

From Mandarin Monopoly to Sinitic Polypoly: The Story of Dubbing (*Peiyin*) in Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper takes a historical anthropological approach to charting the intricate relationships between the industry of *peiyin* (dubbing, voice-over), the state institutions, and the public in shaping Taiwan's sociolinguistic soundscape since 1945. Grounded in multi-year ethnographic research with the *peiyin* industry and archival sources, this paper discerns three stages—industrialisation, popularisation, and diversification—through which the industry not only facilitated the state in establishing the Mandarin monopoly, but also contributed to the disestablishment of that very monopoly by introducing Sinitic polypoly to the public over time. In so doing, this article contributes to the anthropological and sociolinguistic literature on Mandarin in Taiwan with a dynamic account of *peiyin* both as a sociolinguistic practice and a social force.

Keywords

language ideologies – creative industries – audiovisual creativity – dubbing – voice acting – Sinitic polypoly

1 Introduction

In June 2019, several trailers for the newest episode of *Xinpusen jiating* (辛普森家庭), Taiwan's Mandarin-dubbed version of the American animated series *The Simpsons*, teased the appearance of Hsieh Long-jie (謝龍介), a Tainan city councillor of the Kuomintang (KMT), as the episode's celebrity

guest voice actor. In addition to the usual animated cutscenes, these short promotional clips featured documentary-like snippets in which Hsieh was seen voicing his lines in Taigi (Taiwanese Hokkien). While the Mandarin dub of the show is famed for its cunningly localised puns through code-mixing and satires against Taiwanese politicians, including Hsieh, viewers appeared to be more entertained by his Taigi-saturated script lines than his professional identity. For days, both traditional and social media continued to fuel the already excited public discourse of this linguistic novelty. Reporters exaggerated that Hsieh ‘wasted his voice-acting talent for politics’ (e.g. Zhuang, 2019); netizens fondly commented on how ‘normal’ and ‘pleasant’ Hsieh’s Taigi performance was. From the business standpoint, these trailers were extremely successful attention grabbers;¹ nonetheless, from a linguistic anthropological viewpoint, I could not help but compare this happening with other similar past incidents where *peiyin* (配音, commonly known as ‘dubbing’ or ‘voice-over’ outside the Mandarin-speaking and other Sinitic communities),² and its practitioners, the *peiyin yuan* (voice actors), had been foregrounded in public discourse.

In Taiwan, *peiyin* refers to the specialised postproduction practice in the entertainment industry that concentrates on producing voice recordings (hence the word *pei-yin*, viz. ‘to add voice/sound’). The Taiwanese *peiyin* industry, unlike their counterparts in other countries including the US and in Europe (cf. Chaume, 2004, 2014; Díaz Cintas, 2008), does not further differentiate between dubbing recording for imported media and voice-over recording for original content. It is rather common to observe *peiyin* professionals involved in multiple tasks at once, including script production, translation, voice acting, sound recording, and mixing. For them, *peiyin* is not so much audiovisual translation as a collaborative, creative production of commercialised language and sound. For years, Standard Mandarin Guoyu (lit., ‘national language’, henceforward Guoyu) has served as the default medium for *peiyin*; yet, other Mandarin and Sinitic varieties have slowly but gradually been adopted as secondary, and even primary, medium for *peiyin*. In fact, since as early as the 1970s, co-occurrence of these language varieties in *peiyin* has been practised. Without doubt, such linguistic representation was by no means always well received by audiences, nor was it entirely encouraged by the sponsors or tolerated by the state.

1 Personal communication with the involved voice director, CC. Throughout this paper, personally identifiable information, including names, is removed and/or replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identities of key informants.

2 My research has indicated that, while differently pronounced, the Chinese word *peiyin* (配音) denotes the same media practice known as ‘voice-over’, ‘dubbing’, or ‘voice acting’ in English across different Sinophone communities, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia, and overseas diasporas in the US.

If the use of languages other than Guoyu was in fact nothing new, then we must investigate what prompted people then and now to respond so differently to Mandarin-*peiyin* programmes, a phenomenon that linguistic anthropologists understand as ‘language ideologies’ (Irvine, 1989; Kroskrity, 2000). The body of work on language ideologies examines speakers’ beliefs and feelings about language on the premise that these ideological behaviours not only mediate the macro cultural and political-economic system in which these speakers inhabit, but also shape and induce changes to the micro linguistic behaviours of these speakers. Thus, the reactions towards *peiyin* lend us a window into Taiwan’s changing language politics as a ‘cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests’ (Irvine, 1989: 255).

In this paper, I adopt a historical anthropological approach to charting the development of Taiwan’s *peiyin* industry, amid the rapidly shifting sociocultural conceptions of language and the volatile political-economic conditions. Grounded on my longitudinal ethnographic research spanning 2016 and 2021, I draw on first-person narratives from three generations of *peiyin* professionals and the second-hand archival records from 1953 through 2020 (consisting of roughly 4,100 entries) to contextualise the three stages of the industry, namely, industrialisation, popularisation, and diversification. Rather than analysing *peiyin* either through a sporadic, incidental snippet of language politics, or through a specific localisation product, I investigate it as a socially motivated cultural process whose importance can be unpacked only when both the social actors and the larger social context are accounted for. In doing so, I demonstrate that *peiyin* language is historically contingent on various forces, including state influences, capitalist investments, ventriloquial artistry, and socially motivated language ideologies. Studying *peiyin* in context, I thus submit, not only shows us how *peiyin* helps to shape present-day Taiwan’s sociolinguistic soundscape, but also lends us useful insights into Taiwan’s language politics in display and in practice.

2 *Peiyin* as a Sociolinguistic Phenomenon

The filmmaking business in Taiwan speaks volumes about Taiwan’s unique place in the modernisation stories of East Asian nation states. Since its retreat to Taiwan in 1949 and through the early 1990s, the ruling party KMT continued to push its social engineering agenda in subsuming the former Japanese colonial subjects under ‘the monoculturalist national regime’ (Chun, 2017: 59). Operating under the modernist nation state ideological apparatus (Bauman &

Briggs, 2003), the state saw the production of a unified people and a consciousness of peoplehood as ‘Chinese’ could only be realised through the creation of a shared lingua-cultural value system. Accordingly, many assimilation programmes and policies, including the Mandarin-Only Movement (Guoyu yundong) and the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong), heavily regimented the expressions of language and culture, favouring the designated ‘national language’ Guoyu and the ‘high’ Chinese culture over other ‘vernacular’ Sinitic counterparts. Since the late 1980s, with gradual democratisation in both political and other social arenas, and a full-scale integration into the global economy, these top-down enforcements of monoculturalism have been slowly replaced by inclusive policies of ‘(cosmopolitan) “transnationalism” and (indigenous) “multiculturalism”’ (Chun, 2017: 58). The ‘vernacular’ Sinitic lingua-cultural expressions were significantly revalorised and placed side by side with Guoyu and Chineseness.

Indeed, observations abound that the culturally dominant language ideology had placed Guoyu above all other language varieties on the sociolinguistic hierarchy until at least the late 1990s (Huang, 1993; Wei, 2008). These authors not only attribute this Mandarin monopoly to the institutional regimentations enacted through educational programmes and language-related policies under the Mandarin-Only Movement. They also single out the willing adherence and contribution to this linguistic regimentation from the broadcasting and entertainment industries (I. Lin, 2013). Various studies have pointed out how televised programmes targeted Mandarin-speaking populations at the expense of Taigi monolinguals, which has not only deprived the latter of access to the content but also ruptured family relationships to varying degrees (e.g. S. Lin, 2009; Sandel, 2003).

With the lift of the Mandarin-Only regulations and the democratisation of mass media since the 1990s, the dominant ideological stance towards language has steadily shifted away from worshipping Guoyu towards embracing varying degrees of multilingualism (Sugano, 2012). From this period onwards, the entertainment industry has gradually shied away from Mandarin favouritism and begun to establish the cultural economic model that I call ‘Sinitic polypoly’. That is, content creators mobilise ‘living languages other than the standard one, whose hegemonic projection of uniformity is subverted through a straightforward representation that refuses to cover up dissonance with uniformity’ (Shih, 2007: 5). In doing so, Sinitic polypoly has introduced alternative auditory experiences unavailable in Mandarin-language media, as showed by the above example of the politician Hsieh Long-jie’s Taigi-*pei*yin guest role in *Xinpusen jiating*. Thus, a common theme of the public discourse regarding

peiyin since the 1990s concerns the co-occurrence of Mandarin and other Sinitic varieties side by side in *peiyin* media. Intellectuals and amateur observers alike positively assess how this multilingual practice by voice actors effectively challenges, if not entirely shatters, the monopoly of Standard Mandarin.

Contrary to the heightened attention it receives in the public discourse, *peiyin* remains surprisingly understudied outside the field of translation studies. The very few studies that examine *peiyin* as a social practice, rather than as a particular media translation case, have unanimously conjectured that the *peiyin* industry has always been a close and voluntary collaborator of the state in perpetuating Mandarin monopoly (Jan, 2017; Lai, 2014). Oli Jan, for instance, argues that ‘dubbing artist performance follows [a] strictly “Biaozhun-Guoyu” [i.e. Standard Mandarin] system and is alienated from the natural speech in Taiwan’ (2017: 9). I build on this scholarship’s acknowledgement of the potential role of the *peiyin* industry in supporting the symbolic dominance of Standard Mandarin (Bourdieu, 1991); however, I disagree with the argument that conveniently brackets the industry with the state and its coercive lingua-cultural regimentation. First of all, the *peiyin* industry is not a propaganda agency of the state. As a capitalist postproduction sector, producers are willing to violate and/or bypass regulations to meet market expectations, from which economic profits generate. Secondly, voice actors are not agentless puppets who mindlessly ventriloquise for the state. While they may be influenced by different social forces, as professional performers voice actors enjoy creative autonomy in enacting characters and script lines through language and voice artistry. Furthermore, the audiences are not passive sponges that simply absorb Mandarin-saturated *peiyin* media. As individuals with agency, they in/directly participate in the production of *peiyin* media through consumption as well as public discourse.

Most importantly, I must note the danger of attending merely to the notional sense of ‘monolingualism’ and ‘multilingualism’ as the culturally dominant language ideologies of Taiwan in different periods. While useful in discerning the observed changes in *peiyin* media over time, they only indicate language politics *in display* and cannot provide ‘a socially motivated explanation for the sociocultural processes that inform the local beliefs about language and the linguistic products’ (Kroskrity, 1998: 115) that are superficially labelled ‘monolingualism’ or ‘multilingualism’. Only by addressing these as language politics *in practice*, as I delineate below in this article, can we begin to understand the underlying ideological constructs and the structural forces that both regiment and emancipate how *peiyin* professionals utilise language and how the general public responds to such representational tropes.

3 The Dawn of the *Peiyin* Profession: Mid-1940s to 1950s

In the early years right after World War II and the Chinese Civil War, the KMT regime saw the political potential of the entertainment and broadcasting media in propagandising for itself and against the Chinese Communists in mainland China. The regime soon began to pour funding and resources into these sectors, incentivising cultural producers in Shanghai (Yang, 1996) and Hong Kong (Chu, 2003) to collaborate with their counterparts in Taipei, or better yet, relocate to Taiwan. In the meanwhile, to fully nationalise (i.e. Sinicise) the former Japanese colony, the regime swiftly limited, and subsequently prohibited, the dissemination of all Japanese-language and -produced media, including printed publications, radio broadcasting, and films (Lee, 2017).

Despite these social and political conditions favouring their development, the entertainment sectors struggled to integrate into a coordinated and revenue-generating production force. In particular, the filmmaking industry found itself pulled between two equally skilled but differently oriented groups: mainland Chinese experts with enough lingua-cultural capital and experience in producing the nationalist trope favoured by the regime, and Taiwanese professionals with expertise in film style and vernacular capital (i.e. Taigi) embraced by the market (Su, 2020). As such, during this period the industry had to resort to screening imported Japanese- and American-produced films. Film screenings relied heavily on subtitling since the recording and sound technologies necessary for voice-over production were not available. Theatres that wished to provide a richer audiovisual experience had to recruit Taigi-speaking or Mandarin-capable amateurs to 'interpret' the films and replace professional *benshi* who specialised in Japanese live narration (Luo, 1996).³ In other areas, radio broadcasting experienced much less difficulty with the regime relocation and remained the most widely consumed media (I. Lin, 2013: 45). The regime utilised the infrastructure of radio broadcasting systems left by the Japanese (Lee, 2017) and began directing stations to air programmes aimed at cultivating Chineseness and promoting Mandarin proficiency.

It is in this context that *peiyin* emerged as a piecemeal business for actors, voice specialists, and sound engineers.⁴ The demand for Mandarin-capable newscasters (*boyinyuan*) and voice specialists skyrocketed as theatres and radio stations eagerly sought new revenues to both make up the investment

3 *Benshi* (弁士), also known as *piān-sū* (辯士), was a profession that provided live narration for silent films at theatres during Japanese colonial rule. For a detailed discussion, see Dym (2003).

4 Personal communication with voice actor CY and sound engineers HT and CM.

losses due to the ban on Japanese media and to capitalise on the business opportunities for patriotic media (Sugano, 2012: 145–150). Before long, with the completion of the updated recording facilities in the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC; Zhongyang dianying shiye gufenyouxiangongsi, 中央電影事業股份有限公司), *peiyin* finally got off the ground to become a standalone postproduction sector in the entertainment industry in the summer of 1959 (*Central Daily News*, 1959).

4 The Industrialisation of the *Peiyin* Profession: 1960s to Mid-1970s

Although they had not directly benefited from the previously mentioned state investments as other entertainment sectors had in the early years of the post-war era, actors and newscasters did take advantage of the increased demand for voice-over recording from these sectors. However, according to the recollections I gathered from veteran voice actors, these business opportunities were still considered by many as unstable side jobs through which one earned one's 'petty cash'. The real push for these voice workers to take *peiyin* as a serious full-time profession and to invest in developing their production force came from the technological advances in broadcasting and sound engineering, and the heightened interests in audiovisual media throughout the 1960s.

First of all, the three terrestrial television stations (Laosantai)⁵ and the increased availability of affordable television sets dismantled the spatiotemporal confinement of theatres by introducing audiovisual entertainment to a wider population. This new media platform allowed cultural producers and investors to experiment with different forms of audiovisual expressions that neither radio broadcasting nor cinematography could offer. Additionally, a series of breakthroughs in recording technologies, such as sound-on-film, multi-channel sound system, and videotape recording, emancipated voice performers and sound engineers from filming locations. Unlike in the previous decade, voice workers no longer had to be corralled in a site with the filming crew to provide (semi-)synchronous voice-overs. Instead, they could now travel between different sites throughout the day to concentrate on automated dialogue replacement (ADR), the postproduction process that overrides the

5 Laosantai (老三台) refers collectively to the first three terrestrial television stations that obtained the official permits to broadcast and produce programmes between 1960s and the early 1990s. They are: Taiwan Television (TTV, Taiwan dianshi gongsi, 臺灣電視公司), which started broadcasting in 1962; China Television (CTV, Zhongguo dianshi gongsi, 中國電視公司) in 1969; and Chinese Television Service (CTS, Zhonghua dianshi gongsi, 中華電視公司) in 1971.

original soundtrack to improve audio quality and/or to replace the recorded dialogue. Last but not least, eyeing the profitability of television commercials, investors and television stations turned to airing dubbed/subtitled foreign films and programmes to entice and retain audiences. Soon, the high ratings and resulting high revenues further convinced these sectors to more boldly introduce such programmes to cater to market demand (*Central Daily News*, 1968, 1969; *China Times*, 1962).

These developments have significantly incentivised not only cultural producers to streamline voice production but also many skilled voice workers to organise as an independent postproduction force dedicated to voice production. Film companies and investors started to pour in resources to help voice workers set up studios and upgrade recording facilities. As a result, independent studios slowly emerged around the state-owned CMPC as well as major television and radio stations in Taipei. Actors who had treated *peiyin* as a side job began to practice it as a full-time profession; sound engineers migrated from filming sites to these newly established studios. A veteran voice actor in his mid-seventies thus recalled his earlier years as a young apprentice (*genban*) in the late 1960s:

My mentor and I had to 'give up' our acting careers so we could keep up with our *peiyin* cases. I had only been acting for a few years, but he had been acting for two decades. And before he knew it, he was already a full-time *peiyin yuan* [voice actor]. I simply followed his footsteps and became one eventually.⁶

At first, despite the existing language regulations, *peiyin* professionals enjoyed the liberty, and were encouraged by investors, to record in both Mandarin and other Sinitic varieties (predominately Taigi) in order to secure higher ratings.⁷ Yet, as the Cultural Revolution began in mainland China in the mid-1960s, the KMT regime heavy-handedly pushed forward its 'countermeasure' by enforcing the 'Chinese culture [as] an object of discourse not only in political terms [but also in the] habits of everyday practice' (Chun, 2017: 19). As such, the unprecedented popularity of Taigi programmes and commercials soon attracted harsh

6 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

7 For instance, shortly after TTV began broadcasting in 1962, the central government issued a memo on media broadcasting in 1963 (titled *Guangbo ji dianshi wuxiandiantai jiemu fudao yuanze*, 廣播及電視無線電台節目輔導原則), advising the use of Standard

criticism from legislators and state officials in favour of the Mandarin-Only Movement and the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (*Central Daily News*, 1972; *China Times*, 1970a, 1970b, 1970c).

Eventually, the lingua-cultural vitality in *peiyin* was tempered by varying degrees of state regulations and regular scrutiny of media, including the infamous 1976 Broadcasting Acts (Guangbo dianshi fa, 廣播電視法) that mandated strict restrictions on the use of non-Guoyu varieties in media. On top of these restrictions, the state agencies strategically prioritised resources and permits for Mandarin-language media, causing the number of Taigi ones to plummet drastically (Su, 2020). Just as cultural producers started to align more closely with the state to avoid penalties, the availability and demand for Mandarin-dubbed media also skyrocketed. In the meantime, the market success of Hong Kong's Cantonese-language films encouraged Taiwan-based investors and distribution agents to produce Mandarin-*peiyin* films and programmes for both Taiwan and the much larger Mandarin-speaking market.⁸

By the early 1970s, *peiyin* had been undisputedly accepted into the everyday sphere as a distinct sociolinguistic phenomenon and had even begun to influence people's views on the politics of language. First-person narratives from veteran *peiyin* professionals and printed sources from this period suggest a strongly 'pragmatic' ideological stance towards Mandarin *peiyin* as a means for linguistic sharedness. Opinion pieces highlighted the necessity of administering Mandarin *peiyin* for all viewers, particularly pupils and the elderly, to ensure equal access to content (*China Times*, 1969; Dai, 1971, 1974; Hu, 1970; Ye, 1976b). Xia Yuan-yu (夏元瑜), a professor of theatre studies at the College of Chinese Culture, wrote:

With Mandarin *peiyin*, we can remove subtitles.⁹ Nowadays people who read also understand Guoyu, including many seniors in the rural areas. Still, most people cannot read as fast as they can understand the spoken

Mandarin and Chinese subtitles as the standard broadcasting language medium. At this point, Article 3 of the memo still permitted the use of non-Mandarin Sinitic varieties, aka 'vernaculars' (*fangyan*, 方言), as the broadcasting language medium, but on the condition that these programmes consist of no more than 50 percent of the overall airtime permitted for the station.

- 8 Personal communications with voice actors CZ, DM, and WZ and studio managers CT and YU; also see *China Times* (1966).
- 9 The Broadcasting Acts and other media regulations have also made subtitling mandatory for all audiovisual media, whose influence remains visible in modern-day Taiwan's mediascape from television programmes and films to online videos. I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the crucial role of subtitling. While it is beyond the

language. I firmly believe in the benefits of making *peiyin* for all foreign films and programmes in Guoyu.

XIA, 1976

Veteran *peiyin* professionals also expressed the same linguistic pragmatism, often citing as proof their work experiences with linguistically diverse professionals 'back in the day'. In an unplanned interview¹⁰ I happened to have with a group of senior voice actors in 2016, a well-revered actor thus recounted:

Back then [the 1960s and 1970s] we actors spoke different speeches. Minnan of course, then we also had Shanghainese, Shantungnese, and the like. It was easier for us to just all use Guoyu on the set. If you couldn't speak Guoyu smoothly, then we would just cover [your lines] for you. We just couldn't afford the time to teach you line by line. This way [i.e. through *peiyin*], you can focus on acting.¹¹

Other senior *peiyin* professionals at the table nodded in agreement with her emphasis on the convenience of communicating in Guoyu and of replacing soundtrack through *peiyin*. 'Why must we use Guoyu?', I acted dumb (and I was, in terms of my knowledge of voice acting and *peiyin* at the time). Her husband, who had come out of retirement just a few years before and has since been directing as a voice director, added the following comment that adds ideological weight to her earlier explanation:

Guoyu represents our national unity. Because our works will be broadcasted nationwide, we have to use what represents national unity. Protagonists are the key. They need to set an example, to speak perfect Guoyu. What will the viewers think if they see handsome men and beautiful women speak with a funny accent?

focus of this article, much against the public perception of the dichotomy between *peiyin* and subtitling (i.e. that one can be replaced by the other, as Xia indicated here), the *peiyin* industry has long been responsible for and involved in subtitling. Indeed, *peiyin* may have seen its ups and downs in the Taiwanese market; but as far as the transnational Sinophone market is concerned, Taiwanese-made *peiyin* has always been very successful. In fact, in recent years, the Taiwanese market has seen a huge demand for *peiyin* media. Studio managers and personnel from television stations have often expressed their surprise to me that viewers now frequently reach out and request *peiyin* for foreign programmes available only with subtitles.

10 Personal communication with studio managers CT and YU, and voice actors LF, DW, and LX.

11 Several news columns and opinion pieces (e.g. Dai, 1971; Ye, 1976a) have made similar observation on voice replacement.

Often, narratives from this senior generation concerning *peiyin* would easily summon linguistic nationalism. Veteran *peiyin* professionals described the 'educational purposes' of Mandarin *peiyin* as the means to cultivate the cultural notion of 'Chinese peoplehood'. Through *peiyin*, they presented their viewers with an audiovisual alternative in which individual differences are watered down by lingua-cultural unison. For them, Guoyu has the illocutionary force (Austin, 1975) to unify people for a common purpose, be it defeating the evil antagonists, searching communal bonds, and so forth. In doing so, they connected this utilitarian language ideology about Mandarin to nationalism, arguing for the importance of socialising the audience via a 'unified' language, Guoyu, to proper citizenship (as described by Anderson, 1991).

Yet, this is not to say that the *peiyin* industry has since become the dedicated ally and active enforcer of Mandarin monoculturalism. Quite the contrary. As soon as the public began to raise doubts about the strict regulations on media and language, and to voice their appetite for a refreshed audiovisual experience, the industry embarked on experimenting, boldly, but very carefully, adding language varieties other than Guoyu in *peiyin*.

5 The Popularisation of Mandarin *Peiyin*: Mid-1970s to Mid-1990s

Faced with the drastic changes going on in the political public sphere in the years between 1970 and 2000, the cultural industries sweated to find a middle ground between state, market, and civil society. Internationally, diplomatic setbacks and shifting international politics, especially the recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the United Nations, led the KMT regime to tighten its grip on publishing and broadcasting, among other sectors, as a form of retaliation against PRC-friendly nations. For instance, the state indiscriminately banned all forms of Japanese media (Lee, 2017: 58–60; Sugano, 2012: 203–206) in response to Japan's decision to resume diplomatic ties with the PRC in 1972, forcing the entertainment industry to laboriously remove Japanese symbols from all pre-ban imported media in order to continue sales (Luo, 1996). Domestically, pressured by waves of youth-led nationalist movements urging for a more realistic Taiwan-focused nation-building agenda for the new geopolitical reality (Hsiao, 2012), literati, legislators, and state officials controverted the lingua-cultural notions of Chineseness and nationhood (see Sugano, 2012: chap. 7). The unprecedented attention and demand for the acceptance of 'vernaculars' (*fangyan*), particularly Taigi, from the public finally pushed more cultural producers to (in)directly challenge the state-endorsed Mandarin monoculturalism in the 1960s, as I described in the previous section.

For many in the *peiyin* industry, these years were remembered as ‘the most challenging but exciting days’ for the sheer amount of *peiyin* cases and the accompanying attention to their audiovisual creativity and representational tropes.¹² Programming department directors of the three TV stations and independent studios encouraged *peiyin* crews to experiment with non-Guoyu varieties. Script writers and translators embarked on complete localisations by rewriting the screen dialogues and editing out all culturally specific symbols from the footage (*United Daily News*, 1986).¹³ Most noticeably, the *peiyin* medium was no longer exclusively Guoyu. Voice actors now performed in other Mandarin varieties, including the highly stigmatised Taiwanese-accented Mandarin (Taiwan Guoyu),¹⁴ as well as Sinitic varieties such as Taigi and Hakka. *Tianlong tegong dui* (天龍特攻隊)—the Mandarin *peiyin* of the American drama series *The A-Team* made by and aired on TTV from 1984—was extremely well received for its spectacular characterisation of such linguistic novelty.¹⁵

However, the use of non-Guoyu varieties in *peiyin* did not always hit the market as successfully as the production crew wished, nor was it always tolerated by the state or welcomed by the public. Still, television stations and investors were undeterred by these pushbacks; on the contrary, they ventured forth by authorising *peiyin* professionals to code-mix language varieties. The *peiyin* adoption of the American soap opera *The Bold and Beautiful Ideas*, dubbed *Jinfen shijia* (金粉世家), was one such example. Hoping to reproduce the market success of TTV’s *Tianlong tegong dui*, CTV widely advertised how it would refresh audiences with a whole new audiovisual experience in *Jinfen shijia* (*United Daily News*, 1987). On 1 February 1988, the heightened enthusiasm towards this very first programme to be dubbed exclusively in Taigi was soon dampened by the underwhelming ratings of 17.4 percent and negative reactions from viewers immediately after it went on air (*United Daily News*, 1988b).

12 Personal communications with voice directors LF, LS, and CX, voice actors CH, CR, CX, DM, FV, LH, LY, WZ, and XY, studio managers CT and YU, and script translator LR.

13 See also Luo (1996) for a detailed discussion.

14 As I have argued elsewhere (Chen, 2018), following Kubler (1981), Cheng (1985), and Huang (1993), to name just a few, I differentiate Taiwanese-accented Mandarin (commonly but derogatorily referred to as Taiwan Guoyu, 臺灣國語) from Taiwan Mandarin (Taiwan Huayu, 臺灣華語). While sociolinguists of Taiwan have been advocating for a recategorisation of the mainstream Mandarin variety spoken by contemporary Taiwanese as Taiwan Mandarin since the mid-1980s, to date there has not been enough theoretical interventions into the subtle distinctions nor any satisfactory definitions of the two in question. See He (2009) for further discussion and definitions of these Mandarin varieties.

15 Personal communication with voice actors XC, CX, LL, and FY.

While the leading *peiyin* chief insisted in an interview that the *peiyin* programme had received more applause than protest for its innovation, CTV was overwhelmed by complaints from viewers and officials (*China Times*, 1988a; *TV Scan Weekly*, 1988). In the end, on 12 February, the station issued a statement accepting its marketing failure and announce the decision to prematurely terminate the show (*China Times*, 1988b).

This *peiyin* programme may have been a commercial failure for the investors but more crucially, it served as the venue for the public to unleash deeply rooted ideological sentiment towards the politics of language and representations. On 22 February, a few days after CTV's announcement that it was cancelling *Jinfen shijia*, artist Lin Xin (林鑫) published a cartoon in *United Daily News* that satirically but tellingly captured the core of this *peiyin* 'controversy' (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1 Cartoon by Lin Xin published in the *United Daily News* on 22 February 1988. Lin titled the cartoon: 'Dubbing in foreign shows? Don't click' (Waiguo yingji peiyin bu laidia 外國影集配音不來電?). SOURCE: X. LIN (1988).

In his cartoon, Lin depicts an elderly couple watching television, baffled by the dialogue between two stereotyped Caucasian-looking actors, one male and one female, dubbed in a mixed use of language varieties. Whether or not this dialogue actually came from an episode of *Jinfen shiji* is of little concern to us; rather, it is its linguistic features that we must critically examine (Transcript 1).

Language	G	TM/T	G-TL
01 Actor	: 親愛的, 妳 Qinaide, ni darling	有無 youwu you have-AUX	來電 laidian ring-v
Darling, do you feel the romance [i.e. do we click]!?			
	T		
02 Actress	: 人 Lâng	無 put	愛, 你 不 倘 起搨 ài, lí buě- tàng khí-siáu
	myself-REFL	no-NEG	love you NEG can craze
I don't. You cannot get mad [at me]!			

TRANSCRIPT 1 ‘Darling, do we click?’
Note: Gloss of linguistic terms: AUX (auxiliary verbs); v (verbs); REFL (reflexive voice); NEG (negation).

In sharp contrast to the actress’s Taigi speech (line 02), the actor appears as a code-mixer (line 01), alternating between Guoyu (G), Taiwan Mandarin (TM) or Taigi (T),¹⁶ and Guoyu Teen Lingo (G-TL). Just as it was common in everyday life to observe less skilled Taigi users conversing with Taigi speakers through code-mixing (Kubler, 1981), the *peiyin* crew reportedly included a good amount of ‘modern lingo’ in the *peiyin* to encapsulate this ‘authentic’ sociolinguistic soundscape (*United Daily News*, 1988a). And yet, it is this very decision to fuse non-Taigi elements in the supposedly Taigi-exclusive dialogue that ignited the ordeal. Opinion pieces and news columns continued to appear in the following few months expressing strongly polarised views; legislators and state officials struggled to reach an agreement on how to handle the trope. Supporters evaluated the *peiyin* performance in *Jinfen shijia* favourably for the refreshed audiovisual experience it provided; opponents rebuked it for offering nothing but ‘fake voices’ (Ceng, 1988; *China Times*, 1988a; X. Lin, 1988; *United Daily News*, 1988c).

In my conversation with a Mandarin-Taigi voice actor who had worked on the case of *Jinfen shijia*, albeit only for some background characters, she made the following comment:

16 I should note that here it is ambiguous as to whether the intended reference is to Taiwan Mandarin or Taiwanese. As Kubler (1981) and Cheng (1985), among others, have pointed out, the use of *you* as an auxiliary verb (as opposed to Standard Mandarin, which does not allow for such syntactic function) is a unique feature of Taiwan Mandarin. This structure is believed to come from Taigi (*u* ‘have’ and *bo* ‘have not’). Thus, without explicit phonetic notification, it is hard to tell if the two words in question should counted as Taiwan Mandarin token *youwu* or Taigi token *ũ-bô*. That being said, it is still a clear example of linguistic divergence from Guoyu.

Peiyin is all about authenticity. It wasn't like we baselessly fabricated [that type of code-mixing language]. We dubbed with our voices what we did hear in life. . . . *Peiyin* reflects the reality; but to accept this reality or not, it's up to our clients and audiences. They hear what they want to hear.

While her words were slightly tainted with cynicism towards audiences, she did nonetheless underscore the influence they have over what can pass as acceptable *peiyin* and what cannot. Thus, it is undoubtedly useful to examine these reactions as individual, sporadic linguistic ideological responses to a particular *peiyin* case in detail. Yet, what would be more productive in discerning the culturally dominant beliefs about language is to view them as intertextually related metapragmatic commentaries on *peiyin* as a socially situated practice.

What their metapragmatic commentaries problematised was not the negative indexical connections of Taigi, at least not entirely, as many studies have argued (e.g. Huang, 1993; Su, 2020). In fact, throughout the 1970s and 1990s, there were very few, if any, complaints against Taigi programmes. Irrespective of state regulations, Taigi programmes have actually been quite successful. Rather, these commentaries reflected the ambivalent feelings towards the rapidly eroding diglossic structure (Ferguson, 1959) that had strictly regimented the social spheres of Guoyu and non-Guoyu Sinitic varieties. As Taiwanese society sought to reimagine nationhood and peoplehood during the politically unsettling period of the 1970s through the 1990s, *peiyin* professionals and their audiences alike were jointly negotiating the most appropriate lingua-cultural representation for this emerging identity. While *peiyin* professionals aimed to recreate *peiyin* by incorporating lived auditory experiences with which their audiences could easily resonate, the audiences were not yet ready for such overly realistic similitude on national television programmes.

In their first-person accounts, voice actors all recounted how they sometimes felt torn between their 'linguistic leverage' and their struggle to find 'acceptable' lingua-cultural representations. They spoke of how it was 'fun to play with different vernaculars' since 'the audiences can easily associate with these expressions',¹⁷ as a voice actor who started her career in the mid-1980s thus narrated:

It's true that some of my colleagues exaggerated *their* non-standard Guoyu [tamen (de) Bu-biaozhun de Guoyu] to achieve 'dramatic effects', to make *them* laugh! But this is not because we were mocking *their* lan-

17 Personal communications with voice actors FV, LY, LH, LS, CX, and XY.

guage. . . . We wanted to mock the absurdity of our lives based on these language distinctions. *Peiyin* is a reflection of our society; it's never really a fiction. . . . But then, audiences often quickly overgeneralise our *peiyin* as some ill-intentioned mockery.

In describing the language alternation in dubbing, the voice actor, like most of her other fellow colleagues, made an (un)conscious distinction between different pronouns and possessives, as well as the connections between these demonstratives and morality.

Our main mission is to help people communicate with one another, to introduce *them* to the content in the language *we* all knew. So, it was Guoyu. . . . It definitely was not Standard Guoyu [Biaozhun Guoyu]. C'mon, no one really speaks that in everyday life. *We* made *peiyin* after *them* [the audience], to say what *they* would normally say, so *they* would feel *our* performance in the heart.

Non-standard uses of Guoyu were only for dramatic purposes, to 'spice' things up, as they put it. She, like her other linguistically mindful voice actor cohorts, noted that the problem does not lie in the language varieties per se, but their sociocultural indexicalities, that is, the local categories of social differentiation based on language (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Just as is made obvious in the voice actor's dialectic notion of 'reflection' vis-à-vis 'fiction' here, the source of the previously mentioned controversies lies in that the mixture of various language varieties unsettled the established lingua-cultural imagination begot through state regimentation on language. It reminded people of the inconvenient sociolinguistic reality of the time—while standardisation had been institutionally hailed as the means through which one achieves and demonstrates his or her proper citizenship, in everyday life people used all sorts of Mandarin varieties and switched between different Sinitic varieties on a regular basis (Shih, 2007).

6 The Diversification of the *Peiyin* Media: Mid-1990s to Present

From the 1990s onwards, political democratisation and the accompanying institutional reforms have engendered even greater society-wide transformations at all levels, gradually loosening the tight social fabric of Guoyu-centred monoculturalism. In particular, the termination of the Mandarin-Only Movement in 1987 and the implementation of Mother-Tongue Education (Muyu jiaoxue)

in 1993 benefited the entertainment industry by lifting state censorship on lingua-cultural expressions. Coupled with the legalisation of privately owned cable networks and the colossal spike in demand for *peiyin* programmes from Japanese anime to Korean soap operas, producers and *peiyin* professionals enthusiastically ‘toyed’ with every possible lingua-cultural expression that they could imagine:

Too many *peiyin* cases. We were extremely busy, almost had to work from 8 am to 2 am every single day. We pretty much lived in the studios. . . . In the past, we had been able to only do so much with our voice. But now, because the audiences were much more comfortable hearing different ‘languages’, and because there were no strict regulations anymore, we could play with different ‘vernaculars’ more freely. . . . Say, if I can only do nine voices, being able to use another language, then I get to voice a total of 18 characters! [i.e. the product of 9×2].¹⁸

The wide varieties and availability of *peiyin* media, in turn, further normalised the very *peiyin* practice that had still not been well received in the 1980s (Zhang, 2001). As coexistence and mixing of codes had now been accepted as legitimate *peiyin* strategies, professionals were no longer constrained by the physiology of one’s voice organs. Merely by switching to another language variety, one could easily double the number of voices with the same set of voice techniques. Thus, instead of fixating on ‘languages’—and the accompanying ideological disputes and emotional baggage—the discourse has shifted towards validating these linguistic varieties as different yet equally valuable ‘voices’. The changes brought by the professionals’ skilful combination of the linguistics and the acoustics quickly mesmerised the public; what originally started as internally oriented multiculturalism (Chun, 2017) became a profitable practice for the *peiyin* industry in the local market. This linguistic diversity in *peiyin* is now deemed the appropriate way to ‘reflect Taiwanese society’ (L. Lin, 2006).

Another new development was evident in the shift in marketing strategies. Rather than focusing solely on the local market, the *peiyin* industry began to export more proactively such highly localised *peiyin* media to the Greater China Region and overseas Sinophone markets. Soon, Taiwanese-made *peiyin* media—including Japanese animated series and variety shows, American cartoons and movies, Korean soap operas, Southeast Asian media, and locally

18 Personal communications with voice actors CH, LL, FY, GL, and WA, studio managers CT and YU, and script translator LR.

produced films and radio dramas—swept across the transnational Sinophone markets as tokens of trendiness and cosmopolitanism.¹⁹

Yet, in recent years, this otherwise successful business move has also put the *peiyin* industry in a dilemma reminiscent of the Mandarin-Only era. Faced with vastly different demands and state regulations of the export markets on language expressions, professionals have slowly started to retrieve the practices they and their predecessors had followed during the 1970s and 1980s. Voice actors who now travel between studios in Taipei, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing all expressed similar concerns in our conversations:²⁰

What we do here [in Taiwan] is one thing. You can't simply reproduce that in other places. Maybe it was still fine in the early 2000s because our *peiyin* was extremely popular. We were the one leading the trend. But now [2017], you have to respect the local rules more. They have developed their own liking. Not just that, because we are selling our *peiyin* to overseas markets, you need to have one standard so we can ensure everyone enjoy our *peiyin* in exactly the same way. It's just like Disney films or McDonald's meals.

Narratives of this kind that argue for a standardised *peiyin* expression have become much more common recently, as evidenced in my longitudinal fieldwork. While these talks have yet entered the public sphere, they seem to suggest a (willing) return to the monoculturalism of the 1970s and 1980s. What really differs between now and then is that this contemporary monoculturalism applies not only to Guoyu but also other Sinitic varieties. It is also very common to observe Taigi- and Hakka-*peiyin* professionals, like their Guoyu-*peiyin* colleagues, police one another to ensure they produce the most 'correct' and 'representative' way of speaking Taigi and Hakka, respectively, despite the existing regional variations.

This trend seems to suggest that just as the notion of 'diversity' typically denotes internally oriented multilingualism in contemporary Taiwan, it can also be used to justify the need for monolingualism in the era of globalisation. The institutional and political economic forces that these professionals have been dealing with for decades are becoming more irrelevant as they become more transnational. As they talk about producing a *peiyin* expression that everyone can share, these professionals ideologically subject everyone

19 For a detailed discussion, see Gold (1993).

20 Personal communications with voice actors FY, LS, CC, GL, CM, and FM, and studio managers CT and YU.

to a territorialised entity (as opposed to the deterritorialised one Gupta and Ferguson argued for in 1992) that is accessible only to those who understand and abide by this idealised, standardised monolingual-cultural system on a global scale. In this sense, Mandarin *peiyin* not only provides the practical means to a shared audiovisual experience but also becomes the ideological manifestation of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) with which all Mandarin-intelligent Sinophone communities within and beyond Taiwan share.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the developments of the *peiyin* industry against the background of Taiwan's rapid social changes brought forth by happenings in the political field since 1945. I analysed the interdependent relationships that the *peiyin* industry had with the state and the public. Unlike prior sociolinguistic studies of Taiwan that have tended to view it as a close co-operator with the state in regimenting lingua-cultural expressions, I demonstrated how the industry has never been a mindless dummy ventriloquising on behalf of the state. Rather, it has always been a careful venturer which, while complying with the existing regulations on language, was more than willing to challenge these rules and experiment with different lingua-cultural representations. Since as early as the 1950s, the *peiyin* industry has played a major role both in shaping the sociolinguistic soundscape of Taiwan and in influencing the audiovisual experiences of other Mandarin-speaking communities, particularly in mainland China. Locally, faced with tightened regulations on media and language from the state, *peiyin* experts went along with the enforcement of the Mandarin-Only Movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s; but they too raised and have continued to heighten appreciation and support for non-Guoyu Sinitic languages in media from the 1980s onwards. Transnationally, through their Mandarin-*peiyin* creation, Taiwanese *peiyin* professionals (in) directly introduced foreign media to mainland Chinese viewers in the 1980s, and still impose a significant lingua-cultural influence on overseas Sinophone youth today. With increasing investments from major transnational entertainment service providers like Netflix, we could be witnessing a different stage for Taiwan's *peiyin* industry against the background of the global production chain in the near future. To conclude, only by attending not merely to language politics *in display* but more importantly to language politics *in practice*, can we balance between a microscopic analysis of *peiyin* media and a macro view of the politico-economic constraints on the *peiyin* industry. It is through this

multilevel analysis, I maintain, that we can productively research ‘the specific practices and decisions made by those involved in dubbing when faced with linguistic variation’ (Queen, 2004: 534) and ultimately understand the true significance of Mandarin *peiyin* not only locally in Taiwan but also transnationally in the Sinophone world.

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