1. Introduction

WITH THE ACCENSION TO INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ‘SUPER POWER’ STATUS,¹ including social and political ‘landmarks’ such as China’s acceptance in the World Trade Organization in 2001, Beijing’s hosting of the Olympics in 2008, and the Shanghai World Expo set for 2010, an increasing amount of attention has been focused on China worldwide—a country which has been described as an unexplored and ‘alien’ territory (Hunter and Sexton 1999, 1) previous to its recent globalization. In its efforts to present a unified and modernized ‘face’ to the world, China has made some serious considerations of its use and presentation of English, the so-called *lingua franca* of the economic, political, technological and diplomatic world (Kirkpatrick 2007, 155). The tremendous effort in China to match the nation’s revitalized and contemporary ‘face’ through the perfection of English has been no smooth operation. Indeed, this conception of modernization through the English language has been met with conflicts of ideology and identity, particularly on the grounds of national patriotism and ‘purity’.

In *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon*, Braj B. Kachru describes the presence of English in many Asian countries as characterizing the two faces of Janus—or, as one chapter title suggests, a ‘schizophrenia’ in language identity (2005, 29). From an essentialist vantage point, the binary opposition of two language ‘faces’ in China are taken up by those that are *for* the widespread use and standardization of English in China (headed by the Chinese government), and those *against* the institutionalization of English who view it as the ‘killer language’ (B. Kachru 2005, 165) that could potentially replace Chinese languages and/or contaminate Chinese culture. However, like many things, the language debate in China is not as black-and-white, or uniformly dichotomous, as it seems; in fact, it is the ‘grey’ that has perhaps provided the most controversy in China currently—that is, the use of Chinese English, or ‘Chinglish’.

Like other pidgins (‘Singlish’, ‘Hinglish’, ‘Spanglish’, etc.), Chinese English has attracted much negative attention, as the Chinese government and its supporters feel

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¹ China has come to rival such Western economic powerhouses as the United States.
that Chinese English is ‘unacceptable and inappropriate’ (Zhang 1997, 53) and further ‘degrading’ to China’s image (People’s Daily October 15 2009). A portmanteau of Chinese and English, the hybridized Chinese English is a ‘world English’ that is heavily inflected by Chinese syntax and figurative language (B. Kachru 2005, 170), and has become most well-known—both in China and worldwide—through the medium of signs and advertisements translated from Mandarin or Cantonese into English. In the anxieties surrounding China’s image as a powerful and advanced globalized nation state, these ‘Chinese English’ signs, as hotly contested focal points of language planning, have been quite literally condemned by the Chinese government. If English remains the lingua franca of international commerce, it is little wonder that the Chinese government feels the need to take its English seriously and sustain vigorous efforts to eradicate what is felt to be merely poorly translated Chinese. There has been great concern, for example, that Chinese English signage will confuse or even offend tourists and other visitors to the country (Global Times August 21 2009). Despite this logic, the attempt to eliminate ‘Chinese English’ signage—and the variety of hybridized English itself—is suggestive of a greater anxiety felt regarding language, identity, and ‘losing face’. Therefore, the following discussion is an exploration of the controversy surrounding the idiosyncratic Chinese English signs as signposts of a larger tension surrounding national identity in China’s new role on the economic and political world stage.

This analysis is comprised of three main focal points, beginning with a more theoretical outline of the connections between English language, identity and power, which is then followed by a description of China’s history with the English language and early preferences for the hybridity of Chinese Pidgin English (CPE), or simply Chinese English (CE). Before reporting on the issues involving the eradication of Chinese English in public spaces and the defense of the language variety as representative of China’s polyphony and culture, I will also be contextualizing the linguistic debate within China’s move toward globalization and consequent embrace of Standard English.

2. Speaking Identity

Before delving into language issues specific to ‘China’s English’, it is important to contextualize the use of language planning in the development and maintenance of national identity, particularly within instances of contact with the English language through colonization, economic trade, religious mission work, etc. Working within a ‘post-structuralist’ or ‘post-modern’ Western academic world makes such a parallel between language and identity or language and national ideology fairly obvious, as modern language theories have been largely informed by Michel Foucault’s argumentation in The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discipline and Punish surrounding the connection between discourse as a means and producer of power, and the

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structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure’s theories on the significations and constructions of meaning underlying language. In spite of the commonplace nature of this knowledge of language’s ability to convey power and shape identity, there remain many ‘myths’ circumventing the suffusion of English in non-native English-speaking countries. One such myth involves the conception that English as a language of internationalism is somehow neutral, or is perhaps a stepping stone toward equality in the elimination of other hierarchical constraints such as ethnicity or class (B. Kachru 2005, 18). Realistically, the assertion that the English language could be ‘an abstract and neutral entity that does not embody values or ideologies’ in a ‘peripherally’ English-speaking country fully ignores ‘how hegemonical language can be’ in its ability to ‘to define our sense of reality and subjectivity’ (Canagarajah 2000, 29). Despite the fact that China is not an ex-colony of England or any other European nation,3 its relationship to the ‘Inner Circle’ English speaking countries (England, the United States) is still conceived of as one of ‘norm-acceptance’ or ‘norm-dependency’ (B. Kachru 2005, 19). Owing to this power dynamic of (active) providing or dictating versus (passive) reception, it is clear that an ‘Outer Circle’ country (countries with English as a second or colonial language, such as India or South Africa) or Expanding (countries that speak and consider English as a foreign language, such as China and Japan4) cannot have a ‘neutral’ relationship to the English language.

In the words of linguistic researcher Robert Phillipson,

…terms like ‘English as a world language’ grossly misrepresent the reality of the communication experience of most of the world’s population. More seriously…reference to English as a ‘universal’ lingua franca conceal the fact that the use of English serves the interests of some much better than others. It includes some and excludes others (1992, 89)

Thus, English has become more than a means of international communication; aptly nicknamed ‘England’s “black gold”’ (B. Kachru 2005), it is also a system of social economy and, in its ‘invisible’ function, English acts as ‘a gatekeeper and indicator of social [and financial] status’ (Y. Kachru 2006, 169).

In terms of identity in non-native English speaking countries, the ever-increasing use of English in pedagogy, government, science and media has fostered a growing concern that with the infusion of the English language and the inseparability of language and culture (Phillipson 1992, 10) comes a necessary entailment of a Westernization or monoculturation of Outer or Expanding circle nations (B. Kachru 2005, 117). Indeed, as English has become the ‘paradigm modern language of political and economic power…some observers assert that the power of English is the factor responsible for disenfranchisement of a vast majority of populations in the third world [sic]’ (Y. Kachru 2006, 17). Such a concern is undeniably faced by China in its fairly

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3 Barring Hong Kong, which was a British colony from 1842–1930s following the Opium Wars and ending pre-World War II.

4 English as a foreign language (EFL) is rapidly changing in the Expanding Circle countries, as it is used more and more intranationally (B. Kachru, 13)
recent push towards globalization and the concurrent saturation of English in a newly modernizing Chinese society.

3. Making Contact: English in China from 1637 to present day

Though the focus of this report is mainly on English language issues in China post-2001—the year of China’s acceptance into the WTO—China’s contact with the English language is certainly not new. British traders first arrived on Chinese shores in 1637, and the first citations of Chinese Pidgin English (CPE) date to the 1740s, though the term Pidgin English [“pidgin” itself being the Chinese pronunciation of the English “business”] did not appear until 1859 (Y. Kachru 2006, 167-168). Interestingly, CPE—also referred to as jargon, broken English or Canton English—emerged alongside a mercantile mindset that hoped to ‘keep the West at arm’s length’ while carrying on a ‘large-scale trade with Westerners’ (Bolton 2003:147), perhaps early evidence of the desire to resist a complete Anglicization of communication and preserve a sense of Chinese identity while speaking a foreign tongue.

In spite of this early mistrust of the English language, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw an influx of missionary schools teaching language norms and classic British literature, stressing an expectation of Chinese students’ need to learn Standard English. English ‘was not adapted, since it was intended to be learned as an intact foreign language, with norms and models coming from outside’ (Y. Kachru 2006, 168). As the use of English increased within China in the early to mid-twentieth century, so did its more ‘adaptive’ form, Chinese Pidgin English. This hybridization—deemed ‘indigenous deformation’—was considered a serious offense to language purists, and so an instrumentalist form entitled ‘Basic English’ (Basic for ‘British, American, Scientific, International, and Commercial’) was developed by Charles Kay Ogden, featuring a pared-down lexicon and easy-to-learn syntax that would take little time to learn, and learn properly (Huang 2006, 77-78). Void of any expressive creativity, Basic English was pressed in China as an appropriate language model that would exert ‘panoptic conjugation’, and further ‘guard full English from those who…blur all its lines and blunt all its edges’ (98). This rather Orwellian model of language was perhaps one the first major moves toward ‘purifying’ or standardizing the English spoken in China, and the beginning of an ongoing struggle between monolingual and hybridized language in modern China.

3.1 ‘A Basic Menu’—early resistance to English standardization

The extremity of Basic English’s hegemonic linguistic pressure created an interesting reaction from poet Lin Yutang that is perhaps correlative to issues surrounding Chinese English present-day. Yutang’s poem ‘A Basic Menu’ mockingly used Basic English to describe many traditional British and North American dishes:
False soup of swimming animal with round hard cover or soup of end of end of male cow...Fowl that has red thing under mouth, that makes funny, hard noise and is eaten by Americans on certain day...hot drink makes heart jump or you don’t go to sleep (Lin Yutang qtd. in Huang 2006, 93)

The irony of this poem is of course that these common Western items (turkey, coffee, mock turtle soup) would be completely unrecognizable to a British or American person, a kind of satirical proof that language is absent of meaning without some kind of cultural identification. It is therefore no surprise that Yutang was also a strong advocate of CE, an argument that academic Yunte Huang feels ‘has outgrown the theoretical framework of linguistic relativism by projecting...a world of cosmopolitan polyvocality...[and] a translocal dialect that has no single identifiable culture origin’ (94).

4. Globalization and China: the modernizing ideology behind the linguistic controversy

‘we can say that globalization is a real set of (highly complex) processes which are creating a global scale of social life in economy, politics and even culture’ - Culpeper 2009

Interest and advancement in the international market is the impetus behind English language learning for many Expanding Circle or peripherally English-speaking countries (Y. Kachru 2006, 17); China seems to move above and beyond this fact, as no country—peripheral or otherwise—has created such an economic explosion in global trade as this nation has. China’s financial growth is a rather drastic recovery from what has been termed ‘the century of national humiliation’, a roughly one hundred year period that began with the Opium Wars of the 1840s, extending through to the ‘warlord period’ of the early twentieth century, the Japanese occupation in the 1940s, the leadership of Mao and the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s (Nolan 2004, 120). In the past two decades (beginning in the 1980s), the ‘outcome of China’s reform strategy, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, has been the most explosive that the world has seen’ (2), with the year 1996 seeing China’s GDP as succeeding that of all developing countries and most European nations (Bolton 2003, 57). China’s economic acceleration is also made evident by its inclusion in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and its acceptance as the host of the 2008 Olympics and 2010 World Expo. It seems that China has truly become a world contender, and has gained attention and respect from other powerful and cosmopolitan

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5 Mao’s plan to transform China from being an agrarian nation to a communist society, ending catastrophically in violence and a horrific famine that resulted in nearly two million deaths (Nolan).
countries that may have previously deemed it an ‘intractable and radical communist state’ (Hunter and Sexton 1999, 1).

4.1 One World, One Dream: the hope for a unified face of modern China

With the extremely rapid advancement to the eighth largest global trading community in the world (Bolton 2003, 57), China has seen an equally rapid change in ‘lifestyle, attitudes, and social aspirations’ (67). One of the major changes that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been implementing is the desire to present China to the world as a ‘united front’ (Hunter and Sexton 1999, 183). While such a political endeavor can likely be sourced to Mao’s vision of a communist society, the more current move towards a modern China has created an investment (or reinvestment) in a strong and harmonious nation akin to other world powers such as the United States or the United Kingdom. This theme of improvement and solidarity can be read into the slogan of the Beijing Olympics: ‘One World, One Dream’. On Beijing’s official website for the Games, the slogan is explained as reflecting ‘the values of harmony’ integral to ‘the philosophies and ideals of the Chinese people’, including a ‘harmonious society…achieving harmonious development’. Further, the site identifies ‘one world, one dream’ as expressing the ideal of the people in Beijing as well as in China to share the global community and civilization and to create a bright future hand in hand with the people from the rest of the world. It expresses the firm belief of a great nation, with a long history of 5,000 years and on its way towards modernization, that is committed to peaceful development, harmonious society and people’s happiness. It voices the aspirations of 1.3 billion Chinese people to contribute to the establishment of a peaceful and bright world (Beijing Olympics Official Website 2008).

The repetition of social harmony and modernization is indicative of the PRC’s hope for national unity, as is the single voice of the ‘aspirations of 1.3 billion Chinese people’. This voice, along with the other pages of the website, is entirely in English. Of course, at first glance it only makes logical sense that the official website for an international event is provided for linguistic audiences outside of China. A closer look, however, reveals a belief (and potential reality) that a nation entering a modern economy must also speak in its tongue.

4.2 English for economic success? A unified tongue(s) for a modern China

This new identity as an international power rivaling the West has had a strong impact on how the English language is perceived by China. With over 200 million children
aspiring to learn English in Chinese schools—in addition to adult learners—China has become the ‘the largest English language learning population in the world’, with more people speaking English in this nation than in all of the United States (Jiang 2003, 3). Such an enormous number of English speakers in a country where English is a foreign language has been undeniably produced by the strong connection made between speaking the language of international trade and succeeding in the financial world. English, as has been previously established, is a language that been used in China for commercial benefit for centuries, but perhaps only in China’s more recent global position has such bilingual elitism and achievement-oriented idealist views of English emerged.

According to one scholar’s study, ‘Chinese students studying English as a Second Language believe that they will eventually reap increased economic benefits as a direct result of ESL study’ (Qiang and Wolff 2003, 10). This statement is compounded by the monetary success of one entrepreneur’s capitalization on the demand for learning English: Li Yang, something of as celebrity English teacher, travels nation-wide marketing his multi-million dollar business, ‘Crazy English’. His method provides ‘fairly simple sessions of elementary English’ coupled with hand signals, and slogans such as ‘relish suffering’, ‘seek success’, and ‘what do we need now? We need heroes. What else do we need? English’. Yang further claims that after learning English, ‘money [was] no longer a problem’ for him (Bolton 2003, 253), solidifying the popular parallel made in China between language and commercial success. As further indication of China’s belief in the opportunities resulting from English, one article from a Chinese newspaper covering the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics credits China’s gold medal winnings to the athlete’s knowledge of English. Titled ‘Better English, More Confidence and the Best Performance Ever’, source China Daily quotes chef-de-mission Xiao Tian as claiming ‘more and more Chinese athletes in winter sports have become integrated into the world’s sports family as they speak good English…it is one of the main reasons why they did such a good job in Vancouver’ (China Daily March 1 2010).

As per Stewart Cole’s analysis of the economic value of English in his 2007 essay ‘The Functionalist Account of English in China’, the linkage between English and prosperity is not merely an idealized dream; what has been termed ‘bilingual elitism’ in China could now better be described as bilingual prioritization, or even necessity. One blogger from the online newspaper People’s Daily feels that ‘civil servants…need to acquire modern skills such as computer literacy, English, and driving skills’ as aspects of modernization required in the job force (Yang June 18 2000), a sentiment that is certainly affirmed by the institutionalization of English in many important sectors in Chinese society. English has become ‘a key subject in the curriculum’ for elementary schools, as well as ‘a crucial determinant for university entrance and for procuring well-paid jobs in the commercial sector’ (Gotti 2005, 160). Particularly in larger cities such as Shanghai, ‘fluent English almost guarantees a well-paid, decent job’ in any sector, and a Chinese fluent speaker of English is ‘often much admired and considered a great asset to the community’ (Zhang 1997, 39).
Such a valorization of English is certainly not hindered by the Chinese government, which has organized events like ‘Foreign Language Week’ and the ‘Foreign Language Festival’ (all in English!) in an effort to ‘enhance an awareness of English’ (Fong 2009, 45). It would seem that the PRC is exercising Alistair Pennycook’s very Foucauldian theory of English as an International Language (EIL) as a discourse of power (Pennycook 1998, 8). Thus, if knowledge is power, the English language has become the shape of the knowledge necessary to access global power, and the urgency in learning English the PRC has cultivated can be seen as a move toward tapping into a political and economic regime previously only available to Inner Circle nations. Despite the positive aspects of what would seem like a more equal access to international exchange, like any discourse of power, hierarchies, anxieties, and concerns over cultural identity follow the integration of English into Chinese curricula.

4.3 ‘Chinese, the language I love and am worried about’

Though many in China have largely embraced the assimilation of the English language into Chinese culture and commerce, the concurrent influx of Western culture has brought some to arms in defense of what is thought to be a threatened Chinese identity. From a purely linguistic perspective, the pressure to learn English in the classroom has sparked concern over the extinction of Chinese languages. One journalist protests that:

> when nearly all students' attention is focused on English, looking at the situation of our mother language, even Chinese linguists get confused about its use. Not only have many new words and phrases which are very popular on the Internet started to fill in every corner of the society, common use of Chinese is full of mistakes and misunderstandings are all around. Under such urgent situation for the Chinese language, it is time for every Chinese person to start protecting our mother tongue [sic]. (People's Daily Online June 18 2010)

Those that have expressed similar misgivings on the emphasis placed on English in China recognize its pragmatic function in trade, but feel the need to ‘remind China’s intellectuals…media, government of all levels and law-enforcing departments to focus more attention [on the]…on the purity of the Chinese language’ (People's Daily Online 2010). These statements reflect the reputation English has developed as a usurper or ‘killer’ of indigenous languages, and further the concern that with the acceptance of Western language, a replacement of previous national identity with Western cultural trends and values will unquestionably follow. The controversial mingling of the English language with Chinese languages into the pidgin ‘Chinglish’ has become a locus for this concern.

5. Chinese English, or ‘Chinglish’
Up until this point, I have been contextualizing the controversy surrounding Chinese English by establishing briefly China’s history with the English language and its usage in present day; as explained previously, China’s adoption of and conflict with English is couched within the nation’s rise to economic power and global recognition as a political and mercantile peer. With this new international position, China is attempting to modernize its population and present itself as a single, unified and cohesive ‘face’ that speaks fluently in the language of world business and cosmopolitanism—English. However, such a move in strategic language planning is undeniably difficult owing to the fact that there exist ‘many Chinas’ (Hunter and Sexton 1999, 45). Although the PRC ‘defines itself as a unitary…state’ (57), it ‘is regionally and linguistically a diverse country… comprise[d] [of] over fifty-six ethnic groups and over eighty languages’ (Y. Kachru 2006, 168) including several minority speech communities from countries such as India, Thailand, and the Philippines (Bolton 2003, 89). Furthermore, despite the efforts of the PRC to ‘prevent encroachment by the country’s many dialects’ in the interest of creating standardized official languages (be it English or Mandarin), Chinese English continues to persist, resilient amidst the heated debates arguing for its eradication from English and Chinese language purists both.

5.1 What is Chinese English?

Chinese English is a pidgin: a ‘language without native speakers’ that is a particular ‘product of language contact, and arise[s] in a fairly limited set of situations as a result of certain social conditions…’ (Culpeper 2009, 389). As previously mentioned, China’s Pidgin English arose out of commercial contact with British traders centuries ago, and continues to be motivated by economic interests. Mechanistically, Chinese English is comprised of a superstrate English—‘the source of most of its vocabulary…and the language of the colonizers’— and a substrate Chinese—the ‘indigenous language or languages’ (396) that inflect the superstrate with a cultural identity. Chinese English is thus a ‘localized variety of English in China’ (Bolton and Kachru 2007, 149) inflected by culturally specific ‘creative aspects of idiom and metaphor’ and the use of code switching and loan words. An example of CE’s bilingual creativity would be the phrase big pot, meaning ‘egalitarianism’ (Y. Kachru 2006, 170), and people mountain, people sea, meaning ‘a very crowded place’ (Fang 2008, 47).

5.2 Chinglish—the ‘cultural eunuch?’

For those that have a more negative perception of Chinese English, the language is merely a ‘word for word translation from Chinese to English’ (Zhang 1997, 39), implying that it is poorly translated English rather than a variety unto itself. Tellingly framed in

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6 As China is not an ex-colony, perhaps ‘dominant’ language would be more appropriate here.
7 Note here that the term ‘Chinese’ is meant to denote any number of Chinese languages that might temper the use of English.
the discourse of anxieties surrounding hybridity and concomitant imagery of sterility, users of Chinese English in professional fields have been referred to by Chinese critics as ‘cultural eunuchs’ (Bolton 2003, 108) and propagators of a confused nation that is ‘neither purely Chinese nor purely Western, but rather a Westernized China which might more aptly, if ruefully, be referred to as “Chingland”’ (Qiang 2003, 11). This desire or pressure to speak pure Chinese or pure English can perhaps be seen as a way of maintaining an ‘oil and water’ dichotomy between Western and Chinese cultures. Despite the fact that much literature on this topic conceives of the indoctrination and standardization of English in China as the harbinger of Westernization, I would suggest that this investment in speaking ‘pure’ English is actually a way of buffering the West—a distancing that could potentially explain the strong reactions to Chinese English as a hybrid language. It is perhaps not that CE is not English enough, but is actually a linguistic ‘signpost’ for a plurality of identity in China, and this new identity formation’s creation of a fear of cultural ‘impurity’.

Thus, in spite of the fact that in (typically Western) academia Chinese English has been studied and accepted as a world English in its own right, within the praxis of public spheres in China, the polyvocality characteristic of CE remains both highly criticized and vigorously defended. In the proceeding section, I will be examining this controversy through the recent government mandate to rid Chinese cities of CE in public signage, advertisements, and other ephemera.

5.3 A sign of the times

Continuing to use the metaphor of signs, if the anxiety caused by Chinese English potentially signifies a greater concern for the preservation of Chinese national identity, then the contemporary bounty hunt for Chinese English in publicized print is perhaps a ‘sign’ of the menace perceived by hybrid language and hybrid culture, with its implication of Westernized ‘values that [are felt to be] culturally and politically threatening to Chinese’ (Fong 2009, 47). The condemnation of Chinese English on signs, menus, and billboards (among other public media) becomes an indication of the fact that China welcomes bilingualism, not the code-switching linguistic creativity of the far less clearly bifurcated Chinese English. This fact becomes clear in the analysis below of two government-sanctioned movements in the past eight years that focus on the eradication of Chinese English signage.

5.4 Beijing Olympics, 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo, 2010

In 2002 a campaign began to give Beijing what was termed a ‘facelift’ through the ‘Beijing Speaks Foreign Languages Program’, a linguistic initiative that would ‘wage war on baffling English translations popularly known as “Chinglish”’ (Xinhua September 13 2007). While government press releases and news articles often initially cite that the reason for this ‘war’ on Chinese English in public media is to simply make signs in China more accessible for visitors, these justifications often lead to a wider discussion of identity and modernization. One such article evokes the need for the
translation of Chinese English into ‘standard English’ on account of Beijing’s development into ‘an international metropolis’ (Xinhua September 13 2007); another more scholarly report suggests that the Beijing campaigns are ‘considered essential to modernizing’ (Qiang 2003, 44) but also contends that ‘Chinese language and culture [are potentially] undermined by English’, a language that further ‘embod[ies] values’ complicit with the Western world (47). Thus the attack on Chinese English signage is evocative of a rather bipolar (or perhaps, in the words of Braj Kachru, ‘schizophrenic’) anxiety over the aspirations for modernization and the preservation of tradition.

The second wave of ‘attack’ on Chinese English signs revolved around the 2010 World Expo hosted in Shanghai. Purportedly to ‘ensure an intelligent linguistic landscape for the millions of visitors coming to town’ (People’s Daily August 21 2009), Shanghai officials launched a campaign called ‘Write it Right’ that released a series of guidelines and informative pamphlets to the public on English translation (Yu 2009). This campaign further enlisted the assistance of Chinese university students to ‘point and shoot’ (with cameras) any signs they find in Chinese English to aid the government’s mission for standardization (Eastday 2009). Though the push towards the eradication of Chinese English signs in 2010 has brought a mixture of voices and concerns over identity similar to Beijing’s translation strategies, the final result of these large waves of standardization is yet to be seen.

5.5 The inevitability of hybridity: a theory of resistance

Though the majority of press surrounding Chinese English signage is for its ‘correction’ or removal, there has been a small but intriguing outcry from supporters of this world English. Chinese English has generated quite a bit of interest from outside of the nation: German author Oliver Lutz Radtke argues in his successfully published books on Chinese English signage that the language variety ‘provides a counterweight to the burden of political correctness, which…threatens to whitewash everything’ (2007, 5)—a valuable point that is still (rightly) taken lightly by Chinese citizens who feel that outsiders only wish to preserve CE as a source of ‘amusement’ (China Daily October 23 2010). Nonetheless, many residents of China feel that CE does not threaten or dilute Chinese identity, but rather preserves it in a time when the nation that has opened its doors to the rest of the world.

One opinion piece sourced from the Chinese newspaper The Global Times claims that ‘for China to really go global, we have to localize English’ (Xie November 24 2009); this journalist argues that Chinese English is a ‘uniquely Chinese offering’ that is a ‘new trend’ emerging from ‘different cultures collid[ing] on the same ground’ (2009), an opinion that clearly echoes the ‘Basic Menu’ poet Lin Yutang’s argument for the necessity of the expressive value of CE in its ability to impart the perspectives of speakers between cultures (Huang 2006, 94), and Braj B. Kachru’s assertions that ‘the convergence of English with local languages [is] a natural process of convergence and acculturation’ (2005, 18). In this regard, Chinese English is not some middle point on a trajectory of linguistic evolution, but rather a complex cultural dialect that reflects the
social groups that use it to suit their needs, a reflection of Culpeper’s assertion a pidgin is ‘is only ‘wrong’ when compared to something it is not meant to be’ (2009, 399). Chinese English in this light is therefore not a poor attempt at the English language, but rather a more positive example of ‘language creativity and aspects of identity’ that have come from a contact between two cultures (Fang 2008, 50). Furthermore, supporters feel that Chinese English is not ‘watered down’ English or Chinese, but rather a cultural stamp on what has been acknowledged as a necessary tool for global communication. As the journalist Xie explains, ‘if English is mandatory, then it is ours to play with, to make our own’ (2009).

Additional to the benefits and potentialities for both new and heritage identities in the hybrid language of ‘Chinglish’, many theorists further predict that with the ‘open door’ policies and contacts of many nations, polyvocality and pluralized identity will simply become an international norm. In The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha writes that ‘the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds for cultural comparativism—are in a profound process of redefinition’; the desire to maintain a ‘pure’ culture is, for Bhabha, an impossibility, as ‘cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self and Other’ (1994, 55). Thus despite the anxious reactions to the blurring of ‘self’ and ‘other’ representative in Chinese English from conservatives of Chinese and English both, it would seem that the persistence of CE is evidence of the observation that language ‘is inseparable from set cultural implications’, leading therefore to the fact that intensive cultural contact creates hybrid languages ‘shaped by cultural diversity and by a strong need for mutual comprehension’ (Gotti 2005, 160).

And so, as language and cultural contact grow between China and the rest of the world through global events like the Shanghai World Expo, the clear line (if it ever existed) between Chinese and Western culture is likely to lose its supposed definition. However, as sociolinguistics and other cultural observers have pointed out, this does not necessarily denote a ‘white-washing’ of Chinese identity. The resilient creativity of Chinese English and the continuation of linguistic play found in CE public media suggest that a hybridity of language and cultural identity have the potential to resist the homogenization of ‘norm-providing’ cultures by maintaining Chinese meanings and metaphors in inter-cultural communications. Therefore ‘linguistic and cultural hybridism...often represent[s] evidence of a resistance to standardizing pressures’ (Gotti 2005, 160) rather than a complete acceptance of external values and identities.

6. Conclusion

As I hope is evident from the body of this work, my purpose was not to argue for a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ side of this debate, nor vilify the efforts of People’s Republic of China to adjust policy and curriculum to match the growing need for the English language in the competition of the contemporary global market. Chen Lin, a retired language professor, explains that the Chinese cities that host these world events ‘don’t want to be
laughed at’ (People’s Daily September 28 2009), a reaction that is quite understandable given the aims of some derogatory websites like Engrish.com to mock English translations in China. Furthermore, many have aptly pointed out that ‘Chinese people don’t need English-language signs’, contesting the conception of Chinese English signage as evidence of important linguistic creativity (Sept 28 2009). Therefore, this discussion of CE signage was not to suggest that they should not be standardized, but rather use the debates surrounding ‘Chinglish’ in public media as a focus of a larger series of issues, arguments and anxieties over hybrid identity instigated by the contact of English with Chinese languages over time. Indeed, similar to what Braj Kachru identifies as the ‘linguistic schizophrenia’ in India and resultant controversy over ‘Hinglish’ (Hindi + English), the attitudinal divide present in China’s indecision over embracing modernity or rejecting it, advocating English or defending Chinese languages (and etc.) seems to manifest itself in the hybridity of Chinglish language and culture and the debates this pidgin has generated. Although China can be drawn in parallel with other Expanding Circle nations like Singapore and Japan, the country’s unique transformation from one of the world’s poorest nations to one of the global market’s greatest rivals makes for cultural transitions that are largely unforeseeable. As China approaches yet another international event hosted in another of its major cities, the question of whether the nation will increase in polyvocality and linguistic creativity or alternatively achieve the government’s desire to have a more homogenous society of standardized languages and ‘pure’ identities remains to be answered.
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**Postcolonial Theory**
