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The enregisterment of Putonghua in practice

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Abstract

This paper explores Putonghua enregisterment as a supra-local linguistic standard through daily discursive practice of its speakers. Drawing on ethnographic data including observation, interview and documentation, I discuss the emergence and spread of Putonghua as a prestige register of spoken as well as written Chinese, and its indexical values associated with speaker attributes such as social status and education backgrounds. I argue that the standardization of Putonghua is a deliberate institutional practice closely related to the making of the nation; it is however, part of a more general and more tacit enregistering process – an ideological process through which the symbolic dominance of Putonghua is accepted as natural and normative.

Key words: Enregisterment; Putonghua; Symbolic power; Indexicality; Legitimate language.

1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with the 'enregistering' process of Putonghua (普通话 literally 'common speech') – the Chinese national language standardized upon Beijing Mandarin – and the way in which the symbolic power of Putonghua is being accepted as natural within a largely monoglot language ideology (Dong, 2009; see Silverstein, 1996 for the notion of monoglot ideology). Based on ethnographic observation and metapragmatic discourse analysis, this research describes how a once regional dialect, of which the linguistic features used to be perceived as unsophisticated and alien, is standardized as the national model for pronunciation (and to a less extent, for literacy), is associated with linguistic 'correctness', and is socially recognized as indexical of speaker attributes such as social status and education backgrounds. Drawing on the notions of enregisterment (Agha, 2003, 2005), symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), and indexicality (Silverstein, 2003), I suggest that the standardization of Putonghua is a deliberate institutional practice closely related to the making of the nation. It is however, part of a more general and more tacit enregistering process – an ideological process through which the symbolic dominance of Putonghua is accepted as natural and normative.

Putonghua, or 'common speech', is the standard language on mainland China. It is spoken, together with its close cousins g*uoyu* (国语national language) in Taiwan, *huayu* (华语Chinese language), in Singapore, and among Chinese diasporas in America and Europe (Li Wei, 2002) by approximately 1.2 billion people from all Chinese-speaking regions (Li W-C, 2004). Within mainland China, it is reported that 53% of the Chinese people are able to communicate in Putonghua (China Daily

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26/12/2004[2]). The linguistic features of Putonghua and its gradual evolution have been described in a number of studies (e.g. Bradley, 1992; Coblin, 2000; Chen, 1999; DeFrancis, 1984; Hashimoto, 1986; Hu, 1995; Kratocvil, 1968; Norman, 1988; Ramsey 1987). Recent research also addresses Putonghua as a central concern of the monoglot language ideology in China, and explores its indexical values in individual and group identity construction (Dong & Blommaert, 2009; Dong, 2009). Little research has been conducted, however, on Putonghua enregisterment, an arguably key issue that is able to address the gradual assumption and recognition of Putonghua as the center around which revolves the monoglot language ideology. The present study therefore aims to bridge this gap of knowledge by presenting and analyzing three examples of metapragmatic discourses on Putonghua to instantiate such a process in contemporary discursive practice in mainland China.

In order for us to understand the enregistering process of Putonghua, it is necessary to trace its historical and institutional standardization. After that, I shall focus on empirical data collected between 2006 and 2008 in Beijing to illustrate Putonghua enregisterment from three perspectives: a function of division, correctness, and its work in the making of the nation. But before embarking on that discussion, I shall offer a survey of the key theoretical notions that will be deployed in the remainder of the paper for interpreting and analyzing the empirical data.

2 Enregisterment, legitimate language, indexicality, and symbolic power

In a study of Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain, Asif Agha traces the processes whereby a once regional prestige variety is 'enregistered' as a supra-local standard and a status emblem in British society. The notion of enregisterment, in Agha's research, refers to 'processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms' (Agha, 2003, p. 231). Such processes, according to Agha (2003), are mediated by metapragmatic activities ranging from a 1920's cartoon to a newspaper article on the changes of Queen Elizabeth's English. Over the centuries, RP has not only become a socially recognized register, but also established itself as a national standard, and such establishing is not so much a matter of institutionally imposed behavior; rather, it is sedimentation of gradual changes in speech perception and production by its speakers, and more often than not, by its non-speakers alike, through metadiscursive activities that circulate the indexical values of RP.

Similar to RP, Putonghua is more than a socially recognized register – it is a national standard. It differs from RP, however, in that its formation as a national standard involves state institutions as an explicit and decisive player in the imposition of what Bourdieu calls 'the legitimate language' upon the individual linguistic habitus. Such imposition is materialized noticeably through the function of, and through, the collaboration between the educational system and the labor market – i.e. the school system produces educational qualifications which incline the pupils to endeavor in to speak the legitimate language so as to increase their value on the labor market

[2] *Chinadaily* 2004. Greater numbers speak Mandarin. Online documents at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-12/26/content_403419.htm Last viewed on 03/08/2009

(Bourdieu, 1991). Drawing on the historical backgrounds of the French society, Bourdieu describes the establishment and imposition of Parisian French as the legitimate language of the state. The Parisian dialect of French, as Bourdieu puts it, was the language of local bourgeoisies who achieved their social positions due to their mastery of the dominant language – the language that gave the bourgeoisies *de facto* monopoly of politics and thus of communication with the central government of the state. The relationship between the legitimate language and the nation in the case of French is dialectical: on the one hand, the production and circulation of the legitimate language presupposes the making of the 'nation', because the newly formed nation brings about changes in language usage and normalizes these changes through state institutions; on the other hand, the new nation is built on 'the common consciousness' (Davy, 1950, p.233, cited in Bourdieu, 1991, p.49) among the people and such 'common consciousness' is forged and fortified by a new language which is able to express the 'new' era. This dialectical relationship is instantiated by French, and its codification and imposition as the legitimate language was an indispensable part of sustaining the victory of the French Revolution, as Bourdieu argues. It is perhaps a common observation about many places of the world: revolutions lead to the rise of 'new' languages which convey the revolutionary thoughts and make the 'new man'.

The notion of legitimate language can be instantiated by Putonghua, of which the codification has been an integral part of forming China as a 'modern' nation-state. The search for a national standard started in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, an era of social and political transition from an 'old', 'backward' feudal China to a new and 'modern' state. The connection between a unified national language and national strength was convincingly presented by the colonial powers that then occupied China: France, England, Germany, Russia, Japan all had well-defined national languages (Ramsey, 1989, p.4), although the formation of truly hegemonic national languages was only a nineteenth century process. This connection was keenly felt and expressed in the national conferences held by the educational authorities of the then central Nationalist (Guomindang, which is more commonly known as 'Kuomintang' in the West) government, and these congregations led to g*uoyu* (literally 'national language') in 1926, soon after the Nationalist overthrew the last feudal dynasty and seized the power. *Guoyu* was defined as 'the pronunciation of *educated* natives of Beijing', or of elite Beijing accent (Li W-C, 2004, p.103). This definition is largely shared by Putonghua which was 'modeled on the pronunciation of Beijing' in 1955, six years after the formation of the People's Republic. Note that the word 'educated' in the 1926 definition disappeared here, due to anti-bourgeois sentiments following the success of a proletarian revolution (Li W-C, 2004). Instead, the language of grassroots 'ordinary people', or common speech, characterizes the new standard pronunciation with a democratic aspiration. In this sense it is a similar case to Swahili as 'the language of the people' in Tanzania. The establishment and the definition of the legitimate language in China echoes Bourdieu's arguments on the political importance of imposing the legitimate language in making the 'new man' and furthermore in 'perpetuating the gains of the Revolution' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 47). In the *guoyu* case, the first conference of unifying pronunciation was held within a few months after the founding of the Nationalist Republic, whereas the work of forging Putonghua began almost immediately

after the Communists came into power. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the adoption of the Indonesian language as the national language by the revolutionaries who were Dutch speaking in the 1940s (Groeneboer, 1999). In all these cases – French, *guoyu*, Putonghua, Swahili, Indonesian – we can observe what Bourdieu says: 'to reform language, to purge it of the usages linked to the old society and impose it in its purified form, was to impose a thought that would itself be purged and purified'. The competition among various languages and language varieties to be the legitimate language is not solely a matter for linguists; more often than not, it is a struggle for symbolic power in which what was at stake was 'the *formation* and *re-formation* of mental structures' (Bourdieu, 1991., p48). In the *guoyu* case the Nationalists gained recognition for their language of authority over the old feudal authority, whereas in the Putonghua case, the Communists replaced the Nationalists and gained the recognition to express their new interests through their new political vocabulary.

Putonghua is therefore institutionally codified as the legitimate language, a process closely related to the formation of China as a modern nation-state (see also Haugen 1972 for the four-step 'process of standardization'). Its 'uptake' as a correct linguistic form, however, is more than institutional practice; rather, it is an ideological process of enregisterment through which the symbolic power of Putonghua is accepted and taken for granted. Symbolic power is 'a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170). Symbolic power is a subordinate power that reconstructs people's perception of social reality. It functions only when it is misrecognized (in the sense of Bourdieu, 1991, p.142-143), and when it functions, it is capable of achieving what has to be achieved with physical or economic forces. As for Putonghua, although different from French in various ways, its symbolic power produces and circulates a belief that Putonghua is created merely for the need of communication among speakers of mutually unintelligible languages and language varieties. This 'function of communication' of symbolic power however, conceals its 'function of division' between Putonghua speakers and non-Putonghua speakers, and between the inclusion of those who have access to this linguistic resource and the exclusions of others.

The enregisterment of Putonghua as the national standard is processual and dynamic, and this did not cease at the point when Putonghua was announced as the legitimate language. Rather, the process always continues in every social encounter of discursive practice, and the concept of 'indexicality' is at the center of such a process. Indexicality, in Silverstein's terms, 'is the concept necessary to showing us how to relate the micro-social to the macro-social frames of analysis of any sociolinguistic phenomenon' (Silverstein, 2003, p. 193). In other words, 'indexicality' conceptualizes the relationships between linguistic form and social meaning – linguistic forms of the micro-social level 'point to' their social meanings at the macro-social level. The concept of 'indexicality' is deployed in Agha (2003) to explain the enregisterment of RP as a ideological process which turns the contrasts of sounds into the contrasts of social attributes. To put it in another way, the contrasts of sounds *point to* the contrasts of social attributes, and RP as a socially distinguishable register entails the differentiability of the social meanings associated with RP.

The aim of this paper is to explore the historical and ideological processes of Putonghua enregisterment, which is similar to, as well as different from Agha's RP case in observable ways. While both cases are concerned with the historical emergence of a prestige national standard, Putonghua has a 'grassroots' origin from which it gradually evolves into an emblem of social status, and while in both cases a once regional vernacular has been de-localized, the Putonghua case involves explicit institutional standardization, which is to a large extent absent from the RP case. Such observable differences however do not define Putonghua enregisterment as an essentially distinct process. Rather, I suggest that Putonghua enregisterment invokes basically the same process with that of RP, and the institutional imposition of a standard is part of the ideological process of enregisterment – the institutional imposition itself is fundamentally ideological. However, the observable differences do call for application of such notions as Bourdieu's 'legitimate language' and 'symbolic power' sketched earlier, in addition to Agha's RP enregisterment and Silverstein's theoretical tool of 'indexicality'. In what follows, I shall first address the Putonghua standardization with a brief historical account, and second, present and analyze three examples that will instantiate the enregisterment of Putonghua in everyday social and discursive encounters.

3 The emergence of a standard

The established view holds that there was no unified pronunciation in China until the early twentieth century (e.g. Norman 1988; Ramsey, 1987). The linguistic standard prior to that is said to be the written Classical Chinese which, perhaps one of the oldest scripts in the world, has been in unbroken use for over two thousand years. Unlike the European alphabetic languages, Chinese characters do not resemble sounds, so the reading of a written text can vary greatly, and how it is read depends on various factors such as the reader's place of origin, social class, age, gender, and so forth. Recent voices from Chinese historical linguists maintain that as early as Zhou dynasty (about 1046 BC – 256 BC), there was a unified pronunciation called *yayan* (雅言) serving as the standard language (Guo & Gao, 2003; Chen, 1999). *Yayan* meant 'correct language' or 'standard language' in the Classical Chinese of that time. It is believed that it was the common language of the officials in the court and the language standard of intellectuals. Guo and Gao (2003) argue that *yayan* was actually the language of Confucius himself. The historical evidence Guo and Gao (2003) provide indeed points to a linguistic standard, but it is too early to conclude that such a standard governed the *spoken* (as opposed to written) language of the time, and to claim, as do the authors, that the current Putonghua is a descendent of *yayan* of two thousand years ago. It is more reasonable to argue that *yayan*, as well as its later equivalents '*tongyu*' (通语) in Han (202 BC – 220 AD) and '*guanyun*' (官韵) of Sui (581 AD – 618 AD), Tang (618 AD – 907 AD), Song (960 AD – 1279 AD) dynasties, was the language of the ruling class. People who had the ambition of upward social mobility had to master it, and mastering such a prestige language could create a sense of 'distinction', in Bourdieu's term (1984), a distinction between the refined 'high-culture' language and the vulgar 'low-culture' vernacular.

The most widely known name of the Chinese language is probably 'Mandarin',

a term modeled on early European missionary expressions (Coblin, 2000). It is believed to be the 'language of the officials' of the Yuan (1260 AD – 1368 AD), Ming (1368 AD – 1644 AD), and Qing (1644 AD – 1912 AD) dynasties, the so-called 'Mandarins'[3]. The prevalent view among both linguists and lay persons is that Mandarin has been closely similar to, if not exactly identical with, the regional vernacular of Beijing over approximately eight centuries. However, recent research challenges this view and argues that 'for most of its history standard Mandarin had little to do with Pekinese' (Coblin, 2000, p. 537). It is argued that the Beijing-based pronunciation was rejected as 'Altaicized' Chinese, a stigmatized variety possibly due to its reduction in phonological sophistication and its absorption of the northern languages such as Mongolian. Instead of Beijing Mandarin, the Nanjing-based pronunciation had been the standard Mandarin until at least the late eighteenth century (Coblin, 2000). Although the political power had been centered on Beijing for several centuries, the Nanjing-based Mandarin had been the elegant language of the high-culture for much of this period.

How was a once alien and stigmatized language gaining ground, eventually replacing the then official pronunciation? It is safe to say that the two varieties of Mandarin i.e., the Nanjing-based and the Beijing-based, co-existed and competed against each other for some time before the late eighteenth century and Beijing Mandarin finally prevailed in a gradual but dramatic phonological shift. It is important to note, for this paper, that Mandarin is neither a singular entity nor a language with linear development. Rather, it was and is polycentric and multifaceted. Its enregisterment as the official language of the Mandarins in the late eighteenth century testified not only to the competition between the two varieties but also to the power relations between political groups.

This polycentricity is also evident in modern Mandarin – a covering term referring to *guoyu* in Taiwan, Putonghua on mainland China, and *huayu* in Singapore. Although it is arguable that linguistic standards existed, on and off for centuries in China, none was a 'national language' in the sense of full linguistic hegemony – clearly defined, actively promoted, deliberately learnt, and extensively used (Chen, 1999). As shown in section 2, *guoyu* was a direct response to the Nationalist victory over the last feudal dynasty and to the awareness of the call for a national language if China was ever to become a strong and modernized state (Ramsey, 1987). The status of Mandarin was a contested point in the Nationalist conferences referred to earlier, which brought together linguists from many places of the country. Some delegates accused Mandarin of losing too many traditional phonetic distinctions, and language varieties such as the Yue dialects (commonly known as Cantonese) and the Wu dialects were considered superior in the sense that they preserved more linguistic features of the Middle Chinese – the linguistic orthodoxy inherited from the Tang period. However, the Beijing-based Mandarin, though 'unsophisticated', eventually had its way, becoming the national standard after a long and bitter struggle among the conference delegates.

But it was one thing to vote for a national standard and quite another to have this standard accepted. As Bourdieu describes, '…the legitimate language is a semi-artificial language which has to be sustained by a permanent effort of correction, a task which

[3] The rulers of the Yuan dynasty were the Mongols, and those of the Qing dynasty were the Manchurians. These led to not only biological but also linguistic hybridity.

falls both to institutions specially designed for this purpose and to individual speakers' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 60). The newly legislated *guoyu* was codified and fixed through institutional efforts such as composing dictionaries (*Vocabulary of National Pronunciation for Everyday Use*, 1932), being imposed as the language of instruction at schools, and subjected to the scrutiny of the National Language Unification Commission both on the mainland and continuously in Taiwan after the withdrawal of the Nationalist government in the late 1940s (Haugen, 1972).

For Putonghua (the immediate successor of, and a linguistic standard co-existing with, *guoyu* on the mainland), such efforts of correction as legislation, dictionary composition, and the sanctions of the educational system as well as of the labor market, were and are effectively and meticulously made to sustain the language as the national standard for linguistic purity and correctness. After five years of incubation involving study, planning and debate in national linguistic conferences, the language policy of the People's Republic was published in 1956, officially introducing Putonghua as the national language. Ever since its codification in the 1950s, Putonghua has been the subject of more than twenty 'memos' and 'regulations' issued by the central government of the country. The 1955 *Actively Promote the Beijing-based Putonghua as the Standard Pronunciation*, for example, says that primary and secondary schools are an 'important *battlefield* of promoting Putonghua' (italics mine); the 1984 *Strengthening Putonghua Training of Primary and Secondary Teachers* (Ministry of Education) stresses that 'the key task of promoting Putonghua is to ensure the mastery of Putonghua among teachers'; and the 2005 *Further Emphasis on Using Standard Language in TV Programs* (State Administration for Radio, Film and Television) calls for restricted use of dialects and sub-standard Putonghua in TV programs. This effort reaches its peak in the legislation of the *Law of the National Common Language for the People's Republic of China* in 2000, which stipulates that Putonghua is the working language of newsreaders, anchor-persons, actors/actresses, teachers, and civil servants.

As for sanctions of the educational system and the labor market, it is worth mentioning the National Proficiency Test of Putonghua. The Test is administered by the National Working Committee of Chinese Languages (NWCCL), a central authority in charge of instructing and inspecting the popularization of Putonghua, and it is devised to produce proficiency certification for the entrance of Putonghua mastery among such professions as teachers, civil servants, news-readers, and so on. Moreover, the NWCCL finds a major 'battlefield', as coined in the 1955 regulation, in primary and secondary schools. The involvement of educational systems in the imposition of linguistic standards is almost universal in the modern world and it is no exception in the Putonghua case. On the one hand, Putonghua is imposed as the language of instruction. Acquiring proficient Putonghua is more or less perceived to be a means of increasing one's value on the educational and the labor markets, and in that sense Putonghua is 'up-scaled' to be a prestige linguistic resource which indexes a prestige identity (cf. Dong, 2009, Dong & Blommaert, 2009). On the other hand, the 'up-scaling' of one language variety almost always scales down the other varieties. Although there have been government initiatives to protect and preserve the use of regional dialects and minority languages, there has not been any other language or language variety gaining currency comparable to Putonghua's.

So far we have traced the historical contexts of Putonghua back to *yayan* of two millennia ago; we have also looked at its more recent predecessor Mandarin in the Ming and Qing periods, as well as a co-existing standard *guoyu*. The focus has been the standardization of Putonghua through institutional labor such as legislations, qualification devices, and the school system. It is not my intention to show that Putonghua has one 'single ancestor', however – it is rare for any linguistic register to have a 'biological-like' ancestry (Agha, 2003). This historical account of Putonghua is to identify its main source variety, and to illustrate the reconfiguration and re-codification of a linguistic standard through power competitions between language varieties at various times. My concern in the remainder of this paper is with the ideological process of Putonghua enregisterment in everyday social and linguistic practice. I shall embark on the empirical data extracted from my ethnographic fieldwork in Beijing between 2006 and 2008, with a view to exploring the recognition and acceptance of Putonghua as a 'correct', 'accent-free', 'de-localized' linguistic norm.

4 The enregisterment of Putonghua in metapragmatic activities

The process of enregisterment, as Agha shows in the RP case, operates via various channels and instruments, and penetrates through everyday linguistic exchanges. In the Putonghua case, examples of enregisterment can be found in many types of discursive practice ranging from microscopic accent shifts to general discourses on the making of the state. In what follows, my attention will be focused on the empirical data of Putonghua enregisterment, which will be organized in this sequence: the first example is a periodical article urging migrant workers to learning Putonghua, which illustrates Bourdieu's notions of 'symbolic power' and 'legitimate language'. It is an example of public sphere discourses that disseminate register-based images of persons and reproduce the enregisterment of Putonghua in the press. The second example involves an interview with a primary school teacher on the language use of her pupils, and it instantiates the discourses of 'correctness' on Putonghua in an institutional environment. This is an everyday experience of reflexive typification of Putonghua articulated by a local Beijing inhabitant who is at the same time part of the educational system. Whereas the first two examples are concerned with the enregisterment activities of Putonghua in relation to other language varieties, the third example demonstrates the enregistering process in relation to English. It is an example of 'state-making' discourses that continuously feed into the 'one-language-one-nation' assumption (Cf. Hymes, 1968).

4.1 The work of symbolic power and its function of division

The first example we shall consider is an extract of a small article accompanied by a cartoon (Appendix). The article appeared in a monthly periodical called *Nongmin Keji Peixun* (Science and Technology Training for Farmers, 2005, issue 1, p.18), published by a training centre of the Ministry of Agriculture[4]. This periodical has a readership of rural residents and people who work in agriculture-related sectors. The title of this article is *Jincheng wugong qian lianhao Putonghua* (Practising Putonghua well before entering the city and searching for jobs), published in the section *Nomgmingong Zhi Jia*

[4] The table of content of this periodical is available at http://www.cqvip.com/qk/86404X/200501/index.shtml last viewed on 14 Oct 2008.

(A Home for Migrant Workers). The term *nongmingong*, or 'migrant workers', refers to farmers who leave their farming land for urban employment. They collectively become the center of a remarkable social phenomenon – the mass laborer migration within China. In general, the massive rural-urban migration is a result of China's social and economic reform started in the late 1970s, and gives rise to an increase in cultural and linguistic exchanges among different communities (see Dong &Blommaert 2009, Dong, 2009 for more details of the Chinese rural-urban migration). The author of this article is unnamed.

Extract1:

Figure 1. Cartoon of Extract 1.

…it is extremely urgent (for migrant workers)[5] to practice and to achieve a good level of Putonghua proficiency before entering cities and searching for jobs; otherwise it would be very difficult for them even to move around in the urban areas. It is evident that Putonghua is a barrier to rural redundant laborers finding jobs in cities. If you speak good Putonghua, you will not only give a good impression (to others) in job interviews and thus increase your employability; you can communicate with people effectively, express yourself clearly… so that you can find a good job and settle in the city. If what you said could not be understood by others, even if you might be excellent in your job, you could not communicate with those around you, others would feel that you were not trustworthy, and this would therefore diminish your competitiveness. Meanwhile, the language barrier prevents you from communicating with others, and hence makes you isolated…

(My translation; JD)

This periodical article is a multimodal document combining visual and textual signs (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) circulated in the public sphere. It targets rural residents

[5] Unless otherwise specified, the contents between brackets are my own additions or comments.

who have not yet migrated but intend to leave for cities, and stresses the importance of Putonghua in their job hunting, in raising their chance of eventual settlement in cities, and in enhancing their quality of life. The most striking feature of the discourse is the visual cartoon illustration which immediately grabs the reader's attention. The cartoon depicts the social encounter of a couple and a young man. The couple, on the left-hand side, is in old-fashioned tops with traditional Chinese style collar and rag shoes; they have their sleeves and trousers folded as if they are ready to work; they carry a good deal of luggage; they have an innocent smile and an optimistic look in their faces – these visual cues imply that they are on the move from their country-side home with a hope of a better life in the city. The rural couple is on the boundary of a city – they are standing against a flat landscape of plants, whereas the background on the side of the young man is filled with high-rising buildings, factories, and skyscrapers. The young man, shod in leather, dressed in lapel jacket, is talking to the couple while pointing toward the city. Note the different facial expression he has as opposed to that of the migrant couple – this is a confident look, related to a voice of authority which can tell the country couple what they should do and where they can go in the city, if they don't speak Putonghua. The reader could hence imagine a linguistic dimension of this cartoon – the young man speaks the legitimate language of the urban space whereas the migrant couple does not.

This visual representation parallels the text, which reflexively formulates Putonghua as a tool of communication. In line 1 to 6, it establishes the importance of acquiring Putonghua ('it is extremely urgent', line 1 and 2), and this claim is reinforced in line 4 and 5 that migrants cannot move around in cities if they do not speak Putonghua. The urban areas, uniformly defined as opposed to 'the rural areas', are practically guarded by the legitimate language, and people who do not speak it are reduced to being dysfunctional or functionless in cities. In terms of employment, the text suggests, Putonghua is self-evidently a 'barrier' (line 5) for migrant workers: people who master this 'tool' well can impress the potential employer in a positive way and increase their employability (line 7 – 8), because it enables them to 'communicate with people effectively', and to express themselves clearly. People who do not speak Putonghua well, however, are negatively qualified in various ways – 'he could not communicate with those around him', he is untrustworthy, he is not competitive although he 'might be excellent in his job', and finally, he may feel 'isolated' in cities because he cannot talk with others (line 12 – 13). Note the dense clustering of character features indexed by 'poor' Putonghua: untrustworthy, uncompetitive, isolated, marginalized, in contrast to an image of the ideal urban subject – someone who looks and sounds trustworthy, competitive, confident. Here, linguistic contrasts are converted into contrasts of social personae and social identities in an ideological process, and the connection between the linguistic and the social dimensions are disseminated efficiently in the public sphere.

This periodical article shares a stance with most public sphere discourses on Putonghua – to stress the importance of using Putonghua as a common tool of communication and urging those who are not yet proficient in speaking Putonghua to

'improve' and to 'correct' their language for the sake of their own wellbeing[6]. This stance implies that Putonghua is a 'neutral' means which is equal for everyone and which is used by people for their own benefits. The reader could easily receive the earnestness of the text in offering *practical* advice to young farmers. Given the enormous sociolinguistic diversity of China, it would be difficult for someone who speaks only his regional vernacular with others to whom the vernacular is unintelligible; there is undoubtedly a practical layer of Putonghua being elevated to the position of lingua franca in its function of providing a common platform for communication. Beneath this observable layer of 'function of communication' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.170), however, this article articulates the 'function of division' of Putonghua being the legitimate language of the public social space: it depicts an ideal urban image of being capable, reliable, sociable, smartly dressed, mentally healthy, physically mobile, possessing the 'correct' accent, having an optimistic career outlook. It draws a neat line between this ideal urban individual and the potential migrant worker. In short, we encounter a question of what the language does *for* people and what it does *to* people: it divides people into two groups based on perceived variation of sounds, and it reaches beyond the linguistic domain of social life – it indexes the educational level, social status, persona, identities, and so forth, of the speaker. This demarcation is portrayed in the visual sign as well as in the text. The function of division is explicit in this text, but it still hides behind a 'function of communication' of the legitimate language, such as the emphasis on the practical difficulties of lacking Putonghua competence, and the earnest advice on the value of Putonghua in the labor market. The function of communication reproduces the symbolic dominance of Putonghua being the legitimate language of the social space, a power that acts below the level of consciousness. This symbolic power is spread while Putonghua is enregistered in public awareness as indexical of speaker's social attributes.

The ideological process of enregisterment is not found merely at the level of public sphere discourses. It shoots through every layer of reflexive activities in people's daily encounters. Let us turn to some of these data.

4.2 Correctness

Extract 2 is a discourse of 'correctness' produced by an exemplar speaker of Putonghua – a Chinese language teacher and 'native' Beijing resident (a point that will be elaborated in the discussion of Extract 2). Extract 2 is an audio-recorded interview taken from the data of my ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a Beijing public primary school over a semester [Field recording 2007-04-22_V044]. The school is located in central Beijing, and as an increasing number of migrant families reside in the school neighborhood, it is populated with both local children and migrant children who bring in different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The interviewee, Teacher Zhao, is a Chinese language teacher of grade one (pupils aged about seven). I had been an observer in her class for a few months by the time of the interview. The interview took place during class break in her office. Prior to the interview, Teacher Zhao spent one

[6] Relevant regulations and policies can be found from the official website of the National Language and Literacy Working Committee (NLLWC) http://www.china-language.gov.cn/ The NLLWC is part of China Ministry of Educaiton.

third of a class session (a class session is 45 minutes) 'correcting' the pronunciation of a migrant girl and I therefore interviewed Teacher Zhao about that incident. The 'she' in the transcript refers to the migrant girl.

Extract 2

Translated transcript[7]:

T Zhao: …and she can't adjust herself in a short time…
DJ: Hmm.
T Zhao: And… also the boy who was here just now, he had so much difficulty in pronouncing those few words!
DJ: Yeah… and the girl?
T Zhao: Her problem (with pronunciation) is serious.
DJ: Hmm.
T Zhao: (lowering her voice) She is rather slow in other subjects, too.
DJ: Hmm…
T Zhao: The key thing is, what we have here, her problem in accent, that is very serious.
DJ: Hmm, hmm.
T Zhao: There are words she <u>just can't get right</u>. And it is <u>useless</u> to correct her.
DJ: She just does the same =thing next time doesn't she…
T Zhao: =Yeah she just does the same thing next time. It is the time now to correct (their problem in pronunciation) if it's successful it's successful, if not, they will take a long time to correct (their pronunciation).
DJ: (Do you mean) this influences their other subjects?
T Zhao: (There are) definitely some impacts.
DJ: Such as… their math?
T Zhao: Math, yeah… sometimes they don't understand, our Putonghua is different from their home dialect, they don't understand us, they are slow in learning other subject, this sort of pupil has difficulties (in learning other subjects). And slow. If I always spend so much time on them, the teaching couldn't be finished on time according to the plan, and other pupils (who don't have problem in accent) would complain. …… (My translation; JD)

Multilingual and multicultural classrooms resulting of immigration in West Europe have been a focus of scholarly attention (e.g. Bezemer & Kroon, 2006; Rampton, 2006; Spotti, 2008); but the language use of migrant pupils in mainstream urban schools in China has been rarely explored (but see Dong, 2009; Dong & Blommaert, 2009). This

[7] Transcription conventions:
= interruption or next utterance following immediately
( ) omitted part in the utterance
Bold marks the shifts among the accents

transcript shows a local teacher's evaluation on her migrant pupils' linguistic features and school performance. The teacher is an exemplar speaker of Putonghua in two ways. First, she is a Beijing local person. Putonghua is standardized upon modern Beijing Mandarin, as discussed earlier, and being the original form of the linguistic standard, the Beijing dialects enjoy a prestige status, sometimes being taken to be Putonghua itself (Dong, 2009). In the folk-view, the Beijing resident is usually thought to speak 'more correct' Putonghua than the dialect speaker, noticeably in mastering the distinction between dental sibilants (*z*, *c*, *s*) and the retroflexes (*zh*, *ch*, *sh*, *r*) – as Ramsey (1987) observes, the retroflex distinction is the mark of 'elegant Peking pronunciation… [but] great majority Chinese living outside of the capital itself are unable to pronounce this sound… and most do not even try to imitate it' (1987, p.43). Second, the interviewee is a primary school teacher. The educational system is always a key institution which imposes the symbolic power of a legitimate language. In Bourdieu's discussion of the French case, the school system practically devalues dialects and establishes French as the legitimate language among pupils. In the case of Putonghua, similarly, schools are a major 'battlefield', and the mastery of Putonghua among teachers is 'the key task of promoting Putonghua' defined in the 1955 and 1984 bills.

Being an exemplar speaker who teaches Chinese language as a subject, Teacher Zhao is one of my key informants who regularly gives comments on the pupils' communicative competence. In the transcribed interview, she pointed out that the migrant pupils' lack of Putonghua competence was a 'difficulty' (line 4) and a 'problem' (line 6). The reader of this paper might immediately interpret Teacher Zhao's comments as discrimination against migrants. A more cautious way, however, is to contextualize the comments in the specific social backgrounds. Unlike teachers in some Western European countries who are aware of the increasing tension between the local and the immigrants, my informants (who are mostly teachers) are less euphemistic in expressing their disapproval of the use of non-standard accents at least within the school environment. This directness does not automatically suggest discrimination; rather, it can be interpreted as an example of the unquestioned position of Putonghua in the eyes of the teacher: Putonghua was unquestionably the 'correct' language that the pupils ought to use, and the mastery of it was for their own interest. Any deviation from the standard was a 'problem', a 'difficulty'.

By line 14 Teacher Zhao became mildly emotional, which was a mixture of frustration and anxiety, at the migrant pupil's Putonghua competence. She raised her voice to emphasize '<u>just can't get it right</u>' and '<u>useless</u>' (line 14), indicating that she was eager to help the pupil to acquire the 'correct' Putonghua, and had invested considerable amount of time in 'correcting' her, but these efforts seemed in vain. Teacher Zhao believed there was a 'best time' of acquiring the 'right' accent, presumably biologically, and that was 'now' (line 18) when people are seven or so years old (Grade one of primary school education). If they failed to manage it, as she said in line 19 and 20, they would miss the chance for quite a while, if not for ever. The sense of urgency can be interpreted as the cause of Teacher Zhao's frustration and anxiety shown in her tone, which may suggest that the teacher considered the task of making the pupils speak the 'correct language' her very responsibility. And as Bourdieu

observes, the primary school teachers are, by the virtue of their function, 'teaching the same clear, fixed language to children… [and by doing so…] inclining them quite naturally to see and feel things in the same way' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.49).

Recall that in elaboration of what she meant by 'difficulty' and 'problem', Teacher Zhao said the migrant girl's lack of Putonghua competence coincided with her slowness in learning (line 8 and 12). The flow of conversation turned back to this point in line 21. Teacher Zhao explained that the lack of Putonghua proficiency negatively influenced the learning results of migrant pupils, as their home dialects were an obstacle in their understanding of the teaching in Putonghua (line 24 and 25). She further emphasized that such pupils were 'slow' in learning (line 8, 26, and 28). From the immediate context, it could be inferred that Teacher Zhao believed language differences resulted in the migrant pupils' unsatisfactory performance and 'slowness' in learning. Reading further into line 27 and 28, however, I became less definite about this interpretation. It was obscure whether the 'slowness' in Putonghua pointed to a general 'slowness' in their cognitive ability of knowledge absorption. These comments immediately remind us of what Silverstein observes '[the phonetic accent] of the Southerner bespeak mental slowness' (Silverstein, 1996, p. 297). It could be argued that, what the evaluative remarks showed were contrasts of sounds, such as the supra-local Putonghua as opposed to regional vernaculars, being converted into contrasts of social identities, e.g., 'being normal' vs. 'being slow', and 'mainstream' vs. 'marginalized'. In the institutional environment of schools, Putonghua is up-scaled to be 'accent-less' (Dong, 2009; Blommaert, 2005), and other language varieties have to be measured against Putonghua. Putonghua is therefore the 'code of invisibility': once you speak it, no one will notice your language anymore and you can function in the 'neutral', 'accent-less' code. Such an up-scaling process, through the diligent work of educational practitioners, is an instance of enregisterment.

4.3 The making and re-making of the state

The enregisterment of Putonghua is not solely concerned with discursive practice on dialects and accents at the infra-state level; it also bears marks of the supra-state level, due to the process we call globalization. A salient phenomenon is the preference of English as a second language, which is taught from early year education all the way up to higher and postgraduate education in urban China. Mastery of proficient English normally means better educational opportunities and higher employability. Private English schools such as 'English First' and 'Wall Street English' are among the most lucrative business targeting the 'new middle class' who tend to see the expensive tuition fees as investment for their own future (see Dong, forthcoming for more details of the 'new middle class' and English in China). In short, English is an increasingly powerful player in the competition of symbolic power among languages and language varieties in urban China, and a study of Putonghua enregisterment would be inadequate without an attention to this powerful language. Extract 3 pins down such a moment.

Extract 3

1 Ying Y. told me they were fined for speaking Chinese! The foreign
2 teacher of their 'Oral English' class set up a rule that no one could
3 speak Chinese inside the classroom during her sessions plus the

breaks before/after her sessions. Anyone who broke the rule would be fined. 'It's incredible. This is in China!' Ying Y. said. [Fieldnote_2007-10-11_02]

Ying Y. just started her undergraduate study at a Beijing university. The university employed 'native' English speaking professionals to teach oral English lessons so as to ensure that their students were exposed to 'pure and precise' (Northern American) English. In the episode noted down above, Ying Y. described her novel experience of college life and especially of her non-Chinese teacher. Although she did not particularly enjoy language learning, she perceived English as a 'very useful tool' that everyone has to master. In order for the students to make use of every possible chance to improve their English competence, the foreign teacher set up a rule that English was the legitimate language in the classroom space during her sessions plus the breaks before and after her sessions. The students had to speak English in that time-space, and anyone who broke the rule would be punished by a fine of a minimum amount and sometimes, when the 'transgressor' could not pay, by a mark in their assessment record. The rule was designed to help students with their English, and there is no law against such a teaching technique. It was strictly implemented and students were fined for using Putonghua every now and then.

The imposition of English as the legitimate language in the classroom had little impact on the established linguistic order outside the classroom – Putonghua being the dominant language. It did, however, challenge the symbolic dominance of Putonghua within the particular time-space. The 'English-only' classroom can be seen as a micro sociolinguistic environment in which various linguistic resources were ordered and stratified on a continuum, with English ranked high on this scale (see Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck, 2005; Dong and Blommaert, 2009 for the concept of 'sociolinguistic scale'). This micro sociolinguistic space was embedded within bigger social spaces, such as the institutional space of the university, the urban space of Beijing, the national, and the global. On the national level Putonghua is ranked high on the scale, whereas English is a global language that can purchase one a ticket into the international communities. The sociolinguistic orders in these bigger spaces inevitably filtered into the local micro space of English classroom, which functioned according to its own rules but at the same time bore marks from spaces of the higher scales. The sociolinguistic issues of globalization seemed to be collapsed into the micro time-space, and English was no longer a neutral tool of communication, but a language of high social mobility, an expensive commodity, and a language of power.

Ying Y. commented that 'It's incredible. This is in China'. Here we see a scaling effect: the teacher emphasized the classroom scale, whereas Ying Y. emphasized that the classroom scale was subordinate to the sociolinguistic order of the higher scales and the bigger spaces. The two scales confront each other in Ying Y.'s comment. More interestingly, Ying Y.'s utterance, although not very serious in its tone, was arguably a product of Putonghua enregisterment as the standard language, and of an internalized sociolinguistic hierarchy which related language to national membership. It could be seen as a result of the ideological process which established standard Putonghua as an integral part of the political strategies in re-formulating the 'new man' with a

re-formulated mental structure. Such an ideological process was usually invisible and taken for granted, until Putonghua was down-scaled as a result of English being 'up-scaled' to take the position of the legitimate language in the micro linguistic environment. This rescaling of linguistic hierarchy, though hardly affected that of the bigger social spaces, disturbed the established linguistic order, and triggered uneasiness in the mental structure where Putonghua is accepted as natural, as Ying Y.'s utterance showed.

5 Conclusions

I have shown in this paper how a regional vernacular has been enregistered as a supra-local linguistic standard in modern China. Creatively deploying Agha's notion of enregisterment, Bourdieu's 'symbolic power' and 'legitimate language', and Silverstein's 'indexicality', I have argued that the standardization of Putonghua is more than a deliberate institutional practice, but is part of a tacit and ideological enregistering process, through which the symbolic dominance of Putonghua as the legitimate language is being accepted as natural and normative.

The standardization of Putonghua is addressed with a historical perspective covering unified pronunciations of *yayan*, the debate on Beijing/Nanjing-based Mandarins, and contemporary *guoyu*. As for establishing Putonghua as the national standard, I have studied the institutional practice such as legislations and educational system imposing and sustaining the purity and correctness of the language standard. Although Agha contrasts the RP case with Bourdieu's account of 'top-down' formation of French as a language standard (Agha, 2003, p.269), and argues for a different understanding of linguistic transmission and normativity, my research on Putonghua has demonstrated a productive complication and combination of these two lines of arguments, and this is testified by the three examples interpreted and analyzed so far: in the cartoon case, the symbolic power of Putonghua is accepted as natural and the function of division of the language standard is concealed beneath the function of communication - this enregistering process presupposes the imposition of Putonghua as the national standard. The teacher interview is an example of 'correctness' discourses and illustrates how the accent of the migrant pupil is measured against standard Putonghua. The 'English-only' classroom case shows how Ying Y.'s utterance on the linguistic rule of a micro space reproduces the political agenda of standardizing and codifying Putonghau as a national language.

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Appendix

农民工之家 就业指导

进城务工前练好普通话

普通话是以北京语音为标准音，以北方话为基础方言、以典范的现代白话文著作为语法规范的现代汉民族的共同语。简单的说，就是我们平常在电视上看到的新闻报道，说的就是普通话。现在全国大力推广普通话，绝大多数的城市都以普通话为主要沟通语言，而1997年召开的全国语言文字工作会议确定了新世纪我国语言文字的目标，要求在2010年以前，普通话在全国范围内初步普及，21世纪中叶以前在全国范围内普及。

对于北方农村的人来说，普通话一般不会成为进城务工的障碍，但是对南方以及一些边远地区的人来说，如果自己家乡的方言与普通话相差甚远，自己的口音又很重，进城之前练好普通话就极为迫切了。否则，你在城市将寸步难行。大量的事实都证明，普通话是农村富余劳动力进城务工的一道门槛。

练好普通话，不仅能使自己在应聘时给对方留下一个好的形象，增加找工作的成功率。同时，又能保证让别人理解自己所说的话，更好的表达自己的想法，让别人认识和了解自己，这样才能在城市立稳脚跟，找到自己适合的工作。如果一个人说的话别人都听不清楚，即使他工作干的很好，但不能跟人有效的沟通，就会给人一种无法信任的感觉，这无形之中就削弱了自己的竞争力。同时，语言上的障碍也会使自己不能与其他人交流思想、感情，这使自己显得很孤立，在情感的满足上存在着遗憾。所以，重视普通话训练是必要的。