

## ‘Gangpu is too funny!’: The mediatization of Hong Kong Mandarin as a jocular register

ANDREW D. WONG 

*California State University, East Bay, USA*

### ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how mediatization facilitates the (re)production of mock language. Through an examination of Chinese netizens’ reactions to a series of viral internet commercials that feature three Hong Kong actors speaking nonstandard Mandarin, it uncovers the processes whereby Gangpu (Hong Kong Mandarin) has become increasingly perceived in China as funny. The vast scale of uptake formulations enabled by mediatization has made it possible for Chinese netizens to engage in a collaborative effort not only in highlighting certain features of Gangpu and certain elements of the commercials but also in presenting them in ways that evoke specific meanings and interpretations. Ultimately, it is through the parodic voicing of Hong Kong celebrities speaking nonstandard Mandarin that this non-native variety has come to be keyed as humorous. This study shows that we gain a better understanding of how mock practices reinforce and build on each other by tracing their uptake and circulation. (Mediatization, mock language, parody, listening subject, Mandarin Chinese, Hong Kong, China)\*

### INTRODUCTION

This article takes a close look at the role of the media in promoting the perception of certain accents and dialects as funny. Linguistic stereotypes, as Lippi-Green (2012) and others have amply demonstrated, are constantly perpetuated by the media and entertainment industry. It is well documented that accents and dialects frequently serve as mental shortcuts for character portrayal in films and on television (see e.g. Meek 2006; Bucholtz & Lopez 2011; Hiramoto & Pua 2019). Foreign-accented English, for instance, has been shown to be strongly associated with malevolent characters in both Disney movies and television cartoons (Dobrow & Gidney 1998; Lippi-Green 2012). On American primetime television, speakers with non-standard American (e.g. Southern) and non-Anglo foreign (e.g. Spanish) accents have been found to be grossly underrepresented compared to those with standard American and foreign Anglo (e.g. British) accents, and when they do appear, they tend to be portrayed less positively in terms of status and physical appearance

(Dragojevic, Mastro, Giles, & Sink 2016). Departing from the focus on traditional producers of news and entertainment, this study examines the ways in which online media content that illustrates, intentionally or not, nonstandard accents and dialects circulates among and gets taken up by internet users.

Through an analysis of Chinese netizens' engagement with a series of widely circulated internet commercials that feature three Hong Kong actors introducing a video game in nonstandard Mandarin, this article aims to uncover the processes whereby Hong Kong Mandarin—more commonly known as Gangpu (港普)—has increasingly come to be perceived in China as humorous. This non-native variety of Mandarin has lately captured the public imagination and become emblematic of the changing power dynamics between Hong Kong and mainland China. Heavily influenced by Cantonese, the first language of almost 90% of Hong Kong's population (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2019), it differs from Putonghua (the standard variety based on the phonology of the Beijing dialect) most significantly in pronunciation, but there exist some lexical and syntactic differences as well. Gangpu may not be the first that comes to mind when Chinese people think of funny accents or dialects. Yet even a cursory examination of the results of a keyword search for 港普 'Gangpu' on Baidu (China's most popular internet search engine) reveals its emerging association with humor and Hong Kong celebrities.<sup>1</sup> Listed on the first page of the results are online videos with titles like 'Gangpu that makes you die laughing' (那些笑死人的港普) and 'A video collection of Gangpu that makes people double up with laughter' (让人捧腹的港普合集).<sup>2</sup> Also prominently displayed at the top of the page is an article entitled "'Zha Zhahui" speaks the kind of Gangpu that makes you laugh so hard that you suffer internal injuries, and so do these people!' (那些笑出内伤的港普, 除了'渣渣辉', 还有他们!).<sup>3</sup> Two of the five Hong Kong actors mentioned in this article, Zhang Jiahui (张家辉) and Gu Tianle (古天乐), are featured in the internet commercials that are the focus of the present study.<sup>4</sup> What is also noteworthy is that the title of the article refers to Zhang as *Zha Zhahui* (渣渣辉), a nickname for him that originated from the commercials.

This case study of Gangpu illuminates how mediatization facilitates the (re)production of mock language. Semiotic mediation, as Agha (2011b:174) defines it, refers to 'the generic process whereby signs connect persons to each other through various forms of cognition, communication and interaction'. As a special case of mediation, mediatization involves 'institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization' (Agha 2011a:163). Digital media technologies, though often lauded for leveling the playing field for the masses, have also made it easier for internet users to participate in the subordination of minoritized linguistic varieties in cyberspace. Mediatization, as I show below, contributes to the increasingly prevalent perception of Gangpu as a jocular register among Chinese netizens. The vast scale of 'uptake formulations' (Agha 2011a; the ways in which the commercials are understood and recontextualized by viewers) enabled by mediatization allows netizens to engage

in a collaborative effort not only in highlighting certain features of Gangpu and certain elements of the internet commercials but also in presenting them in ways that evoke specific meanings and interpretations. Ultimately, it is through the parodic revoicing of Hong Kong celebrities speaking nonstandard Mandarin that Gangpu has come to be keyed as non-serious and humorous. This study shows that we can gain important insights into the mutually reinforcing nature of mock practices by tracing their uptake and circulation.

#### WHY GANGPU? WHY NOW?

The name *Gangpu* (港普) is a clipped compound that combines the second syllable of the Putonghua name for Hong Kong (香港 *Xianggang*) and the first syllable of the Putonghua word for Mandarin (普通话 *Putonghua*).<sup>5</sup> Cantonese, as the first language of the majority of Hong Kong's population, exerts a significant influence on the phonology, syntax, and vocabulary of this non-native variety of Mandarin. Articles about Gangpu that have recently sprung up on the Chinese internet often highlight such stereotypical features as the absence of rhotacization (e.g. *huā* instead of *huār* for 'flower'), the pronunciation of [n-] as [l-], and the substitution of the retroflex consonants [ʈʂ, ʈʂʰ, ʂ] (*zh, ch, sh* in Pinyin) and the alveolo-palatal consonants [tʃ, tʃʰ, ʃ] (*j, q, x* in Pinyin) with the alveolars [ts, tsʰ, s] (*z, c, s* in Pinyin).<sup>6</sup> These features, though enregistered as belonging to Gangpu, are found in other varieties of Mandarin as well. Gangpu resembles the Mandarin variety spoken by many native Cantonese speakers in the neighboring Guangdong province, with one possible difference being its liberal use of English words, often believed to be a legacy of the British colonial rule of Hong Kong.

To understand why many Hongkongers speak nonstandard Mandarin, we need to take a close look at the sociolinguistic history of their city. Of course, not everyone in Hong Kong speaks Gangpu. Those who do tend to be Cantonese-speaking Hongkongers who grew up during the British colonial period (1841–1997) and have never formally studied Putonghua. As early as the 1950s, Hong Kong schools stopped teaching Putonghua because of teacher shortages (Leung & Wong 1996). With the official support of the colonial government, Putonghua was reintroduced as an optional subject in some schools in the 1980s, but it did not become a core part of the curriculum until 1998 (Zhang & Yang 2004). Nevertheless, even Hongkongers who have never received formal instruction in Putonghua are familiar with its structure because Modern Standard Written Chinese (MSWC), essentially the written form of Putonghua, has long been taught in Hong Kong schools. Minor differences notwithstanding, the same written standard is also used in mainland China, Taiwan, and other Chinese-speaking communities. What is interesting is that in Hong Kong, MSWC is commonly taught through the medium of Cantonese rather than Putonghua. (An inexact analogy would be native Italian speakers being taught to read French using Italian pronunciation.) This practice has declined in popularity since the 1997 handover, but many Hong Kong

students are accustomed to using Cantonese to read aloud MSWC texts. Thus, Cantonese-speaking Hongkongers who previously learned MSWC through the medium of their mother tongue know the grammar and vocabulary of Putonghua, but speaking presents a particular challenge because they must learn to pronounce words in the Putonghua rather than the Cantonese way.

In the last few decades, people in mainland China have become increasingly acquainted with Gangpu, in large part thanks to the intensification of economic exchange and cross-cultural interaction with Hongkongers. But what accounts for the recent emergence of Gangpu as a jocular register in Chinese media? This phenomenon, I propose, must be understood in relation to the changing power relations between Hong Kong and mainland China. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, Hong Kong underwent rapid industrialization and experienced tremendous growth, developing into a high-income economy and a leading international financial center. Also emerging during this period was a sense of cultural distinctiveness that not only separated Hongkongers from mainlanders but also convinced many of them of their own superiority (Mathews, Ma, & Lui 2008:36–39). Seeing themselves as more affluent and more cosmopolitan, some Hong Kong residents adopted a discriminatory posture towards ‘new immigrants’ (新移民) from the mainland, who began to settle in the city after China relaxed its border control in the late 1970s (Siu 2008). It was not uncommon at that time for new immigrants to be called derisively *A Chaan* (阿灿) ‘country bumpkin from mainland China’, originally the name of an unsophisticated mainland character in a popular television drama. Yet the decades-long economic boom came to a grinding halt not long after the 1997 handover, when Hong Kong was rocked by the Asian financial crisis. Since then, the city seems to have been beset by one crisis after another: for example, the SARS outbreak in 2003, the Great Recession in the late 2000s, the Umbrella Movement in 2014, and the anti-extradition protests in 2019. Suddenly, this once thriving city, which some (e.g. Chui 1996) previously dubbed ‘China’s golden goose’, does not look so golden anymore. In the 1990s, Hong Kong accounted for roughly twenty percent of China’s GDP, but that number dropped to a meager three percent by 2017 (The World Bank 2018). Meanwhile, the phenomenal growth of the mainland economy in the last five decades has propelled China to global prominence. Hongkongers drawn to China’s burgeoning economy now live, work, and study on the mainland. In an ironic reversal of roles, mainlanders have refashioned the moniker that Hongkongers coined for them in the 1980s and now call arrogant Hongkongers unfamiliar with mainland Chinese culture 港灿 *Gǎngcàn* ‘A Chaan [country bumpkin] from Hong Kong’.

Perhaps nowhere is this reversal of fortune between Hong Kong and mainland China more keenly felt than in the entertainment industry. Hong Kong movies and popular music once held considerable sway over the Chinese pop culture scene. Cantopop (Cantonese pop music) from Hong Kong reached its height of popularity in the 1980s and the 1990s, boasting a legion of loyal fans from mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan (see e.g. Chu

2017). Leslie Cheung (张国荣), Anita Mui (梅艳芳), and other Cantopop singers became household names, performing at sold-out concerts in many countries around the world. Hong Kong television dramas also achieved remarkable success in East and Southeast Asia, with some like *The Bund* (上海滩) (1980) spawning sequels, remakes, and film adaptations (Ma 1999). From the 1980s to the early 1990s, the Hong Kong film industry (once the third largest in the world) prospered despite Hollywood's growing global dominance, evolving into a hub for Chinese-language film production and attracting the attention of Western film critics and audiences alike (Sun 2018). Feeling the pull of Hong Kong pop culture, people in mainland China and elsewhere became interested in learning Cantonese (Chung 2019), and 'Hong Kong-Taiwan accent' (港台腔) even acquired a certain cachet among some mainlanders (Zhang 2018:160–62). Yet, for a variety of reasons (e.g. piracy, overproduction, increased foreign competition), the Hong Kong entertainment industry has lost much of its luster since the 2000s. In particular, the decline of the film sector has led to a growing number of Hong Kong actors turning their career focus to the enormous mainland market. As Hong Kong-mainland co-productions become more and more common, actors from Hong Kong are now regularly featured in mainland films and television series (Sun 2018). Although their voices are usually dubbed by voice artists proficient in Putonghua, mainland audiences can hear these Hong Kong actors' Mandarin in interviews and other events. Through mediatized performances of Gangpu, which may or may not be intentional, Hong Kong actors have essentially become 'exemplary speakers' (Agha 2003) of this variety of Mandarin.

#### MEDIATIZATION AND MOCK LANGUAGE

Chinese netizens' revoicing of the Hong Kong actors in the internet commercials mirrors various forms of mock language that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have studied over the last few decades. The term *mock language* covers a wide variety of parodic performances of others' voices in comedy, everyday conversation, and other discourse settings. It has been used to refer to comedians' hyperbolic imitation of non-native accents, the appropriation by dominant groups of linguistic practices associated with minorities, and linguistic parodies that members of subordinate groups perform to call attention to racist ideologies (see e.g. Ronkin & Karn 1999; Chun 2004; Slobe 2018). In all of these cases, mock language users highlight and exaggerate stereotypical features of the target's speech not only to produce humorous effects but also to convey their parodic intent. An important point is that mock language, though allowing its users to project an easygoing colloquial persona, often perpetuates negative stereotypes of its target. Through the use of Mock Spanish, for instance, white Americans may be able to present themselves as funny, laidback, and cosmopolitan. Yet to understand Mock Spanish humor, one needs to have access to 'very negative racializing representations of Chicanos and

Latinos as stupid, politically corrupt, sexually loose, lazy, dirty, and disorderly' (Hill 1998:682).

Using Agha's (2011a,b) concept of mediatization, this study examines how what is often dubbed 'new media' facilitates the production and reproduction of mock language. Mediation, as Agha (2011a,b) explains, refers to the process whereby people are connected to each other through semiotic means in various forms of communication and interaction. As a special case of mediation, mediatization laminates 'a process of commoditization upon a process of communication' (Agha 2011b:173).<sup>7</sup> Thus, a mediatized object—whether it is a novel, a newspaper, or a commercial—is not merely a communicative form but also a commodity, something of value that can be bought and sold. Furthermore, in connecting communication to commoditization, mediatization links communicative roles (e.g., the speaker, the addressee) to positions within a socioeconomic division of labor (e.g. the buyer, the seller), thereby expanding 'the effective scale of production and dissemination of messages across a population' and 'the scale at which differentiated forms of uptake and response to common messages can occur' (Agha 2011a:163).

Agha's formulation of the concept encourages us to take a close look at the uptake of mediatized objects. Uptake, which may simply be understood as 'a phase or interval of mediation viewed from the standpoint of what is recontextualized' (Agha 2011a:166–67), hinges upon the ability of language users to detach fragments of mediatized objects from their original sources and use them in new contexts. Mediatized messages designed for large audiences provide 'massively parallel inputs to recontextualization' (Agha 2011a:167), but media users, far from being passive recipients, often interpret and reframe these messages in ways that suit their purposes. Once someone receives a mediatized message and responds to it in a certain way, that person is no longer merely a recipient but also the creator of a new uptake formulation, a fragment in a long chain of communication that others can respond to in their own ways. Through mediatization, certain uptake formulations are continuously recycled while others become muted and recede to the background (Cole & Pellicer 2012). If we are to take uptake seriously, we cannot simply focus on immediate responses from the audience at one particular point in time; rather, we must examine the circulation of mediatized fragments and explore uptake as a series of interconnected responses emerging (both linearly and nonlinearly) over time (Androutsopoulos 2016). This crucial insight, as we see below, can help us better understand the transformation of mock language.

#### THE INTERNET COMMERCIALS

This study focuses on a series of internet commercials for Tanwan Lanyue (贪玩蓝月), a massively multiplayer online role-playing game produced by Tanwan Games (贪玩游戏) in mainland China. Released in 2017, these commercials feature three Hong Kong actors using Gangpu to introduce the role-playing game. Because of

their appearance in popular films and television programs, the three actors—Chen Xiaochun (陈小春) (Jordan Chan), Gu Tianle (古天乐) (Louis Koo), and Zhang Jiahui (张家辉) (Nick Cheung)—are well known to mainland audiences. In the commercials, the three actors are dressed in what appears to be traditional warrior garb, introducing the game, highlighting its features, and sometimes even fighting enemies in a mythical land.

Shortly after their release, the Tanwan Lanyue commercials were combined into videos and posted on YouTube and on China's media sharing websites. These videos have garnered views and comments from millions of internet users. Memes and mashups incorporating the commercials soon began to crop up on the Chinese internet. Zhang Jiahui, one of the three actors in the commercials, has received the lion's share of attention. On Weibo (a Chinese microblogging website similar to Twitter), 渣渣辉 *Zhā Zhāhuī*, his nickname that originally came from the commercials, became widely used. An article on Zhihu (a Chinese question-and-answer website) that discusses regional varieties of Mandarin even uses Zhang as an example to poke fun at the way Cantonese people speak the national language.<sup>8</sup> These commercials have also caught the interest of traditional producers of news and entertainment. In 2018, Zhang was asked about the commercials on a popular Chinese talk show.<sup>9</sup> When he lamented that the entire country had been laughing at his Mandarin, the host suggested that he should interpret the laughter as signaling the virality of the commercials.

The corpus for this study includes different videos of the internet commercials that have been shared on several websites. Because of space limitations, the analysis presented below focuses on the video with the most views on Bilibili and YouTube, the comments it has received on both websites, and a video mashup as further illustration of how Chinese netizens engage with the commercials. Bilibili, which claims around 223 million active users per month, is one of the most popular video sharing websites in mainland China (Bilibili 2021). Selective rather than exhaustive, the analysis is intended to provide a glimpse of how viewers recontextualize fragments of the Tanwan Lanyue commercials. As of June 23, 2022, the video in question garnered 2,589,000 views (and 2,480 comments) on Bilibili and 709,424 views (and 647 comments) on YouTube.<sup>10</sup> In their comments, Bilibili and YouTube users describe the commercials as 'cute' (可爱), 'interesting' (有趣), 'funny' (搞笑), and 'comical' (滑稽), using emoticons and onomatopoeic words representing laughter (e.g. 哈哈哈哈哈 *hahahaha*) to draw attention to their humorous nature. Some suggest jokingly that the video possesses a magical power that makes viewers become 'addicted' to it. Most importantly, netizens attribute the addictive and humorous nature of the commercials to the three actors'—and especially Zhang's—Gangpu. 'This kind of Mandarin', as one YouTube user says, 'can make you laugh for five minutes' (这些普通话 可以笑五分钟了) (Tony lee, comment posted 2018-02-02).

Recognizing uptake as a continuous process comprised of linear and nonlinear pathways, the following analysis pays close attention to how Chinese netizens

selectively recontextualize the video and how their reactions to the actors' Gangpu reinforce and build on each other. Never a pure transfer from one context to another, recontextualization generates new meanings through the interaction between the original and the copy and between the quoting text and the quoted text. To decontextualize and recontextualize a text, as Bauman & Briggs (1990:76) remind us, is also 'an act of control, and in regard to the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises'. As 'listening subjects' (Inoue 2003), Chinese netizens exert significant power in promoting and solidifying the perception of Gangpu as a jocular register.

#### THE LAYERED POLYPHONY OF YOUTUBE COMMENTS

To understand how viewers poke fun at the three actors' Gangpu, we can look at the ways in which YouTube users recontextualize the Tanwan Lanyue video in their comments. As sites of audience engagement, the comments sections of YouTube videos allow users at disparate locations to showcase knowledge, form mutual alignments, and exchange metalinguistic views. As we see in this section, Chinese netizens engage with each other and build on each other's remarks about Gangpu. In 'quoting' the three actors, they extract stretches of discourse from the video to supposedly highlight nonstandard features. However, to enhance the comic value of Gangpu, they exaggerate—and often misrepresent—the actors' pronunciation. The entextualized fragments, though ostensibly mimicking the actors' nonstandard accent, produce new meanings and humorous interpretations through deliberate mishearing and clever manipulation of Chinese characters. By widening the intertextual gap between what is said and what is reported, Chinese netizens distance themselves from the quoted voice and mark their recontextualizations as parody. Parodic imitations work precisely because they are not perfect replications. In this form of varidirectional double-voiced discourse, the parodist's voice 'collides in a hostile fashion with the original owner and forces him [or her] to serve purposes diametrically opposed to his [or her] own' (Bakhtin 1984a:160).

Example (1a) shows the very first comment about the video posted on YouTube. To facilitate our discussion, I have included on the right its Pinyin transliteration and phonetic transcription. Here, the commenter pokes fun at the way Zhang Jiahui speaks Mandarin by using the character 渣 *zhā* 'dregs, sediment' to foreground his nonstandard accent. In this and subsequent examples, the actual comment is in (a). For the sake of comparison, I provide in (b) the 'correct' (standard) version of the intended message and highlight the differences between (a) and (b) in boldface. They are then followed by the English translation of the intended message. It is important to note that Zhang says in the video the second part but not the first part of the comment in (1a). This comment can, therefore, be viewed as Terminator's attempt to mimic how the actor would say the 'correct' version



in (1b). Example (1c) shows the phonetic transcription of how Zhang actually introduces himself in the video.

(1) Terminator (终结者) (YouTube, 2017-12-19)<sup>11</sup>

- a. 大渣好，我是渣渣辉      dàzhā hǎo, wǒ shì Zhā Zhāhuī  
[ta:<sup>4</sup>tsa:<sup>1</sup> xau<sup>3</sup> wo:<sup>3</sup> sz:<sup>4</sup> tsa:<sup>1</sup> tsa:<sup>1</sup>x<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>]
- b. 大家好，我是张家辉      dàjiā hǎo, wǒ shì Zhāng Jiāhuī  
[ta:<sup>4</sup>tca:<sup>1</sup> xau<sup>3</sup> wo:<sup>3</sup> sz:<sup>4</sup> tsaŋ<sup>1</sup> tca:<sup>1</sup>x<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>]
- c. [wo:<sup>3</sup> si<sup>4</sup> tsaŋ<sup>1</sup> tsa:<sup>1</sup>x<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>]  
'Hello, everyone! I'm Zhang Jiahui.'

Unlike letters in an alphabetic writing system, individual characters in the Chinese logographic system generally represent morphemes rather than sounds. In Chinese writing, to approximate nonstandard speech, one must resort to the use of already existing characters with conventionalized meaning. In (1a), Terminator uses 渣 *zhā* to flag the actor's nonstandard pronunciation of *zhāng* and *jiā*. Retroflex and alveolo-palatal consonants—including the onsets of these two syllables ([ʈʂ] and [tʃ] represented by *zh* and *j* in Pinyin)—do not exist in Cantonese. Many Cantonese speakers pronounce them as retracted alveolars instead. In fact, this is regarded as a shibboleth of Cantonese speakers' (and more generally, southerners') Mandarin.

Two issues arise when we compare (1c) with (1a) and (1b). First, it is apparent that not all nonstandard features in (1c) are represented in (1a). Most notably, (1a) does not indicate Zhang's pronunciation of the onset of the Chinese copular verb, 是 *shì*, as a retracted [s]. (In the phonetic transcription, the retraction is denoted by a minus sign under the consonant.) Second, one may wonder why 渣 *zhā*, with its retroflex onset, is used in (1a) to represent Zhang's nonstandard pronunciation of the retroflex and the alveolo-palatal consonants. 脏 *zāng* [tsaŋ<sup>1</sup>] 'dirty' and 扎 *zā* [tsa:<sup>1</sup>] 'bind, tie, fasten', for example, are closer to how Zhang pronounces *zhāng* and *jiā*. In (1a), the character 渣 *zhā*, though not accurately representing Zhang's nonstandard pronunciation, adds comic value to the representation by virtue of its meaning. Literally meaning 'dregs', it also refers to the worst part of something and is found in words like 人渣 *rénzhā* ('person' + 'dregs' → 'scumbag') and 学渣 *xuézhā* ('study' + 'dregs' → 'bottom-of-the-barrel student'). Its use in (1a) suggests that the actor inadvertently presents himself as worthless.

Replies to Terminator's comment illustrate the collaborative nature of YouTube viewers' efforts to mock the three actors' nonstandard Mandarin. In these replies, netizens follow Terminator's template and provide additional examples from the video to illustrate the three actors' use of stereotypical Gangpu features—particularly, their nonstandard pronunciation of retroflex and alveolo-palatal consonants (represented by *zh/ch/sh* and *j/q/x* in Pinyin)—when introducing themselves to viewers. Examples (2a) and (3a) are two such replies.

## (2) Justin Why (YouTube, 2018-01-18)

- a. 白毛 我是蠢小春 Báimáo wǒ shì **Chǔn** Xiǎochūn  
 b. 白毛 我是陈小春 Báimáo wǒ shì **Chén** Xiǎochūn  
 ‘White Hair, I’m Chen Xiaochun.’

## (3) I Really Think So (我真的这样以为) (YouTube, 2018-05-10)

- a. 我系古舔螺 wǒ **xì** Gǔ **Tiǎnlúo**  
 b. 我是古天乐 wǒ **shì** Gǔ **Tiānlè**  
 ‘I’m Gu Tianle.’

As (2a) and (3a) demonstrate, netizens’ recontextualizations are less about representing the actors’ nonstandard pronunciation accurately than about making their Gangpu funny by changing a few characters here and there. Addressing Terminator as ‘White Hair’, Justin Why in (2a) appears to highlight Chen’s nonstandard pronunciation by replacing his family name, 陈 *Chén*, with 蠢 *chǔn* ‘stupid’.<sup>12</sup> In the video, the actor actually pronounces *Chén* as [tʂʰən<sup>2</sup>], so 岑 *cén* [tsʰən<sup>2</sup>] ‘hill’ would do a better job of representing his nonstandard pronunciation of the retroflex consonant *ch* in his surname. However, given that 蠢 *chǔn* means ‘stupid’, (2a) is more likely to be perceived as funny as it suggests that Chen not just mispronounces his own family name, but also introduces himself as ‘Stupid Xiaochun’. The focus on names continues in the reply in (3a). The commenter replaces the copula 是 *shì* with 系 *xì* ‘system’ (which also happens to be the simplified character for the Cantonese copula *hai*<sup>6</sup>), and the name of the third Hong Kong actor, 古天乐 *Gǔ Tiānlè*, with 古舔螺 *Gǔ Tiǎnlúo*. 舔 *tiǎn* and 螺 *luó* mean ‘to lick’ and ‘conch’, respectively. Gu’s pronunciation of his name in the video is rather close to the standard, but 古舔螺 *Gǔ Tiǎnlúo* in (3a) adds a sense of humor to the representation by suggesting that the actor presents himself as ‘Gu Licking Conch’.

By promoting complex multi-party interactions, YouTube allows netizens’ comments about the actors’ Gangpu to reinforce and build on each other in different ways. Not only can viewers post comments about a video and respond to its uploader (‘vertical uptake’), but they can also rate and reply to each other’s comments (‘horizontal uptake’). What is interesting about (4a) is that this commenter, compared to the ones in (2a) and (3a), reacts to Zhang’s nonstandard Mandarin in the video by engaging more directly with what Terminator says in (1a).

## (4) Cao Ni Die (操你爹) (YouTube, 2018-02-04)

- a. 白毛 錯了大渣好我係江家龜 Báimáo cuòle dàzhā hǎo wǒ **xì** Jiāng Jiāguī  
 b. 白毛 錯了大家好我是張家輝 Báimáo cuòle dàjiā hǎo wǒ **shì** Zhāng Jiāhuī  
 ‘White Hair, you’re mistaken. Hello, everyone! I’m Zhang Jiahui.’

Cao Ni Die’s reply in (4a), which is in the traditional script, ‘corrects’ Terminator’s recontextualization in (1a). This commenter states that Terminator (also addressed here as White Hair) did not represent Zhang’s Gangpu accurately. Like Terminator,

Cao Ni Die uses 渣 *zhā* to flag the actor's nonstandard pronunciation of *jiā*. Unlike Terminator, this commenter highlights Zhang's nonstandard pronunciation of the retroflex consonant in the copular verb, *shì*, with 係 *xì* [çi:<sup>4</sup>] 'relation, to tie up' (also the traditional counterpart of 系 in (3a)). However, neither 渣 *zhā* nor 係 *xì* corresponds to Zhang's actual pronunciation (see (1c)). In addition, Cao Ni Die replaces 張家輝 *Zhāng Jiāhuī* [tʂaŋ<sup>1</sup> tɕa:<sup>1</sup>x<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>] with 江家龜 *Jiāng Jiāguī* [tɕaŋ<sup>1</sup> tɕa:<sup>1</sup>k<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>] ('Jiang' [a common family name] + 'family' + 'turtle') as the actor's name. While the latter sounds somewhat similar to the actor's name, Zhang most certainly does not pronounce the last character of his name as [k<sup>w</sup>ei<sup>1</sup>] in the video (see (1c)). Yet the name in (4a) is funny because it gives the impression that Zhang calls himself the Jiang family's turtle. The character 龜 *guī* is used in expressions with negative meanings like 龜公 *guīgōng* 'pimp' and 縮頭烏龜 *suō tóu wūguī* 'a coward' (lit. 'a turtle pulling its head back').

As the preceding examples suggest, the three actors' names have received the preponderance of attention from Chinese netizens. Through the kind of character substitution illustrated in examples (1)–(4), 183 of the 647 comments about the video on YouTube 'quote' the three actors and mimic their nonstandard Mandarin. Of these, two-thirds (122 comments) focus at least partly on the way they pronounce their own names. Many YouTube users have zeroed in on Zhang's Gangpu and coined nicknames like the ones in (5) to poke fun at his accent.

- |     |     |              |                             |
|-----|-----|--------------|-----------------------------|
| (5) | 渣渣輝 | Zhā Zhāhuī   | 'dregs-dregs-brilliance'    |
|     | 渣渣灰 | Zhā Zhāhuī   | 'dregs-dregs-ashes/gray'    |
|     | 渣渣飞 | Zhā Zhāfēi   | 'dregs-dregs-to fly'        |
|     | 渣渣废 | Zhā Zhāfèi   | 'dregs-dregs-waste/useless' |
|     | 江家龟 | Jiāng Jiāguī | 'Jiang-family-turtle'       |

These nicknames, one might argue, infantilize Zhang by ridiculing him for not being able to say his own name properly. Emblematic of his Gangpu, 渣渣輝 *Zhā Zhāhuī* is the most widely used nickname for Zhang on the internet. A proper name—especially, a nickname—may become an injurious label if one person names another without the latter's consent. To many Chinese netizens, *Zhā Zhāhuī* simply indexes Zhang's nonstandard Mandarin in the Taiwan Lanyue commercials. To others, however, it comes across as derogatory as it suggests his depraved moral character by virtue of its meaning. On a popular mainland talk show, Zhang said he did not mind being called *Zhā Zhāhuī* if it inspired a sense of intimacy for everyone.<sup>13</sup> His explanation in this case focuses on the general function of nicknames to mark familiarity while glossing over the actual meaning of this nickname and the way it came about. Zhang's reaction is not surprising given that he, like other targets of mock language (see e.g. Hill 1998), is most likely expected to accept this as a joke, or he risks being accused of not having a sense of humor.

MAKING GANGPU FUNNY ON BILIBILI

Bilibili users' bullet comments on the video show that Chinese netizens, despite their predominant focus on the way the three actors pronounce their own names, make Gangpu funny through other means as well. Web 2.0 technologies, of which media sharing sites like YouTube and Bilibili are prime examples, are intended to foster greater users' engagement, interaction, and collaboration. On both YouTube and Bilibili, users can engage with content and with each other by leaving comments in the designated space/section below the video, but Bilibili also allows viewers to post 'bullet comments' (弹幕). Overlaid on the video screen, they either appear in a fixed position for a short time or run across the screen from right to left as the video plays, giving viewers the impression that they are watching the video together (see Figure 1). Bilibili users can select the color, size, and movement of their bullet comments. Viewers can, in turn, filter certain comments, deactivate bullet comments altogether, or adjust their font, speed, and transparency.

Bilibili users, like their counterparts on YouTube, do not just highlight the three actors' Gangpu; rather, they also create new meanings and humorous reproductions of the actors' words by exaggerating and misrepresenting their nonstandard pronunciation. In the scene captured in Figure 1, Zhang introduces himself and declares that while he has acted in many movies, Tanwan Lanyue is the only video game he likes (我是张家辉。戏，我演过很多。但是游戏，我只喜欢贪玩蓝月。). In their bullet comments, many viewers remark on what they see and hear in this and adjacent scenes, but others repeat what Zhang says and mock his Gangpu accent. In (6a), a bullet comment displayed several times in the middle of the



FIGURE 1. 'Shit, I've eaten a lot of it.'

screen (see the text in the white box in Figure 1), the commenter ‘quotes’ Zhang and makes the entextualized fragment funny by appealing to scatological humor.

(6)

- a. 屎我哋过很多      **shǐ** wǒ **yē**guò hěnduō  
 b. 戏我演过很多      **xì** wǒ **yǎn**guò hěnduō  
 ‘Movies, I’ve acted in a lot of them.’

In this ‘quote’, the commenter uses 屎 *shǐ* ‘shit’ in place of 戏 *xì* ‘movie, show’. Gangpu speakers like Zhang are more likely to pronounce the alveolo-palatal consonant in 戏 *xì* ‘movie, show’ (represented by *x* in Pinyin) as a retracted [s] than as the retroflex fricative [ʃ] (represented by *sh* in Pinyin), but what is interesting about (6a) is that the commenter also replaces 演 *yǎn* ‘to act, to perform’ with 哋 *yē* (an interjection for expressing astonishment), which happens to be the character for the Cantonese word meaning ‘to eat’ (*yaak*<sup>3</sup>) as well. Thus, this comment inspires a sense of ‘faux bivalency’ (Wong 2021) by suggesting the simultaneous presence of Cantonese and Putonghua. It comes across as comical because it gives the impression that the way Zhang says the sentence in (6b) in Gangpu sounds somewhat like how one would say ‘shit, I’ve eaten a lot of it’ in Cantonese.

To make Gangpu funny, other Bilibili users imbue what Zhang says with sexual connotations, often provoking humor that is widely perceived as lewd and vulgar. In the scene preceding the one captured in Figure 2, Zhang is sitting in front of a computer and playing the Tanwan Lanyue video game. He suddenly knocks on the desk and declares in excitement: ‘I’ve finally won!’ (终于赢了!). As we see in Figure 2, the computer screen is then plastered with red envelopes. Zhang proceeds to explain a feature of the video game: ‘You can pick up red envelopes even if you’re just passing by’ (路过, 也能捡红包。), presumably indicating that players receive credit or bonus points (‘red envelopes’) even if they are just walking past some sort of landmark in the game. Several bullet comments in Figure 2, like those highlighted in the white boxes (reproduced in (7a) and (8a) below), rework these two utterances.

(7)

- a. 终于硬了      zhōngyú **yìng**le  
 b. 终于赢了      zhōngyú **yíng**le  
 ‘I’ve finally won.’

(8)

- a. 撸过也能捡荷包      **lū**guò yě néng jiǎn **hé**bāo  
 b. 路过也能捡红包      **lù**guò yě néng jiǎn **hóng**bāo  
 ‘You can pick up red envelopes even if you’re passing by.’

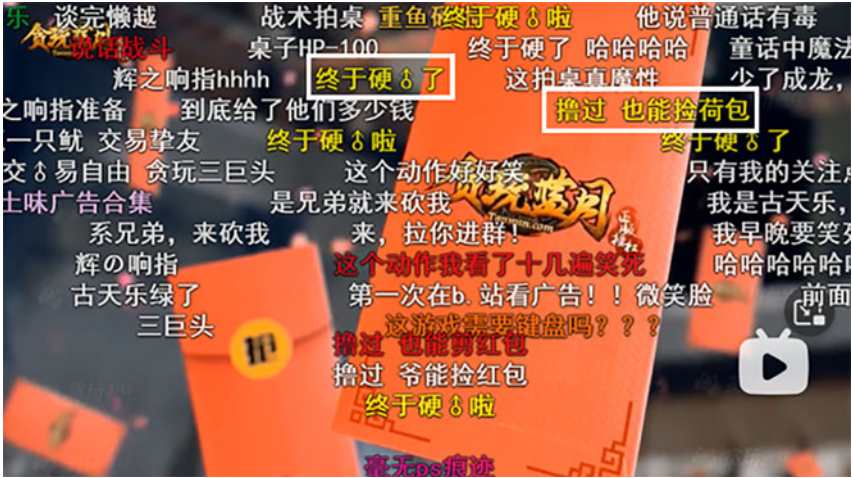


FIGURE 2. Sexual connotations.

In (7a), the commenter imposes sexual connotations on what Zhang says by replacing 赢 *yíng* ‘to win’ with 硬 *yìng* ‘hard’ and inserting the symbol representing the male sex (♂) into the entextualized fragment, changing the meaning of the utterance from ‘I’ve finally won’ to ‘I’m finally hard’. Similarly, the commenter in (8a) substitutes not only 红包 *hóngbāo* ‘red envelope’ with 荷包 *hébāo* ‘purse, wallet’, but also, more importantly, 路 *lù*, meaning ‘to pass by’ in this case, with 撸 *lū* ‘to rub’. This character in (8a), which is used in the colloquial expression 撸管 *lū guǎn* ‘to jerk off’ (lit. ‘to rub’ + ‘tube’), further produces a vulgar and sexual interpretation of what Zhang says in this scene.

Another potential cause of laughter is the perception of incongruity (see e.g. Billig 2005:57–85). As the following example shows, Bilibili users replace certain characters strategically when ‘quoting’ Zhang, not so much to represent his Gangpu pronunciation but to allude to male same-sex relations. Homosexuality is a sensitive if not taboo subject in China. Given that Zhang and the other two actors are widely known to be heterosexual, it is funny to imagine these words coming out of their mouths. In the scene captured in Figure 3, Zhang highlights another feature of the video game. The bullet comment in the white box in Figure 3 (reproduced in (9a) below) changes the meaning of what Zhang says through clever manipulation of characters.

(9)

- |    |                    |   |
|----|--------------------|---|
| a. | 罩杯回收，找一基友，<br>基线到手 | zhàobēi huíshōu, zhǎo yī jī yǒu<br>jīxiàn dàoshǒu |
|----|--------------------|---|



FIGURE 3. Alluding to homosexuality.

- b. 装备回收, 交易自由,      **zhuāngbèi huíshōu, jiāoyì zìyóu**  
 提现到手                      **tíxiàn dàoshǒu**  
 ‘Equipment return. Freedom of transaction. Withdrawn cash [refunds] in hand.’

Example (9b) is a little difficult to decipher because of its telegraphic four-character format, but Zhang’s message seems to be that players are free to exchange equipment and can receive their refunds easily. In (9a), the commenter replaces 装备 *zhuāngbèi* ‘equipment’ with 罩杯 *zhàobēi* ‘bra size’ and 交易自由 *jiāoyì zìyóu* ‘freedom of transaction’ with 找一基友 *zhǎo yī jī yǒu* (找 *zhǎo* ‘to meet/find/look for’ + 一 *yī* ‘one’ + 基 *jī* ‘gay’ + 友 *yǒu* ‘friend’), producing a comical and somewhat nonsensical message that can be roughly translated as ‘bra size return, looked for a gay friend’. In the second part of (9a), the commenter uses 基线 *jīxiàn* ‘baseline’ in place of 提现 *tíxiàn* ‘withdrawn cash’. The character 基 *jī* in 基线 *jīxiàn* means ‘base, foundation’, but it also means ‘gay’ and is found in the word 基友 *jīyǒu* ‘gay friend’.

Paradoxically, netizens’ bullet comments discussed in this section are both transgressive and norm-reinforcing as they simultaneously cross boundaries of propriety and mock Zhang’s failure to conform to standard language norms, demonstrating the co-presence of what Billig (2005) calls ‘disciplinary humor’ and ‘rebellious humor’. While disciplinary humor ‘mocks those who break social

rules, and thus can be seen to aid the maintenance of those rules', rebellious humor 'mocks the social rules, and, in its turn, can be seen to challenge, or rebel against, the rules' (2005:202). Bilibili users' bullet comments uphold norms of linguistic correctness by making fun of Zhang for not being able to speak the national language properly. At the same time, they provide an apt illustration of rebellious humor as they flout social rules that dictate what is and isn't allowed in polite conversation. Unlike Habermas's (1989) public sphere, which is characterized by participants' rational and informed deliberation supposedly unaffected by their emotions and social positions, the 'wild public' (Young 1985; Gardiner 2004; Heyd & Schneider 2019) that emerges from these comments is 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin 1984b) by nature, often coming across as playful, unruly, irreverent, and even grotesque.

#### CONCOCTING A GAY LOVE STORY

Chinese netizens have even used fragments of the Tanwan Lanyue commercials to create funny mashup videos. Mashup creators, like Bilibili and YouTube commenters, 'quote' the three actors by lifting stretches of discourse out of the commercials to highlight their use of Gangpu features. Once again, these 'quotes', created through deliberate mishearing and selective substitution of Chinese characters, are supposed to mimic their nonstandard pronunciation, but in reality, they enhance the comic value of what the actors say. Going a step further, as we see below, mashup creators put these entextualized fragments in new contexts and use them as 'subtitles' to concoct fantastical stories involving the three actors, thus further widening the intertextual gap between the original discourse and its representation.

A prime example is a video circulated on Neihan Duanzi (内涵段子) (lit. 'subtle jokes'), a now-banned app developed by ByteDance (the parent company of TikTok) that allowed users to share jokes, memes, and funny videos. In this video mashup, viewers hear a Putonghua-speaking narrator relating a gay love story illustrated with video clips (with sound) from the Tanwan Lanyue commercials as well as video clips (with no sound) from movies featuring the three actors.<sup>14</sup> At the beginning of the video, viewers see several images of Zhang Jiahui. The narrator begins by saying that 'people only know that this man is called Zha Zhahui, but no one knows how exactly he is a scumbag' (人们只知道这个男人叫渣渣辉 但没人知道他渣在哪里). Recall that the character 渣 *zhā* in Zhang's nickname 渣渣辉 *Zhā Zhāhuī* means 'dregs' and is commonly used to describe people who are considered scum of the earth. Thus, this video is intended to 'explain' how Zhang earned this nickname. The title of the video, 'Romance of Zhazhahui' (渣渣辉的罗曼史), is then shown against the backdrop of Zhang Jiahui's and Gu Tianle's images (Figure 4), and the narrator launches into a story about love and betrayal.





FIGURE 4. 'Romance of Zhazhahui.'

According to the narrator, the story began one night when Zhang Jiahui came across the handsome Gu Tianle on his computer screen. Zhang became enamored with Gu and started watching all his movies. The two developed feelings for each other after collaborating on a movie project. One night over dinner, Zhang confessed his love for Gu. As the narrator recounts in (10), an excerpt from the video mashup, they started spending more time together and socializing with gay friends. The two 'quotes' from the Tanwan Lanyue commercials (both underlined) are in lines 3 and 8. In this and the following excerpt, what Zhang actually says—or at least, intends to say—is in square brackets, and the replaced characters are in boldface. For the 'quotes', the video creator used Zhang's voice and video clips from the commercials but added 'subtitles' (reproduced in lines 3 and 8 and highlighted in rectangular boxes in Figures 5 and 6) to the bottom of the screen to shape viewers' interpretation of what Zhang says.

## (10) Romance of Zhazhahui (Part 1)

- |   |                                     |   |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 他们开始频繁相见                            | ‘They started seeing each other frequently’   |
| 2 | 还叫上很多志同道合的同志                        | ‘and they even called out to like-minded <i>tongzhis</i> :’   |
| 3 | ‘ <u>会弯的兄弟一起来</u> ’<br>[‘会玩的兄弟一起来’] | ‘“ <u>Brothers who can turn <b>gay</b>, come together!</u> ”’<br>““Brothers who know how to <b>play</b> , come together!””’ |
| 4 | 那是一段幸福的时光                           | ‘It was a happy time.’  |
| 5 | 乃至至于渣渣辉                             | ‘As for Zha Zhahui,’  |
| 6 | 想向全世界大声宣布                           | ‘he wanted to announce loudly to the world that’  |
| 7 | 自己                                  | ‘he’  |
| 8 | ‘ <u>交一基友</u> ’<br>[‘交易自由’]         | ‘“ <u>met a <b>gay friend</b>”.</u> ’<br>““ <u>freedom of transaction</u> ””’   |



FIGURE 5. ‘Brothers who can turn gay, come together!’



FIGURE 6. ‘Met a gay friend.’

Homoeroticism is palpable in this excerpt. A general address term in Communist China, 同志 *tóngzhì* ‘comrade’ in line 2 was appropriated by gay rights activists in the late 1980s and now commonly refers to members of sexual minorities (Wong 2005). In (10), the narrator also replaces 玩 *wán* ‘to play’ with 弯 *wān* ‘bent’ (often used as an adjective meaning ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’) in line 3, and 交易自由 *jiāoyì zìyóu* ‘freedom of transaction’ with 交一基友 *jiāo yī jī yǒu* ‘met/associated with a gay friend’ (交 *jiāo* ‘to meet/associate with’ + 一 *yī*

‘one’ + 基 *jī* ‘gay’ + 友 *yǒu* ‘friend’) in line 8. 基友 *jīyǒu*, though now also used by heterosexual men in China to refer to close male friends, clearly means ‘a male homosexual friend’ or ‘a (gay) boyfriend’ in this context.

Unfortunately, the narrator continues, the two actors’ relationship tapered off after a while. Feeling that the spark had gone, Zhang became romantically involved with the other actor in the commercials, Chen Xiaochun. Chen, according to the narrator, ‘is handsome in another way’ and like Gu, ‘can turn someone gay’ (是另一种帅 也能把人掰弯). As the narrator explains in (11), another excerpt from the video mashup, Zhang felt guilty after cheating on Gu and admitted that he was a scumbag by saying ‘I’m Zha Zhahui’ in line 5. Again, the original video and audio are used for this ‘quote’, and the ‘subtitle’ at the bottom of the screen (reproduced in line 5 and highlighted in a rectangular box in Figure 7) produces a humorous interpretation of Zhang’s Gangpu utterance.

(11) Romance of Zhazhahui (Part 2)

1	劈腿后	‘After cheating’
2	渣渣辉也痛苦过	‘Zha Zhahui also suffered’
3	内疚过	‘he felt guilty’
4	他也承认自己是个渣男	‘he also admitted that he was a scumbag’
5	‘我是渣渣辉’	‘“I’m <b>Zha Zhahui</b> .”’
	[‘我是张家辉’	‘“I’m <b>Zhang Jiahui</b> .”’]

Thus, this story ‘explains’ how Zhang earned the nickname 渣渣辉 *Zhā Zhāhuī* and why he is now known as a scumbag. Video mashups like this boost the jocular image of Gangpu by suggesting a homoerotic interpretation of what the actors say in



FIGURE 7. ‘I’m Zha Zhahui.’

the commercials. They illustrate what Georgakopoulou (2015) calls ‘rescripting’, the practice of visually and/or verbally manipulating previously circulated stories that serves to create alternative stories meant to be taken as humorous (see also Leppänen & Häkkinen 2012).

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how mediatization facilitates the (re)production of mock language. It shows that we can gain a better understanding of how mock practices reinforce and build on each other by tracing their uptake and circulation. While mediatized performances of nonstandard dialects can be recontextualized in myriad ways, certain uptake formulations tend to attract more attention than others, and they are continuously recycled, augmented, and elaborated upon. Thanks to the affordances of Web 2.0 technologies, Chinese netizens are able to work in tandem to not only foreground certain features of Gangpu and certain elements of the Tanwan Lanyue commercials but also frame them in ways that evoke specific interpretations. In mashup videos and in comments on the commercials, internet users ‘quote’ the three actors, ostensibly to highlight their nonstandard Mandarin, especially the way they say their own names and the way they pronounce retroflex and alveolo-palatal consonants. Yet, more often than not, the characters chosen for this purpose poke fun at the actors’ pronunciation rather than represent it accurately. By exploiting the intertextual gap between what is said and what is reported through deliberating mishearing and clever manipulation of Chinese characters, internet users underscore the nonstandardness of the actors’ speech and more importantly, enhance the comic value of their Gangpu. To present entextualized fragments as funny, they appeal to scatological humor, allude to sex and (homo)sexuality, and concoct a gay love story involving the three actors who are widely known to be heterosexual. It is through the parodic revoicing of the three Hong Kong actors and the continuous recycling of mediatized fragments of the commercials that Gangpu has come to be keyed as humorous.

Gangpu, at least as represented in the mediatized fragments of the commercials discussed above, is therefore not exactly the nonstandard variety of Mandarin spoken by many Hongkongers; rather, it is a product of mock practices that sustain and naturalize the standard/nonstandard binary. Of course, there is nothing inherently funny about Hongkongers’ Mandarin; it is funny only when considered against the backdrop of a standard language ideology that posits it as a deviation from the norm. Putonghua, despite its northern origins and its association with the Han (the largest ethn racial group in China), has long been promoted by the Chinese government as the common language for all its citizens regardless of their regional or ethn racial affiliations. In fact, the name *Putonghua* (普通话), literally meaning ‘common language’, reinforces this idea. The ideology of Putonghua as the spoken standard has created a linguistic hierarchy that disfavors not only nonstandard dialects of Mandarin, but

also the languages of ethnic minorities as well as southern varieties of Chinese (e.g. Cantonese, Hakka) that are commonly referred to as ‘dialects’ despite their mutual unintelligibility. While this standard language ideology has been widely promulgated in China by what Lippi-Green (2012) calls ‘dominant bloc institutions’ (e.g. the educational system), the preceding analysis shows that new media like YouTube and Bilibili, though often credited with improving access for and encouraging participation from diverse voices, also serve as important platforms for ordinary netizens to further the dissemination of this ideology and the subordination of minoritized linguistic varieties.

This study also underlines the role of Chinese netizens in fixing the interpretation of Gangpu. Inoue’s (2003) powerful theorization of the ‘listening subject’ has encouraged us to shift our attention from the speaker to the (over)hearer when studying the circulation of linguistic signs. A particular mode of hearing, she proposes, must be understood as ‘an effect of a regime of social power’ (2003:157). Through the semiotic process of rearticulation (Pak 2023), whereby linguistic signs are misconstrued and assigned new meanings, Chinese netizens acting as a ‘wild public’ willfully misinterpret what the Hong Kong actors in the commercials say and depict their Mandarin as both deficient and laughable despite its intelligibility to speakers of Putonghua and other varieties of Mandarin. These netizens, many of whom probably consider themselves speakers of (more) standard Mandarin, not only judge the correctness of the actors’ speech but also uncover ‘hidden meanings’ in it. What the actors intend to say is largely overshadowed by the humor that Chinese netizens are able to find in their nonstandard utterances. Thus, much like Chinglish (Henry 2010), Gangpu as a jocular register exists more in the minds of its listening subjects than in the actual linguistic practices of its presumed speakers.

Those who mock the three actors’ Mandarin may claim that they only do so in good fun. However, as Billig (2005) reminds us, we must not lose sight of the dark side of humor. Through mediatization, Gangpu has become an emblem of the reversal of fortune between Hong Kong and mainland China, and a highly visible platform on which power relations between the two cultures are played out. Now, whenever Hongkongers open their mouths and start speaking Mandarin, the jocular image of Gangpu inevitably comes to mind, and the listening subject, who is perhaps more inclined to focus on the form than on the content of their speech, cannot help but listen for traces of this ‘funny’ way of speaking. The jocular image has also reinforced the idea that Hong Kong Mandarin is highly inappropriate for serious business, thereby limiting the range of meanings and functions assigned to this variety. The parodic revoicing of Hong Kong actors speaking nonstandard Mandarin, like other mock practices that seem innocuous to those who engage in them, is insidious in its effects, and it is deeply implicated in the linguistic subordination of Hongkongers.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>This keyword search was conducted on April 29, 2021.

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.iqiyi.com/v\\_19rsb22o34.html](https://www.iqiyi.com/v_19rsb22o34.html); <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av56844327>; accessed May 11, 2021.

<sup>3</sup><https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1602707008476890728&wfr=spider&for=pc>; accessed May 11, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Hong Kong actors are often known by their English names. For example, Zhang Jiahui's English name is Nick Cheung. For the sake of consistency, I use the Hanyu Pinyin (Mandarin romanization) transliterations of Hong Kong actors' Chinese names throughout this article. By convention, the family name appears before the given name.

<sup>5</sup>In Putonghua, the word 普通话 *Putonghua* is often used to refer to all varieties of Mandarin, standard and otherwise. In this article, I use the English transliteration *Putonghua* to refer to the standard variety and *Mandarin* to refer to both standard and non-standard varieties.

<sup>6</sup>See e.g. <https://www.zhihu.com/question/57483011>; accessed May 12, 2021. Pinyin is the official romanization system for Putonghua.

<sup>7</sup>Others have defined the term differently. See Androutsopoulos (2016) and Maegaard, Milani, & Mortensen (2019) for more details.

<sup>8</sup><https://zhanlan.zhihu.com/p/73281855>; accessed June 1, 2021.

<sup>9</sup><https://youtu.be/BN4AxOyX98o>; accessed June 1, 2021.

<sup>10</sup>The Bilibili video (<https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV16W411h7HH>) and the YouTube video (<https://youtu.be/CO8AexTAKdA>) were posted on December 10, 2017 and December 12, 2017, respectively (accessed June 2, 2021).

<sup>11</sup>All comments are quoted in the original script. The IPA transcriptions in this section are based on Duanmu's (2007) analysis of the sound system of Mandarin Chinese.

<sup>12</sup>The commenters in (2a) and (4a) may know Terminator as 'White Hair' in another context.

<sup>13</sup><https://youtu.be/BN4AxOyX98o>; accessed June 1, 2021.

<sup>14</sup><https://youtu.be/RFivJ4gdwii>; <https://www.bilibili.com/s/video/BV1nW411E72X>; accessed August 9, 2021.

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**Address for correspondence:**

Andrew D. Wong  
California State University, East Bay  
Department of Anthropology, Geography & Environmental Studies  
California State University, East Bay  
25800 Carlos Bee Boulevard  
Hayward, CA 94542, USA  
[andrew.wong@csueastbay.edu](mailto:andrew.wong@csueastbay.edu)