

**Written Cantonese and the rise of written vernaculars**  
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**Handout #1**

**Diglossia.**

- ❖ Definition = describes situations in which a society uses two different language varieties for different functions:
  - A "low" (L) language for daily conversation;
  - A "high" (H) language for formal purposes, including most or all writing.
- ❖ Key characteristics of a diglossic situation:
  - L is the daily spoken language; H is not used for ordinary conversation.
  - L is learned naturally at home; H is learned primarily in school.
  - Little - if anything - is written in L (although there may be some exceptions, such as certain kinds of poetry written in L); H is a written language with a strong written and literary tradition.
  - L is generally considered low and vulgar; H is generally considered superior to L - more beautiful, more logical, better for expressing lofty thoughts.
  - L has few formal standards, and if such things as dictionaries and grammars exist for L at all, they were probably done by outsiders. H has clearly stated standards, and there is generally a strong tradition of the formal study of H within the community; for example, there are dictionaries, grammars, formal codes of orthography, and so forth.

**Written vernaculars:**

- ❖ China:
  - Before 1900s, Classical Chinese dominant written language in China.
  - However, Baihua already existed and had a long history.
    - Appears first in Tang Dynasty *bianwen* texts.
    - Grows through use in vernacular fiction.
  - In early 1900s, reformers advocate use of Baihua in order to promote literacy, education, and modernization.
  - From 1920s on, Baihua gradually replaces Classical Chinese. For example, in 1920s, adopted by government as the language for school textbooks.
- ❖ Japan:
  - Classical Chinese the dominant written language in traditional Japan.
  - However, written Japanese developed quite early and was used in some kinds of poetry, private writing, and low-prestige writing such as women's literature.
    - Heian period Japan (794-1185) – *wabun* Japanese prose, *waka* Japanese poetry.
    - *Tale of Genji* all in Japanese in hiragana, cir. 1001-1010.
  - In Meiji period (late 1800s) reformers argue it is too difficult to promote mass education using Classical Chinese. (Many of them aware of close relationship between spoken/written language in Europe.)
  - During late 1800s/early 1900s, written Japanese replaces Classical Chinese in fiction writing – paves way for use of written Japanese in other genres.
  - Early 1900s – written Japanese becomes main language of newspapers; later of school textbooks.
  - In 1946, written Japanese becomes the language of official documents.
- ❖ Korea:
  - Classical Chinese the dominant written language in pre-modern Korea.

- However, some use of the vernacular in certain kinds of writing:
  - Hyangga 鄉歌 between 600s and 880s – vernacular poetry transcribed in Chinese characters.
  - Also hyangch'al 鄉札 system of writing, using Chinese characters but completely Korean word order.
- Hangul – announced in 1446 – though little used until late 1800s.
- Late 1800s – progressives begin to use written Korean in newspapers.
- 1894 – royal decree that all government documents be printed in Korean.
- 1910 – movement to unify spoken and written language.
- Onset of Japanese colonization ends promotion of written Korean – Japanese promoted instead.
- After independence from Japan, written Korean promoted vigorously in both North and South Korea – Hangul becomes a symbol of great national pride.
- ❖ Vietnam:
  - Classical Chinese as dominant pre-modern language.
  - In pre-modern period, there was a written language called Nom - Vietnamese represented with Chinese characters, used for writing certain kinds of texts such as vernacular poems.
  - After Vietnam becomes a French colony, colonial authorities promote Romanized Vietnamese (Quoc Ngu) as the written language through use in schools – in part to reduce Chinese influence. Nom gradually dies out as fewer and fewer people educated to read Chinese characters.
  - Initially Quoc Ngu resisted by many Vietnamese, but gradually nationalist leaders become more supportive of it because they feel some degree of westernization is necessary for national strengthening.
- ❖ Chinese dialect writing:
  - Wu dialect used in printed texts of songs, operas; also in turn-of-the-century fiction.
  - Southern Min dialect used in pre-modern opera, song texts; written Taiwanese promoted in recent decades as a symbol of cultural nationalism, used in fiction and even academic texts.
  - Cantonese used first in song, opera texts, later in newspaper articles; used in Hong Kong today in many kinds of newspaper and magazine articles, some fiction, and advertising.

**“Popular development” of vernacular writing – defined as:**

- ❖ Development that is not actively promoted by any organized and influential social group.
- ❖ Development that, rather, grows as a result of popular “demand,” driven by personal factors such as the following:
  - The vernacular is easy to learn to read and write.
  - For writers, using the vernacular makes it easier to express personal feelings.
  - For readers, use of the vernacular creates stronger sense of emotional immediacy, personal intimacy, and in-group closeness.
- ❖ Such development may also be driven by market factors.

**Text 1:** 健仔說五虎跳舞差因互影響拉低水準, 樣子不夠標青但慶幸有觀眾緣. (節選)

1) 彭健新加盟了亞視後, 不知多活躍, 又拍劇集, 又做主持, 此外, 他還要兼顧本身製作公司的工作及唱歌工作等, 總之, 就係忙啦.

2) "咁多嘢做, 掂唔掂呀? 咪到頭來周身刀無張利嗎?" 3) 健仔個人一向忍得, 瘀得, 所以, 亦不怕潤他兩句. 4) "車, 有乜唔掂." 5) 健仔牙擦擦, 說 "這些工作也不致太難, 尚可應付, 我呢個人, 只有一樣嘢稍微難到我, 那便是跳舞及做司儀嘞!" 6) "咁就唔止一樣啦, 擺明已經係兩樣嘞, 不過, 睇嚟仲唔止, 你個樣呢?" 哈哈笑的盡情在糟質他. 7) 健仔那份膨脹的自信, 絲毫不受到打擊, 他還不知多神氣說 "我個樣雖然唔係太標青, 但尚幸也有一點觀眾緣, 哎吔, 呢點好重要, 起碼行到出嚟, 唔會被人噓先啦!"

8) 講回健仔話自己跳舞差, 呢點, 相信十個人十個人也不會反對他的說法. 9) 健仔更又拖埋溫拿的其他四位成員落水, 說 "其實在溫拿的五個人之中, 我算係跳得最叻嘅一個添囉."

#### Notes:

❖ Text from *Sing Pao Daily* (成報), 13 September 1989, p.32

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**Text 2:** 怪論: 情人節實係有情人之節論 (節選) 三蘇

1) 今日是華倫泰節, 俗稱情人節, 此乃洋節, 中國人以前一向冇這個節者也. 2) 現在的中國 (不論大陸與台灣) 亦無此節, 香港好多中國人亦不理此節, 只有讀番書的少年男女乃至中年男女, 才流行過此情人節. 3) 情人節本來只係一個表示親愛關懷的節日, 不限於情人, 所以朋友之間, 亦可互相道賀以致送禮, 至於真正愛河中的情侶, 則更加重視此一節日, 不在話下. 4) 拍拖之外, 還要寄一張情人咭俾情人, 至為要緊.

5) 實際上, 情人節在香港, 亦只係 "情人咭節" 耳, 好多後生子女, 買定情人咭, 在幾日前已經寄發與情人及女朋友. 6) 情人節最好之處是監人賴厚, 買張又大又靚者寄與女朋友, 咭內印好晒情話, 唔使自己講, 亦唔怕講出來面紅, 更不怕會俾人打幾個巴掌. 7) 此乃情人咭的好處, 如果女朋友對自己有意, 回到電話, 約佢去街, 不難變成情人, 不過有時會俾人丟咗個咭落字紙籬耳. 8) 幸而女仔倒底是人軟動物, 不論對方監人賴厚與否, 收到張情人咭, 亦會擺在案頭, 好比聖誕節收到人地聖誕咭一樣, 舉行展覽會, 邀集親友參觀, 以示威水. 9) 三蘇有個世侄女, 就很興這一手嘢, 專門展示情人咭, 以示其男友眾多為榮.

10) 照三蘇來看, 情人節者, 實係有情人之節日, 如果彼此有情, 則日日都係情人節, 天天孖公仔一樣, 使乜咁緊張要在一年之中揀一日來做節, 認真荒謬.

#### Notes:

❖ Text from 三蘇, 三蘇怪論選, 香港: 作家書屋, 1975, pp. 118-19.

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**Text 3:** 小男人周記 #2 (節選) 阿寬

1) 各位朋友,我係阿寬! 大家好嘛?  
 2) 呢兩個月以來,我嘅體重急劇下降. 2) 好彩而家仲係冬天,我唯有經常着個 D 濶身粗冷冷衫嚟掩飾我苗條嘅身型,因為我條腰幼咗吋幾兩吋,哦,用公制即係四至五個 cm, 4) 為咗要 hold 住我個褲頭,我唯有將個 call 機「攝」咗入裏面, D 褲僥倖唔駛改, 5) 不過我個 call 機係震動嚟,每次有人 call 我,我都有俾人「吱」嘅感覺!  
 6) 自從我揸住大古惑架 BENZ 190E 撞埋支電燈柱嗰度之後,我就腳咗响醫院成個月, 7) 我老婆阿 Ann 日日都有嚟睇我, 8) 初初佢可能諗住我死梗,着埋啲全套黑,全套白嗰亭衫嚟睇我,一 set 咁,可能諗住一旦我雙腳伸直,佢就唔駛換衫, 9) 後尾見我有起色,就略略「變」番啲啡色腰帶呀,跟住就綠呀,紅呀咁, 10) 佢上嚟好少講嘢,躑居居咁坐响我床邊,粒聲唔出望住我. 11) 好多時佢可能日頭做嘢做得好辛苦,嚟到就「恰」眼瞓, 12) 終於有一次,我見到佢瞓着咗,索性抱咗佢上床,讓咗張床俾佢瞓!

**Notes:**

❖ Text from *Diary Of The Little Man #2* (小男人周記 #2), Hong Kong: Tomakazu Production House, 1988, pp.5-6.

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**Text 4:** 方言文學運動: 寫乜嘢好呢? (節選) 華嘉

1) 呢一排,响報紙副刊同雜誌上,都好少見方言文藝嘅作品發表,因此,少不免就有人會咁樣覺得: 方言文藝呢味嘢,講下就得,實行起來就唔係幾得. 2) 而家趁大公報嘅"方言文學"兩週刊要出版,我想就呢個問題講幾句,講得唔對,請大家指教.

3) 近來少見廣東話 (或者其他嘅話) 寫嘅文章發表確係事實,不過呢件嘢講起嚟有兩個原因: 4) 一個係以為寫親方言文藝就要寫龍舟木魚,即係話要用廣州嘅民間形式來寫至得; 5) 另一個係以前喜歡寫方言文藝嘅人,都有的唔知寫乜嘢好. 6) 呢兩個原則確係使到寫方言文藝嘅人頭痛,就算我自己,都曾經為呢件嘢想左好耐,想來想去都想唔通,想唔通就寫唔出,寫唔出又點有得發表呢?

**Notes:**

❖ Text from *Ta Kung Pao* (大公報), 9 March 1949, p.7.

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**Handout #2**

**Tentative generalizations:**

1. Written vernaculars tend to grow by expanding first into domains where there is less social pressure to adhere to a written standard. (The “path of least resistance” factor.) In particular, it more readily establishes a foothold in texts where its use is sanctioned by one or more of the following characteristics:
  - a. The content/purposes of the text are “light” rather than serious.
  - b. The authors and/or audience are of low social class.
  - c. The text is perceived as being associated with settings that are informal or even disreputable.
  - d. The publication in which the text appears is “cheap” – inexpensive and low in prestige.
  - e. The text preserves/replicates spoken language – or at least appears to do so.
2. The shift from a written language norm to a vernacular norm tends to be gradual, with intermediate stages in which written language and vernacular norms are mixed.
3. It is easier for a written vernacular to become widely known and used if the “cost” of learning it is not so great. (Cost/benefit factor #1.)
4. It is easier for a written vernacular to become widely known and used if the “benefits” of learning are relatively high; in other words, if the texts written in the vernacular tend to be appealing. (Cost/benefit factor #2.)
5. In speech communities that are “vital” - wealthy, powerful, autonomous, and so forth - it is natural for spoken vernaculars to develop written forms.

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