
Chinese Netizens' reactions to the use of English as a lingua franca

WEIHONG WANG AND FAN (GABRIEL) FANG

Introduction

With the spread of English around the globe, academics increasingly seek to figure out what global English means to the world. Some accept English globalisation as a reality and take it as natural, neutral and beneficial for international and intercultural communication (Crystal, 2003). Some recognise English skills as important linguistic capital and must-have global literacy (Park & Wee, 2012; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). However, others associate the global expansion of English with linguistic imperialism and the death of indigenous languages (Phillipson, 2009). Some regard globally spread English as native English varieties, particularly American and British English (Modiano, 2001; Trudgill, 1999), others argue for the rise of local varieties of World Englishes (WE) (Bolton, 2005; Kachru, 1986) and the international use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Although these generic interpretations of English have solid arguments from their own perspectives, none is sufficient to elucidate all the 'complexity of ideological ramifications of the spread of English in [any] particular locality' (Pan, 2011: 79).

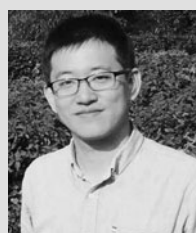
A recent Chinese-African interaction provides an appealing case for examining the ideological constructions of English in the Chinese socio-cultural context. On March 26, 2013, a Chinese Central Television (CCTV) news channel aired a Chinese reporter's interview with a Zambian official one day before the fifth BRICS summit. The interview was carried out in English, a typical instance of ELF communication. Unexpectedly, a popular blogger posted a video clip of the interview on his blog with comments ridiculing the reporter's 'Chinese dialect-like English'. The post became an instant internet hit and provoked extensive discussion on the reporter's English among Chinese netizens. These comments reveal much about Chinese

netizens' attitudes towards ELF and the overall ideological discourse on English in China. By examining these comments, particularly netizens'



WEIHONG WANG obtained her PhD from the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong. She is currently Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at the School of Foreign Languages, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China. Her research

interests include the Sociolinguistics of Globalisation, Linguistic Landscapes, and English Language Education. Her publications can be seen in Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, Journal of English for Academic Purposes, System, The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, Language, Culture and Curriculum, and Linguistics and Education. Email: wangwh@cug.edu.cn



FAN (GABRIEL) FANG (corresponding author) obtained his PhD from the Centre for Global Englishes, the University of Southampton, UK. He is currently Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at the College of Liberal Arts, Shantou University, China.

His research interests include Global Englishes, language attitude and identity, intercultural communication, and ELT. His publications include articles in Asian Englishes, ELT Journal, English Today, Language Teaching Research, System, The Journal of Asia TEFL, and The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics. Email: ffang@stu.edu.cn

reasons justifying their attitudinal responses, this study aims to unveil the ideological constructions of English in popular discourse of China.

Language ideologies as a field of inquiry

Language ideologies

Language ideologies, as a field of inquiry, can be traced to Michael Silverstein, who first emphasised the importance of language beliefs in shaping language development. He defined language ideology as ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure or use’ (Silverstein, 1979: 193). To highlight the manifold interpretations of language and ideology, this study uses the plural *language ideologies*. Language ideologies are, in Kroskrity’s (2010) words, socially, culturally and historically constructed belief systems about language structure (linguistic forms) and use (the function, role or status of a language in society). They perform like ‘an interpretive filter in the relationship of language and society’, mediating between ‘social structures and forms of talk’ (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994: 55–62). In other words, linguistic practices, language ideologies and social structures are interconnected (McGroarty, 2010). Social structures have the potential to shape language ideologies, which, in turn, influence linguistic practices within society. Language practices contribute to (re)producing and, on occasion, contesting and transforming language ideologies and thus also social structure. Research on language ideologies can facilitate understanding of the interaction or mutual constitution of language and society, while recognition of the multiplicity of language ideologies allows exploring the potential conflicts, struggles and contestations among divergent ideologies within shared social spaces (Kroskrity, 2010).

Ideologies of English in China

In line with the concept of language ideologies, *ideologies of English* concerns systematic assumptions and beliefs about English, including its role and function in a particular society and the linguistic forms and structures valued in that society. Within the context of China, Xiong and Qian (2012) identified three aspects of ideological discourses of English: dominant ideologies, counterhegemonic ideologies and popular ideologies. *Dominant ideologies* are ideological constructions employed by the ruling classes or dominant groups to deploy,

legitimate and promote their political-economic interests. Manipulated by the groups in power, dominant ideologies tend to assume hegemonic positions in society, coercing the general public to observe them. In China, the ruling class or the dominant group is usually identified as the nation-state or the government authorities and the apparatuses they possess to manage the nation-state. *Counterhegemonic ideologies* oppose the dominant ones. Indeed, they are formed precisely to challenge and contest the ideologies in hegemonic positions and the interests they serve. *Popular ideologies* refer to the ideological beliefs or perceptions held by the general public. They may align with dominant ideologies but are constructed from the perspective of ‘enhancing individual opportunities’, rather than ‘serving the state’s interests’ (Xiong & Qian, 2012: 77).

Research in China has largely focused on uncovering the dominant ideologies of English legitimised in official discourse. Research has revealed that the role and status of English in China is closely connected to the nation-state’s political and economic agenda (Adamson, 2004; Gao, 2012). Since the implementation of reform and open-door policy, China’s leadership has adopted a pragmatic or utilitarian philosophy towards nation-building, which prioritises socialist modernisation through economic development. This approach recognises western science and investments as crucial, and English is pivotal to accessing to these resources (He & Li, 2009; Hu, 2005). Consequently, English has been actively promoted in Chinese education systems and remained so into the 21st century (Adamson, 2004; Jiang, 2003; Wang, 2015).

With the support of the nation-state, English is a compulsory course from primary school to university and a mandatory subject in College Entrance Examinations (*Gaokao*). It is also legitimised in a series of high-stakes English proficiency tests, such as the Test for English Majors (TEM Band 4 and 8), College English Test (CET Band 4 and 6) for non-English majors, and Public English Tests (PET) for the general public. Witnessing the fervour for English across China, scholars have begun to challenge its influence on Chinese language and culture. For example, Niu and Wolff (2003) warned of a disguised form of linguistic imperialism amid the craze for English and English education. Guo and Beckett (2012) exposed the hegemonic role of English in gate-keeping, cultural control and local knowledge construction in China.

However, it is no longer realistic to ‘deport’ English from China in the face of intensifying

globalisation and China's ever-deepening integration into the global economy. Some identify the hegemony of English in privileging native norms and cultures, and advocate *China English* as an alternative to express local identity and culture (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Wei & Fei, 2003; Xu, 2010). It is argued that *China English* allows 'non-native users' linguistic and cultural rights to appropriate English for local and creative expression' (Xiong & Qian, 2012: 78). Some advocate moving further away from teaching and learning Standard English to ELF because English is more likely to be used by Chinese people for international communication with both native and non-native speakers in the future (Fang, 2017a; Fang & Ren, 2018; Wen, 2012).

So far, the reviews of dominant and counterhegemonic ideologies of English have been mainly macro-level analyses of official and academic discourses. Few studies have discussed how the populace at the micro-level makes sense of these ideological imperatives. Members of the general public have their own private agendas in learning English, which may align with the dominant ideologies if their interests agree with of the nation-state. However, if discrepancies occur, there might also be tensions, conflicts, struggles and even actions of resistance, as counterhegemonic ideologies predict (Moody, 2013). There are some language attitudes investigations concerning the ideologies of English in popular discourse. For instance, Pan and Block (2011) studied university students' understandings of the status of English, expectations for English learning and practices of English teaching and learning in China. Wang (2015) examined both teachers' and students' attitudes towards China English. These studies revealed that English language learners in China generally recognise the status of English as an international language but prefer native English standards and have low recognition of China English (see also Fang, 2017b; Yang & Zhang, 2015).

However, most such studies have focused on university English teachers and learners. More studies are needed to examine the ideological discourses among the general public not necessarily subjected to educational mechanisms. This study, therefore, approaches this issue with naturally occurring data from Chinese netizens. By viewing online discourses as discourses of popular culture, we follow Moody (2013) and examine netizens' language ideology from both the performative and affiliative channels. According to Moody (2013: 2), whereas 'the *performative channel* examines language ideologies that are related to pop culture performances, the *affiliative channel* examines fan reaction to language used in

popular culture' (Emphasis in original). To be specific, this study addresses three research questions:

1. What ideological discourses on English do Chinese netizens have?
2. Why do Chinese netizens have these ideological constructions?
3. How are these ideologies of English related to the ideologies found in official and academic discourses?

Research methods

Data collection

Data collect captured netizens' comments on the popular blogger's (Houson猴姆) post mentioned in the introduction (<http://www.weibo.com/1258256457/zpnF9jBdP>). The blogger posted a 2'26-minute-long video clip of a news report that aired on CCTV 13 on the morning of March 26, 2013. The report was about a Chinese CCTV reporter's interview with a Zambian official before the 5th BRICS summit to be held the next day in South Africa. In the whole interview, the reporter asked the official only three questions in English about his opinions on China's development and China's role in the five BRICS organisation:

1. Andrew, what's your view about the five BRICS countries?
/ændru:↓'wɒts 'jɔ: 'vju: 'ə'baʊt 'ðə- 'fɑ:v 'brɪks 'kʌntrɪz? ↓
2. How do you see China's development in recently years?
/həʊ 'du: 'ju: 'sɪ: 'tʃɪnə s- 'de've'ləp'mənt 'ɪn 'rɪ:'snt'ɪ 'jɪəz? ↓
3. How do you see the relationship between Zambia and China in development?
/həʊ 'du: 'ju: 'sɪ: 'ðə- 'rɪ'leɪf'n'ʃɪpə- 'bɪ'twi:n 'zæmbɪjɪə 'ænd 'tʃɪnə 'ɪn 'de've'ləp'mənt? ↓

The reporter used English with a strong Chinese dialect-like accent (e.g. the lengthened pronunciation of 'the' as /ðə-/ in the transcript) and other Chinese features, such as syllable-timing (e.g. a stress at the start of each word) and literal translation of Chinese expressions (e.g. translating '你怎么看' (*what do you think*) as 'how do you see').

In this post, the blogger joked about the reporter's Chinese-accented English (and the Zambian official's African English as well):

The moment he opened his mouth, I pissed myself laughing! Netizens are circuseeing the CCTV reporter's full mouth of awkward English!
HaHaHa~~How do u see China's

DE'VE'LO'P'MENT in RE'CENTLY years? ...
HaHaHa~~~Are you familiar with the English accent? But that African brother's English is no good, either ...

[Note: In this paper, all Chinese comments were translated into English by the first author and proofread by the second author. The original English in the comments is maintained and italicised.]

The post quickly drew a huge number of netizens. It was followed 7,000 times (including 6,000 with comments) the day it was posted and 29,745 times (including 18,905 with comments) in a month. Discussions, comments and even longer articles reviewing these comments popped up on various webpages during that month, and many can still be seen today. We selected the first 300 of 941 pages for analysis in this study but we browsed all the comments on the blog to make sure that the later comments were similar to the previous ones, and nothing new emerged. The 300 pages contained 5,975 comments (listed as comments 1-5,975 in the database), sufficient to reveal the complexities of English ideologies in the popular discourse and allow for generalisations to a certain degree.

Data analysis

The 5,975 comments were analysed by adopting a paradigmatic approach to produce 'taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database' (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5) through repeated readings of the data. The main purpose of the analysis was to explore these Chinese netizens' ideological discourses on English and to relate these popular ideologies to those promoted in the official and academic discourses to see how the latter were (re)produced, negotiated and even contested in the popular discourse. We first reviewed the data to gain a general picture of all comments on the event and eliminate irrelevant comments (76) and comments that did not reveal the followers' attitudinal evaluations (1,333).

The other 4,566 comments were read again to derive preliminary 'taxonomies and categories' for coding (ibid.). In this phase, the comments were roughly grouped into two categories according to the attitudes they expressed: negative or positive towards the reporter's use of English in the interview. A small number of comments evaluated only the African official (16), and some were undecided due to a lack of sufficient information (189). In this study, only the comments in two categories with clear attitudinal judgments (4,361) were

selected for further analysis. In the third reading, these comments were coded according to the categories and taxonomies generated in the second phase while allowing new themes to emerge. After the preliminary categorisation and coding, a fourth reading was carried out to interpret the popular ideological discourses. The categories and taxonomies identified were reiteratively compared, contrasted and related to the ideological constructions promoted in the official and academic discourses.

Findings

Negative comments on the reporter's English

Our analysis reveals that the netizens' comments are overwhelmingly negative, with 3,255 of 4,566 (71.3%) expressing disapproval of the CCTV reporter's English. Scrutiny of the reasons netizens give to justify their negative evaluations show that few cite communicativeness as a criterion in evaluating the reporter's English. Only five explicitly mention that they cannot understand the reporter, while another four infer from the interviewee's facial expression that he might not understand the reporter. It seems that communication is not an important standard to consider in evaluating English in China. Instead, deviations from native English standards and disgrace to the Chinese CCTV reporter's identity are repeatedly stressed as two major reasons for censuring of the reporter's English and questioning of his qualifications as a CCTV reporter.

Of the 3,255 negative comments, 1,053 take non-standardness or incorrectness as reasons for their criticising the reporter's English, illustrated as follows:

E.g.1 How could people from CCTV speak such non-standard English ... (Comment 222)

E.g.2 Ha ha!!! The reporter's accent makes me laugh to cramping ... *Hao do u see China's DE'VE'LO'P'MENT in RE'CENTLY years?* None of the words is pronounced correctly ... (Comment 523)

E.g.3 *How do u see China's DE'VE'LO'P'MENT in RE'CENTLY years* Why did he stress every syllable ... Let alone the incorrect pronunciation. Damn it, how could you change *recent years* into *recently years*? Is 'zenyang kandai' spoken like this in English? SHOULD be *what do you think of* ... ! (Comment 2691)

E.g.4 I want to say that it is not that terrible to speak English with accents, but it is extremely terrible to make such a stupid mistake by addressing the official with his first name Andrew. You know, buddy? (Comment 4080)

The comments reveal that the netizens seem to find fault with everything the reporter says. According to them, his English is non-standard (e.g.1), his pronunciation is incorrect (e.g.2), he has problems with lexicogrammar (e.g.3), and directly addressing the official by his first name is inappropriate from the perspective of politeness (e.g.4). It is interesting to note that these netizens seem to have pre-defined standards for judging the reporter's English. Any instance of English usage deviating from the standards they upheld is seen as incorrect, and the netizens seldom question the appropriateness of the standards. For instance, when explaining why the African official should not be directly addressed by his first name, *Andrew*, the netizens reason that:

E.g.5 To interview a person who is older than you (judging from his face), such as this director of the development agency, as a reporter, you should call him *Mr. XXX*, but not directly call him *Andrew*. Conditions apply to addressing one's first name: the two have some relationship, such as being colleagues, classmates or friends, or the two are of similar ages or in similar positions. In this interview, the reporter was interviewing a high-ranking official. They had great differences in positions and age. It was inappropriate to address his first name. (Comment 5607)

In this case, how to address a person, according to this netizen, is decided by the rule that 'to address somebody older than you, you should call him Mr. instead of his first name'. The rule is pre-determined and applicable to all contexts regardless of the actual communicating situation. We know that in this specific linguistic episode, how the official was addressed depended on many factors. Perhaps everyone there was addressed by their first names. Perhaps the official asked the reporter to call him *Andrew* before the interview. Perhaps the reporter addressed the official by his first name to build rapport. It is also possible that the official did not consider this to be problematic but instead preferred to be called *Andrew*. The netizens do not seem to take all these possible situations into consideration but instead criticise the reporter for violating the rule they uphold. The following comments shed some lights on the reasons leading to netizens' mechanical following of rules for using English.

E.g.6 He did not learn English well – hahahahaha. (Comment 4390)

E.g.7 Oh, my God . . . I laughed my head off . . . You want to kill your English teacher with such English. (Comment 197)

E.g.8 Hahahahahaha, he couldn't have passed CET4 [a standardised English proficiency test for university students in China, see also e.g.22, e.g.23]. (Comment 4632)

Although these comments do not explicitly explain how the netizens acquire their standards for judging others' English, they seem to suggest schools (e.g.6), language teachers (e.g.7) and examinations (e.g.8) as possible sources. They negatively evaluate the reporter's English as it is different from what language teachers teach in schools and English exams test. The officially supported Standard English ideology seems to be largely naturalised in the popular discourse. English different from Standard English is negatively evaluated, regardless of whether it serves communicative purposes. Why does the general public align with the official discourse privileging Standard English over intercultural communication? This question leads to the second theme emerging in these negative comments.

In addition to notions of standardness and correctness, English is found to be connected to China and the Chinese people in far more complicated ways in the netizens' belief systems. The kind of English spoken is related to personal image and social status – a point mentioned by 1,144 of the 3,255 negative comments.

E.g.9 Very salient manifestation of Chinglish. What a shame! (Comment 1811)

E.g.10 His English is even worse than mine . . . Is he qualified as a reporter . . . I piss myself laughing. (Comment 4627)

E.g.11 Oh, I am dying laughing. It is really humiliating [that] a CCTV reporter spoke English like this. (Comment 1515)

As e.g.9 shows, English is connected to personal image. To speak English with Chinese characteristics is perceived as shameful and disgraceful, a kept private failing that should not be exposed to others. E.g.10 and e.g.11 further relate English language proficiency with professional qualifications and social status. The comments reveal the expectation that to be a reporter, one needs to have a certain command of English. To work for an organisation with such high social status as CCTV, this is even more imperative. Otherwise, one does not deserve to work as a CCTV reporter.

In addition to being associated with personal image and social status, English is also actively appropriated (1,022 of 3,255) to represent institutional and even national images.

E.g.12 Hehehe I feel the reporter could be laid off. He is destroying the image of CCTV. (Comment 2825)

E.g.13 Feel [he or his English has] been humiliated. Speaking like this . . . to represent a nation, could you find someone reliable. (Comment 248)

These comments seem to associate a perceived level of English language proficiency with the images of the institution and even the nation-state. However, the English appraised positively in these situations is not English with Chinese characteristics or China English. To the contrary, China English is perceived as damaging the image of the institution (e.g.12) and humiliating the nation in front of the rest of the world (e.g.13). With English associated with national, institutional and individual identities, people's use of English is critically evaluated against their social and professional backgrounds. In this case, the reporter's Chinese-accented English becomes a target of attack. In a sense, the reporter is criticised not due for his English *per se* but for the mismatch between the way he uses English and the high professional and social status he has as a CCTV reporter, according to these netizens. If he had another job, speaking English with Chinese accent would not be perceived as so problematic (e.g.14). That he speaks English like everyone else despite his high social and professional status (e.g.15) triggers the debate as he is expected to use so-called English as an English-language news reporter. That is the main reason for the critical censure of his English.

E.g.14 There is a large number of people with such accents, but to humiliate CCTV, it is a little unacceptable. (Comment 2372)

E.g.15 For oral English, grammar need not be particularly attended to, but he is from CCTV. Can he also speak this way?! (Comment 3856)

It seems those netizens take English as much more than a communication tool. It is effectively regarded as 'a defining quality of talents', 'a sign of distinction' and 'the language of social and economic prestige', as Hu and Alsagoff (2010: 371) argued. Associating English with social status and upward mobility, in turn, contributes to turning English into a valorised form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) in China. The netizens seem to be quite clear about this point. To negotiate upward mobility, they actively capitalise on English to gain access to various 'economic, social, educational and professional opportunities and resources' (Hu & Alsagoff, 2010: 371). Likewise, the netizens

who show affiliation to such discourses aligned with the ideology of using English to differentiate people and construct social stratifications. The case of the reporter goes against the ideological discourses they have reinvested. This, to a certain degree, increases dissatisfaction with his English, as revealed in the following comments.

E.g.16 Crap!!!!!!! Didn't CCTV check their oral English ability while hiring reporters!!!!!!!!!!!! (Comment 2458)

E.g.17 Is the reporter a floor cleaner at CCTV? Otherwise, he must have got the job by using private connections!!! (Comment 2345)

These two examples reveal that the netizens regard English as a gatekeeper for social and professional upward mobility in China. They take it for granted that when hiring any reporter, CCTV will consider the applicant's English (e.g.16). E.g.17 challenges the reporter's professional competence as a CCTV reporter based on the way he speaks English. The user describes being a CCTV reporter as a job with high social status. To be qualified as a CCTV reporter, one has to use English according to certain norms. Otherwise, one only deserves to work as a floor cleaner. However, given that this person already is a reporter, the only reasonable explanation is that he got the job not based on his competence but through personal connections. These netizens seem to have internalised the ideology of English as a capital and a gatekeeper of social mobility. Within this ideological discourse, they discredit the reporter's Chinese-accented English.

In sum, our analysis of the negative comments reveals the netizens' alignment with the dominant discourse, particularly in their belief in Standard English norms and conventions and the use of them rather than communicative effectiveness to evaluate the reporter's English language features. In addition, the netizens generally accept English's gatekeeping role in individual, institutional and even national development in China and actively recapitalise on it for social and economic upward mobility. Within such ideological discourses, Chinese-accented English is devalued, and those who speak English with a Chinese accent are negatively evaluated, particularly when their English goes against their professional and social status.

Positive comments on the reporter's English

In contrast to the negative comments discussed, positive ones draw on different ideological

discourses to support the reporter's use of English. The comments in this category convey a strong message that these netizens generally recognise the role of English in communication. Among the 1,106 positive comments, 302 foreground communication as the primary concern in evaluating the reporter's English. In line with the concept of English for communication, these comments challenge the ideological constructions underpinning netizens' negative evaluations of the reporter's English.

E.g.18 This is standard oral English. Support! Completely Support! Claps! (Comment 1495)

E.g.19 There is nothing funny about this. Language is for communication. It is enough if the two understand each other. Having accents is normal, OK? (Comment 4989)

These two examples show that positive comments focus more on the use of English as a communication tool. Aligned with the discourse on English for communication, they recognise the Chinese-African interaction as genuinely 'standard' English (e.g.18), and accept accents as normal and natural in such authentic communication (e.g.19). To the contrary, these netizens question privileging the idealised native speaker English (e.g.20), particularly when using English to communicate with non-native speakers, as pointed out in e.g.21.

E.g.20 I really think it is nice. It is enough to understand each other. Is it necessary for everyone to speak like an American? That is stupid. Anyway, I think it is nice. (Comment 286)

E.g.21 We don't need to communicate with African friends in the European or American way! (Comment 4000)

These comments explicitly challenge the relevance of native English norms to communication without the presence of native speakers. In addition, other practices built on the dominant ideologies are also untenable.

E.g.22 This kind of communication materials should be included in CET 6. (Comment 8913)

E.g.23 It demonstrates clearly that we should not elevate the status of English so high. It is only an instrument. To understand is enough. It is nonsense to take CET6 test. (Comment 3801)

E.g.24 In fact, it is fine to have fun with the reporter's English. But whatever he spoke, he is a visiting reporter from CCTV and must have his own expertise! Language is for communication. It is OK if the

two could understand each other and answer the questions. (Comment 2454)

E.g.22 points to the necessity to adjust English examinations to include these instances of ELF communication in listening, while e.g.23 directly questions the high status of English in China and the implementation of high-stakes English tests. E.g.24 appeals for fair treatment of the reporter instead of judging him solely on the way he uses English. In other words, the reorientation of English towards communication leads to netizens' positive evaluations of the reporter and subversion of the dominant ideological constructions of English.

Along with recognition of English for communication, 148 of the total 1,106 positive comments mention the development of English in different places and the uniqueness of English in China.

E.g.25 He spoke English succinctly and fluently. In fact, the whole issue is to get yourself understood and achieve the communicative purpose. Accent is not a problem at all. There are Indian English and Australia English. Why can't we have China English, especially when it is so unique?! (Comment 3345)

E.g.26 I claim that I am also speaking Chinese-style English. I write emails to my clients like this every day, and I don't find any problem with them. Can anybody send me a correct model? (Comment 1180)

Both comments justify the use of China English. The first makes a connection between China English and other varieties of English in the world, and the second recognises that this netizen, too, is a China English user and further challenges the existence of any correct English model. In addition to recognising China English, the netizens also promote the reporter's English as a preferable instance of communication for both China and Chinese speakers.

E.g.27 It is great to have English with ethnic features. (Comment 4458)

E.g.28 This indicates China is truly walking into the world. (Comment 952)

E.g.29 Good accent!!! Only with this kind of accent can the Chinese be treated in the right way in international communication!! (Comment 5393)

These three examples outline three possible roles for China English in international communication. E.g.27 highlights China English's role as a carrier of Chinese characteristics and the uniqueness of China English in local expressions. E.g.28 recognises the potential of China English to bring

China to the world, while e.g.29 stresses its potential to empower Chinese speakers in international communication.

A large number of netizens also perceive China English as familiar and comfortable for Chinese speakers.

E.g.30 I find it is very genial. We, the general public, can also understand. Its sound is not a bad thing.

(Comment 4843)

E.g.31 Sounds good. Very genial. It is just like our classmates who are asking questions. (Comment 860)

E.g.32 Very homey. People around us all speak this way. He is definitely from our Shandong. It sounds closer to us than the standard pronunciation.

(Comment 4491)

In these comments, China English is valued for its closeness to Chinese. In particular, China English is put forward as easily understandable and accessible to the general public (e.g.30). Hearing people speaking China English is like hearing one's own classmates (e.g.31) or a person from the same hometown speaking a local dialect (e.g.32). Unlike the negative comments in which the reporter's China English is perceived as inferior, China English is appreciated in these comments for reducing social distances. Indeed, 458 of the total 1,106 positive comments explicitly mention increased confidence after seeing the video clip of this Chinese-African interaction.

E.g.33 People with this kind of English could appear in CCTV programs and interview foreigners. This really sets a good example for me, who always feels shy opening my mouth. My confidence rises sharply. (Comment 3569)

E.g.34 Having spoken fluent China English for three years, I finally find my confidence. He heals my sense of inferiority for many years. (Comment 3354)

The netizens in e.g.33 and e.g.34 send the message that they previously were ashamed to speak China English due to concerns about the Chineseness of their English. The reporter's use of China English has set a good example for them and restored their confidence in using Chinese-influenced English. These examples are also enlightening for understanding the Chinglish stigma traditionally attached to China English. The analysis reveals that the stigma might result not from China English's inability to serve the communication needs of speakers but from its lack of recognition as symbolic capital for negotiating upward mobility. However, the stigmatisation results in serious

consequences for people's confidence in learning and using English. The positive comments may express the netizens' implicit aspiration to decouple English and socio-economic stratification and to change how English is learnt and used to empower Chinese English users.

Conclusions and implications

The study investigates the ideological constructions of English in China from a folk linguistics perspective and sheds light on how the dominant ideologies of English are (re)produced in the popular discourse. On one hand, it seems that Chinese netizens (71.3%) are largely subject to the dominant ideology establishing Standard English in the official discourse. Within this discourse, the reporter's English is largely perceived as nonstandard and incorrect and thus is criticised. These netizens associate English with individual competence, professional mobility, social status and even institutional and national images. These practices, to a certain degree, contribute to the glorification of English from a mere language to valuable capital, proficiency in which is taken as a criterion for social differentiation and stratification. In this ideological discourse, China English has no place as it is widely shared by most Chinese speakers and thus fails to function as symbolic capital signalling distinction and prestige.

On the other hand, some netizens are also found contesting and transforming the dominant English ideologies and (re)constructing or (re)negotiating their own identities in their comments. 24.2% netizens support the reporter and evaluate his English positively. This group of netizens prioritises communication as the main criterion in its evaluations. Foregrounding communication contests the practice of privileging Standard English in schooling, testing and gatekeeping. Instead, China English is promoted as an effective means to democratise English and meet the needs of the general public. It is valued as familiar to the general public and as indexing Chinese identity. Using China English has the potential to reduce the social distance among Chinese speakers, boost their confidence in using English and empower them in international communication. These comments indicate Chinese netizens' emergent identification with ELF for communication.

This debate online over the performance of English reflects Chinese online culture and the popular discourse of language ideologies (Yan, 2014). Findings of the study also have important implications for understanding English in present-day

China. Today, a number of initiatives seem to promote English education within the ELF paradigm. It is argued that ELF has already become a social reality, and language education in China should be adapted to this reality. After all, international and intercultural communication is the main purpose for Chinese people to learn English (Wen, 2012). However, with the deepened integration of English into Chinese society, it might not be easy to bring about the necessary changes through classroom language teaching and learning. As our study indicates, the Standard English ideology is not only preserved in the official discourse but is also produced and reproduced in the popular discourse to serve the interests of the general public. English is widely recognised by the general public as an indicator of individual prestige, professional ability and social mobility.

The finding that some netizens align with the academic discourse in supporting China English and contesting Standard English demonstrates the negotiated nature of language ideologies in real contexts. In line with Kroskrity (2004), this study problematises the 'overly homogeneous view of language ideologies' stemming from the 'official culture of the ruling class' (Kroskrity, 2004: 496-497). It is true that the dominant ideologies of English can draw a large number of netizens to their side. However, members of the general public, as local agents, also critically scrutinise and actively make sense of these dominant ideologies in their own ways. They have their private agendas in using English and actively capitalise on dominant English language ideologies, turning them into useful steppingstones for social and economic mobility. The negotiated nature of China English ideologies in this study implies that successful enactment of any top-down language policy and planning has to take into consideration bottom-up realities. Failing to do so runs the risk of subjecting the general public to dominant power forces, which will eventually mute their voices rather than serving their real needs. It may also provoke conflicts, struggles and acts of resistance if mismatches occur between the dominant ideological constructions and the needs of grassroots language users.

This study also contributes to the understanding of English globalisation with insights from the Chinese context. China, as a major participant in ELF communication, is sure to influence the future development of ELF through the ways it uses English (Fang, 2017a; Seidlhofer, 2011). This study indicates that the ideology of Standard English is still robust in China, but an emergent identification with ELF can be seen in the popular discourse. With the rise of

China's participation in globalisation, the Chinese public's opportunities to communicate with the outside world will gradually increase, as will their knowledge about ELF. Another point worth making here is that the WE and ELF paradigms are usually treated separately, with the former investigating the development of English in various local contexts – that is, the local English varieties – and the latter the development of English in global contexts, with a particular emphasis on the interactions of speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds (Park & Wee, 2012). To understand ELF communication at the global level, one has to pay attention to the local features and cultures individuals bring with them to international communication (Fang, 2017b; Liu & Fang, 2017; Wang, 2015). Local English varieties are also needed for self-expression in international ELF communication. Consequently, in this ELF communication case, the reporter's use of Chinese-accented English is not only tolerated by a certain number of netizens but even favourably appreciated by some for marking their Chinese identity and facilitating local expressions. To add to the research focus on linguistic features and communication strategies, therefore, attention to local English varieties in realising local cultures and identities is also needed.

Acknowledgements

Research for this article was supported by the Discipline Co-construction Project of Philosophy and Social Science of Guangdong Province (No. GD17XWW07), China Scholarship Council (No. 201806415052), and the Fundamental Research Funds for Central Universities, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan (No. G1323541818). We would like to thank them for the sponsorship, and also the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their comments and suggestions during the peer-review process. Any remaining errors are our own.

References

- Adamson, B. 2004. *China's English: A History of English in Chinese Education*. Hong Kong: University Press.
- Bolton, K. 2005. 'Where WE stands: Approaches, issues, and debate in World Englishes.' *World Englishes*, 24(1), 69–83.
- Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a Global Language* (2nd edn.). Cambridge: University Press.
- Fang, F. 2017a. 'An Investigation of attitudes towards English accents – A case study of a university in China.' In Z. Xu, D. He & D. Deterding (eds.), *Researching Chinese English: State of the Art*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 141–156.

- Fang, F. 2017b. 'World Englishes or English as a lingua franca: Where does English in China Stand.' *English Today*, 33(1), 19–24.
- Fang, F. & Ren, W. 2018. 'Developing students' awareness of Global Englishes.' *ELT Journal*, 72(4), 384–394.
- Gao, X. 2012. 'The study of English as a patriotic enterprise.' *World Englishes*, 31(3), 351–365.
- Guo, Y. & Beckett, G. 2012. 'A critical analysis of English language teaching in today's market economy in China.' In K. Sung & R. Pederson (eds.), *Critical ELT Practices in Asia: Key Issues, Practices and Possibilities*. Rotterdam: The Netherlands Sense Publishers, pp. 55–70.
- He, D. & Li, D. C. S. 2009. 'Language attitudes and linguistic features in the "China English" debate.' *World Englishes*, 28(1), 70–89.
- Hu, G. 2005. 'English language education in China: Policies, progress, and problems.' *Language Policy*, 4(1), 5–24.
- Hu, G. & Alsagoff, L. 2010. 'A public policy perspective on English medium instruction in China.' *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(4), 365–382.
- Jenkins, J. 2007. *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford: University Press.
- Jiang, Y. 2003. 'English as a Chinese language.' *English Today*, 19(2), 3–8.
- Kachru, B. B. 1986. *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions, and Models of Non-native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Kirkpatrick, A. 2007. *World Englishes: Implications for International Communication and English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Kroskrity, P. V. 2004. 'Language ideologies.' In A. Duranti (ed.), *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 496–517.
- Kroskrity, P. V. 2010. 'Language ideologies—Evolving perspectives.' In J. Jaspers, J.–O. Östman & J. Verschueren (eds.), *Society and Language Use*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 192–211.
- Liu, J. & Fang, F. 2017. 'Perceptions, awareness and perceived effects of home culture on intercultural communication: Perspectives of university students in China.' *System*, 67, 25–37.
- McGroarty, M. 2010. 'Language and ideologies.' In N. H. Hornberger & S. L. McKay (eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 3–39.
- Modiano, M. 2001. 'Ideology and the ELT practitioner.' *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 159–173.
- Moody, A. 2013. 'Language ideology in the discourse of popular culture.' In C. A. Chapelle (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. London: Blackwell, pp. 1–3.
- Niu, Q. & Wolff, M. 2003. 'China and Chinese, or Chingland and Chinglish?' *English Today*, 19(2), 9–11.
- Pan, L. 2011. 'English language ideologies (ELI) in Olympic Beijing.' *Applied Linguistics Review*, 2, 75–97.
- Pan, L. & Block, D. 2011. 'English as a "global language" in China: An investigation into learners' and teachers' language beliefs.' *System*, 39(3), 391–402.
- Park, J. S.–Y. & Wee, L. 2012. *Markets of English: Linguistic Capital and Language Policy in a Globalizing World*. New York: Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. 2009. *Linguistic Imperialism Continued*. New York: Routledge.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. 1995. 'Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis.' In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (eds.), *Life History and Narrative*. London: Falmer Press, pp. 5–24.
- Seidlhofer, B. 2011. *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: University Press.
- Silverstein, M. 1979. 'Language structure and linguistic ideology.' In P. R. Clyne, W. F. Hanks & C. L. Hofbauer (eds.), *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*. Chicago: Linguistic Society, 193–247.
- Trudgill, P. 1999. 'Standard English: What it isn't.' In T. Bex & R. J. Watts (eds.), *Standard English: The Widening Debate*. London: Routledge, pp. 117–128.
- Tsui, A. B. M. & Tollefson, J. W. 2007. 'Language policy and the construction of national cultural identity.' In A. B. M. Tsui & J. W. Tollefson (eds.), *Language Policy, Culture, and Identity in Asian Contexts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 1–24.
- Wang, W. 2015. 'Teaching English as an international language in China: Investigating university teachers' and students' attitudes towards China English.' *System*, 53, 60–72.
- Wei, Y. & Fei, J. 2003. 'Using English in China.' *English Today*, 19(4), 42–47.
- Wen, Q. F. 2012. 'Teaching English as an international language in mainland China.' In A. Kirkpatrick & R. Sussex (eds.), *English as an International Language in Asia: Implications for Language Education*. NY: Springer, pp. 79–124.
- Woolard, K. A. & Schieffelin, B. B. 1994. 'Language ideology.' *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23, 55–82.
- Xiong, T. & Qian, Y. 2012. 'Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis.' *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 32(1), 75–92.
- Xu, Z. 2010. *Chinese English: Features and Implications*. Hong Kong: Open University Press.
- Yan, X. 2014. 'A meta-discursive analysis of online comments of Chinese netizens on Huang Xiaoming's appropriation of English.' *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 27(2), 151–162.
- Yang, C. & Zhang, L. J. 2015. 'China English in trouble: Evidence from teacher dyadic talk.' *System*, 51, 39–50.