being] so ill to death, [and] still [you] make jokes), which is the translation of 'Even on your deathbed you're still making jokes.' The Cantonese translations, whether they are idioms, colloquial expressions or slang, are chosen and adapted to convey meaning or connotations in respective situations. The mismatch created by such colloquial Cantonese and the visual images of the western setting adds to the comic effect which can only be appreciated by native Cantonese speakers who understand the subtext.

This impression of displacement is strengthened by two other oral features: the use of abusive slang and local references. In cases when name calling is found in the original, corresponding Cantonese terms are used to reproduce the derogative tone: 'idiot' is translated as 白痴 (IG: white idiot), 'villains' as 壞蛋 (IG: bad egg), 'a bad man' as 大壞蛋

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[7] The Cantonese expression is vague in the sense that it can be interpreted in operative voice (you are in so much pain that you won't [be able to] recognize your mother), or in receptive voice (you are in so much pain that you won't be recognized by your mother.) This echoes Shi, Chu and Shao's claim that Cantonese relies heavily on situational usage (2006, pp. 28-30).

(IG: big bad egg), and 'morons' as 蠢材 (IG: foolish material). More abusive Cantonese terms are chosen to insult the addressee as the occasion calls for it, for example, 變態佬 (LT: twisted man) is used to abuse Charming when he is described as a 'jerk' in English, 廢柴 (IG: rotten stick) for Artie when he is called a 'loser.' Other terms for abusive name-calling include 死蠢 (LT: damn fool), 傻仔 (LT: halfwitted), 乜水 (IG: what water, which is understood as 'nobody'), and 茂利 (a vulgar term referring to a man; possible translations are 'moron' or 'sucker' [Hutton & Bolton, 2005, pp. 284-285]). The insults underlying these words further incite the younger audience to feel strongly against those characters as the plot unfolds.

The Cantonese subtitles also draw on current affairs in Hong Kong society after the handover of sovereignty. The name 'Rapunzel' is translated as 長毛 (IG: long hair), which echoes the nickname of a male legislator and activist who wears long hair. 造馬選舉 (IG: make horse election), which means 'manipulated election', hints at the biased electoral system after 1997. There are other terms which are associated with common topics, such as popular radio and television programmes. The title of the programme 'It's a Happily Ever After After All. Shrek's Final Performance' is rendered into 終極大團圓結局. 史力加即將一

鑊熟. The last characters of both lines rhyme with each other（局／guk/ and 熟／suk/), which is a common feature of Cantonese headlines in the media. 終極 (IG: ultimate) is a hyperbole, a device also commonly seen in texts circulated in the media. The Cantonese translation of the squad team 勁爆叱吒犀利特工奇兵（LT: extremely explosive powerful excellent special agent wonderful squad）is an aggregate of hyperboles and cliché that echoes film titles and popular events catering for young people.

High school culture features as a main theme in *Shrek the Third*. There are scenes and dialogues which parody the life of high school students, such as drug abuse, online games, and teen speak. The teen speak reproduced in the Cantonese subtitles is characterized by faddish expressions and slang marked by exaggerating intensifiers such as 激 (IG: ultra), 超 (IG: super), and 勁 (IG: extremely). The dialogues are filled with single character slang terms such as 閃 (IG: flash, which means 'dash off'), 爽 (IG: crispy, which means 'cool'), 瘀 (IG: bruised, which means 'embarrassed') and 冧 (the character has no concrete meaning by itself, but is usually taken to mean 'to fall for [someone]'). There are also sentence final particles such as 囉（／lo1/), 喎（／wo3/), 先（／sin1/), 咩 (/me1/), 乜呀 (/mat1aa1/), as well as faddish phrases such as 超低能, 勁搞笑（LT: super low wit, extremely funny). All of these expressions

do not carry distinctive propositional meanings, but they characterize the language of teenagers in Hong Kong. In those scenes, the translations depart from the original wording and create a style that appeals to the audience who are familiar with such expressions in the local context.

Conclusion

The translation of idiosyncratic speech is not a new topic in translation studies. Rosa gives a detailed analysis of "literary fictional varieties" exhibited in the dialogues of English novels and the strategies to reproduce such linguistic properties in translation (2015, p. 212). The two terms of 'orality' and 'literary speech' are used interchangeably in the paper as she explains its function to portray the fictional characters (Rosa, 2015, p. 215). In the area of audiovisual translation, the translation of dialects has often been seen as an impossible task as the linguistic variations are intricately tied to phonological and grammatical features of the speech, and the social and political implications relating to the cultural identities of the speakers. On certain occasions, the regional voice can reveal "identifiable narrative needs" and is significant to the structure of audiovisual texts (Federici, 2009, p. 19; see also Marrano et al. (Eds.), 2009; Nadiani & Rundle (Eds.), 2012 for further discussion). In both cases,

the discussion focuses on the significance of the language varieties as they are deployed by authors or scriptwriters. The argument I presented above, however, looks at how features of an oral language are manifested in the translations to trigger a dynamic reading experience for the target readers/audience. Orality is an essential cultural quality which is shared by members who identify themselves with that oral community. When the translators translate a text into an oral language, whether it is a conscious choice or not, one of the major tasks is to reshape the source text, explore and exploit the linguistic resources of the target oral language— the "aesthetics of orality" (Bandia, 2011)—to engage the audience/readers.

These linguistic elements are different from the features of literary speech in the sense that they induce the readers/audience to actively decode the oral texts into meaningful messages in current situations. Jane Lai, in her Cantonese translation of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, makes use of the sentence particles of Cantonese and creates a musical quality with reduplication, repetition and parallelism. The use of metaphoric language urges the readers/audience to construe mental pictures. She also taps into the pool of formulaic expressions commonly found in traditional Cantonese opera and faddish expressions in the 1980s. In comparison, the translator of the animated film relies on Cantonese

lexis. While formulaic styling can still be found in the subtitles, slang and faddish expressions which have gained currency among the younger generation and in social networking platforms are extensively used to appeal to the target group of audience.

Both cases lead us to reflect on the intimate relationship between language and the people being brought up in and literally " living" the language. Through the translation, the translators invite the readers/audience to participate in a joint performance. The unique cultural quality embedded in the oral language requires the readers/ audience to play an active role, connecting the text and their native tongue in order to make the translation meaningful. As in other oral literature and performance, the whole event (in this case, the act of translation) can only be completed when the readers/ audience are motivated to add the final stroke. The process evokes and strengthens a sense of belonging, reinforcing the cultural identity of members in the oral community. At the same time, we should not forget that these translations, presented in written form, also serve to record aspects of the oral culture, bearing witness to the cultural life and current issues at significant historical moments. For readers in future generations, they are important historical records of slices of life in the Hong Kong community.

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