

Reappropriating the neoliberal university for a new putonghua (common language)

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1. This essay combines the sketch of an alternative history about linguistico-cultural development since the colonial encounter with a discussion about the subjective technology of language and education in the context of globalization. Its concrete aims are: 1) to summarize an alternative framework to the understanding of world history in terms of geocultural units and thus articulate a critique of culture as the ideology of capital (a summary of our previously elaborated project in a "biopolitics of translation"); 2) to reevaluate the history of the modern, national university in terms of its role as an institution of translation whose main function is biopolitical; 3) to consider how the neoliberal University sits at a crucial nexus between linguistic value, border controls, and intellectual property regimes; 4) to recontextualize ELF (English-as-a-Lingua Franca) education in light of the implications of a critique of English language as a global model of translation and; 5) and to propose that Qu Qiubai's notion of a non-national, non-imperial "common language" (putonghua) be taken as a figure for the reappropriation of Global English with the eventual aim of a radical restructuring of the Humanities.

2. Four fundamental characteristics of current processes of globalization are producing a major impact on linguistic usage: 1) the reshaping of geographical scale and the changes such scalar reshaping have brought to the institution and practice of borders; 2) the corresponding emergence of organized networks; 3) the central role of technologically-assisted forms of communication not necessarily of a conventionally textual or even oral nature that disrupt linear temporalities and displace the role of "communication" into new relations of production and consumption as well as new forms of life; and 4) the technologically-assisted dominance of global English and the concomitant precarity of other languages.

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My response to the first trend, which requires historical contextualization, is to frame the constitution of modern macro-regions (nation and civilization) through the themes of translation and biopolitics. My hypothesis is that in the aftermath of the massive deterritorialization (or *terra nullius*) unleashed by colonial encounter, translation provided a key biopolitical technique for a reterritorialization crystallizing around the nation-State, penetrating much further into everyday life than juridical theories of sovereignty would normally concede. Henceforth, both political theory and modern linguistics would share the same fundamental assumption of trying, in the words of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, "to clarify something that was already obscure (the concept of people) with the help of something even more obscure (the concept of language)." The result of this obscure confusion, it must be remembered, has been not just political but epistemological as well, forming the basis for the modern national University and the disciplinary divisions of the Human Sciences. Contemporary transformations of a linguistic nature cut across this configuration in new ways.

One fruitful way to contextualize the new sites of social conflict that are shaping higher education would be simultaneously to consider two symptomatic phenomena everywhere in evidence today: first, the ascendance of a single language, English, to a role of dominance in global affairs—including, of course, educational markets; and second, the accelerating disappearance of global languages, particularly acute among indigenous populations, and the general precariousness of languages not officially recognized as State languages and promoted in State educational institutions. Due to limitations of space, this essay must limit itself to the former phenomenon, although there is no doubt that the two are inextricably linked and must be thought together.

3. The effects of English language dominance in global affairs are too numerous to discuss here. One among these that is already having a major impact upon social relations far beyond the University is the reorganization of the public/private dichotomy. The association of English with "international" and other languages with "local" contexts imposes yet a new way of delineating "public" from "private" space along a bifurcation into "global" and "local" access (even while the meaning of "global" and "local" are themselves undergoing profound transformation), conferring an implicitly "private" status upon other languages associated with the "local." Ironically, we are now witness to an era in which entire nationalized languages—which were themselves historically constructed as imposed forms of "public" exchange—are becoming progressively "privatized" relative to the "public" use of global English. The recent case in which the Republic of Korea successfully applied to have Dragon Boat Festival, common in other parts of East Asia, recognized as part of its exclusive national heritage under the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) demonstrates the extent to which national culture is becoming a form of private property, subject to specific regimes of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Of course, the nation-State since its inception was designed to codify the terms of ownership of the "resources" of particular geographical territories, yet it is fascinating to see how the regime of immaterial labor typical of postfordist production is pushing such proprietary claims beyond the conventional, 19th century definition of resources (human, animal, and natural) to extend now to various forms of immaterial and intangible property, including of course knowledge, training, and language. Given the propensity of neoliberal governments to operate as stakeholders for corporate interests of a complex, trans/national nature, eroding the category of the citizen, the collective claims implicit in such immaterial resources stand to follow a similar

logic. The wholesale privatization of language under the influence of global English is occurring at the very moment when postfordist incorporation of a “linguistic model” into the process of production means that language itself is becoming a source of value and even property rights. Undoubtedly this rendering “private” of languages that are now considered to be “local” and ethnicized can also be expected to have important ramifications for the construction of gender, for which the division between public and private has perennially been a major touchstone.

4. It should now be evident that the State is not external to the problems of linguistic diversity and dominance. Just as English language dominance is most often registered as a problem by defenders of other, relatively weaker national languages, the problem of “endangered languages” discussed by advocates of “biocultural diversity” is most acutely experienced by languages outside of State institutions--particularly those aboriginal ones that apparently hold no hope of becoming State languages and yet are subjected to the policies of a single State.

Historically-speaking, it goes without saying that language policy has been a critical tool for the creation of the modern nation-State and a constant site of State intervention. In what has virtually been a universal process (which is to say, no more and no less universal than have been the State-form and the commodity-form in the modern period), modern nation-States have established themselves linguistically by the elimination of difference through standardization--along with the concomitant displacement of minority populations and the appropriation of minority lands. The establishment under the auspices of the modern State of a linguistic standard uniformly applicable to all social classes has rendered language irreversibly political in the modern period. Although the distinction of social status according to linguistic usage (reserving written communication for a small, male elite) was widely practiced by pre-modern imperial, tribal, and feudal formations, it was not until the modern period that both population and linguistic practice became the interrelated objects of juridical and epistemological institutional practices--epitomized by the national school--managed by a single, centralized State sovereignty.

5. The notion of a “biopolitics of translation” which I propose as a replacement for the structuralist understanding of linguistically-determined worldviews acquires conceptual validity and critical importance in light of the specifically modern--which is to say, global--phenomenon of the linguistic standardization associated with nationalization and colonial land appropriation, and the concomitant effects these processes have had upon humanistic knowledge. Ever since the concomitant birth of philology and biology, modernity has been associated with the advent of a global cartographic imaginary that places peoples with no prior “memory” of migratory contact, or only “deep memory” such as etymology, into relation through the mediation of an imperial center. As the transition to a global form of spatial imaginary, *modernity* begins, linguistically speaking, when the project of standardization is extended across all manner of social differences to encompass diverse populations in the process of national homogenization (which occurs, as Jacques Bidet argues, on the level of world *system*) and domestic segmentation (which occurs on the level of “class” difference or *structure*). This process must be seen, in turn, in the context of contact with other global populations undergoing the same traumatic process of systemic definition and structural segmentation. The *biopolitics of translation* thus names that space of exchange and accumulation in which politics appears to have been preempted by the appearance of two new objects of knowledge, population and language, assumed to be intrinsically related.

When “translation” is understood according to a representational scheme of the epistemic subject, it names not the operation by which cultural difference is “bridged,” but rather the pre-emptive operation through which originary difference--what is encountered when translation is understood as an act of social practice--is segmented and organized according to the various classificatory schemes of bio-anthropological knowledge emerging out of the colonial encounter. In order to unpack the contemporary implications of this convergence, it is necessary to remember what the perspective of *translation* teaches us: each individual State language in the modern age (there are only 225 of them) is not the autonomous, organic creation of “a people,” but the *arrested result* of an essentially transnational governmental technique--the subjective technology of translation that configures languages in order to distinguish them--aimed at population management. Research such as that undertaken by Naoki Sakai has shown that the very category of national language, crucial to the biopolitical formation of global populations under the system of nation-States, must be understood as a product of translation. National languages do not precede the translational exchange, but are in fact predicated upon it. In fact, to speak a national language is to speak through the mediation of translation even when one pretends to speak without it. Seen from this perspective, the modern regime of translation is a concrete form of “systemic complicity” (in the sense of “world system”) whose primary function is population management within the purview of capitalist expansion and imperial domination. In other words, it is a globally-applicable technique of segmentation aimed at managing social relationships by forcing them to pass through circuits on the “systemic” level. In Sakai’s research on the transnational discursive structure of both Japanese studies and the institution of the Japanese Emperor system, or again in the relation between imperial nationalism and the maintenance of ethnic minorities, we learn that the geography of national sovereignty and civilizational difference that constitutes the geocultural and geopolitical map of both the world and the Human Sciences indicates an important kind of subjective technology or governmental technique that has, until recently, been thoroughly naturalized by an anthropological discourse of “culture.” Looking at the history of modern linguistic transformation, postcolonial writers have shown not only how the colonial and postcolonial State mobilized language in the creation of “invented traditions,” but also how the establishment of national literary and linguistic traditions--such as the notion of “English” literature and its corresponding canon--in metropolitan social formations originated as a technique of colonial governance (as, for instance, the British experience in India reveals) that was subsequently imported into the metropolitan nation in order to manage domestic class relations in the midst of revolutionary demands for universal suffrage. It is only today that we can begin to see how a multiplicity of disciplinary arrangements forming an economy of translation (in place since the colonial era but far outliving colonialism’s demise) actually produces differentially-coded subjects, typically national/civilizational ones, whose constitution is interdependent and, at specific intervals, actually complicit in a single, yet extremely hierarchical, state of domination. We have thus traced a series of genealogies within which “translation” is no longer seen as simply an operation of transfer, relay, and equivalency, but rather assumes a vital historical role in the constitution of the social.

6. This critique of translation as a contingent form of social production forces us to reconsider the historical role of higher education. The birth of the national school, without which the institution of nationalized language could not have been realized, has played a crucial role not just in

the creation of a homogeneous national population speaking a standardized language, but also in disseminating knowledge about what the difference between nations (as a factor of linguistic and anthropological difference) means. No institution epitomizes this role more than the modern University. "The University of Culture," described by Bill Readings as one of the two great models of the modern university (the other being the techno-science model), must in fact be seen as an *institution of translation*. It is a *national* institution of translation charged with the task of "translating" all knowledge into and out of *nationalized* idioms while at the same time legitimizing in a general way the domestic (i.e., *nationalized*) division of labor at the basis of social class. Its very purpose, beyond the actual content of translation, is to institutionalize and regulate the ratio that constitutes the paradigmatic quasi-object of modern spatiality--those complex models of thought + world that we know as geocultural regions or civilizational worldviews. The normalized form of "national culture"--which Sakai maps through the relations among Japan, the West, and the Rest, as well as minorities within each--emerges through globally-codified relations of domination, or cultural translation, typically carried out in universities.

7. Professional (that is, "organic") intellectuals are the translators, in a sense that goes far beyond the rendering of specific texts: they are the ones who fashion the forms of expression. They not only make them fit over the functional requirements of international exchange, they also substantially embody or "wear" those forms, becoming institutionalized forms of "knowledgeable bodies" essential to concrete social production. The subtle negotiations of that fit and fashion--what constitute a certain plasticity of social bodies in general--are then called "culture." Typically national formations of culture repress differences such as the indeterminacy of the translator and the repression of both historical difference (ethnicity, class, and gender) and the fluidity (or inherent difference) of these differences in the modern era. By the same token, professional intellectuals are also the ones who take the operational knowledges of the international exchange society and render them into the terms of a national class system, where any resistance can again be called--but this time in a derogatory sense--"culture" (i.e., cultural burdens, cultural idiosyncracies, cultural atavisms, etc.)

The attitude of *ressentiment* everywhere in evidence today on the part of intellectual-translators reveals an obvious contradiction. Imprisoned within the particular international rank-order achieved by the economic performance of their national class-structure within the world system, they would naturally resent that which helped cement the overall order, both at home and abroad--namely, their own, usually unacknowledged and even unnamed, activity as cultural translators. If anthropological difference coded as cultural translation is the reigning ideology of the postfordist imperative to communicate, one must pay particular attention to the way the subject of knowledge, formed in the crucible of disciplinary and linguistic codifications still indebted to the legacy of colonial difference, is particularly prone to communicate according to a restricted economy of *ressentiment*. This is not so much a problem of colonial psychology in the Fanonian sense, but rather a restricted economy of return that characterizes subjective formation according to any number of disparate practices from language to economy that establish exceptions in order to exclude certain forms of difference. According to the trajectory of return, one is always either a recipient or a supplier in relations of exchange. What is excluded are what contemporary economists refer to as "externalities," what historical economists refer to as slave, migrant and other "irregular" labor, or what Sakai shows is the essential hybridity of the translator.

What Sakai suggests is that there is a both a constraining discipline and an emancipating politics of translation for those placed between the national class-structures and the global exchange-systems organized around geocultural regions. In terms of a constraining discipline, intellectuals are called upon to translate not just content specific to other cultures but, most important, the general rules of international exchange. Even as we, in our role as translators, adapt concepts and images to the needs of the local class structure, we are also contributing to the solidification of a segmented structure analogous to class in the emerging global-State. We can resent this role as translators, and then resent the whole “verbiage” of intellectuality which we have made into our trade; this sort of posture regularly leads intellectuals to privilege either a site of “real struggle” in “the outside world” while abandoning “theory” as a site of struggle altogether, or else to retreat into esoteric, aestheticized representations incomprehensible outside of a professional caste. Rather than adopting either of these approaches, which seem to me to preserve, in spite of great differences, the exceptional role of intellectuals as mediators and distributors of the heterogeneity between world and knowledge (a role that ultimately institutionalizes the role of elites, regardless of which side one is on, by denying the relative autonomy of specific social practices), we can instead set about using the tools of the trade to work against its normalized effects. But how to go about that?

8. Naoki Sakai presents a very interesting answer, which concerns a kind of translocal, translanguistic practice, a practice which is both contextual and respectful of the “foreigner” in all of us. In the face of sophisticated discourses embedded in university institutions, what could be asked each time is how could this material be used to overcome the causes and effects of capitalist imperialism? And if it is potentially useful, then how can it be translated against the grain of whatever class structure one is in, with its particular hierarchy of inclusions and exclusions, signified and covered up by its particular culture? And if those counter-translations have been done, then how could they in turn be exposed to heteronomous translations from elsewhere?

These questions would require us to reconsider how we typically translate and naturalize certain discourses, particularly by fetishizing a proper name the better to forget the real situations and processes from which it was subtracted. But instead of just leading back to infinite deconstruction, white guilt, or subordinated *ressentiment*, the same questions also point toward a possible development of cultural dreams, organizational forms and productive techniques that could help people everywhere to survive the transition to a world society. Intellectuals are not required to perform the heroic role of architects and social engineers who provide blueprints for the whole of society--in fact, such a role amounts to little more than a self-aggrandizing hallucination; but, like every other kind of laborer, they can respond to the specific situations of their trade (which includes *both* the temporality of embodied social relations *and* the abstractions of knowledge about social objects), develop corresponding autonomous responses, and then translate them into other situations.

9. Let us take the example of English in the current restructuring of higher education in Taiwan. A combination of government policies, market trends, and intellectual dispositions inherited from the colonial/imperial modernity have resulted in global English acquiring the de facto status of official language for higher education in Taiwan (e.g., promotion for junior faculty is more

and more dependent upon publishing in SSCI-listed English journals; the point system used for reviewing faculty performance accords much higher weight in general to publications in English over those in Chinese; more and more degree programs are being designed to be taught in English; undergraduate education at many schools now incorporates mandatory on-line e-learning courses (in English) with an anglophone correspondence university; graduate students in literature and language programs other than English are required to take additional courses in English; etc.) In short, global English is essential both for the accreditation offered by the system and for promotion within its ranks. Evidently, this combination of policies leaves the Taiwanese university system dependent upon the globalized anglophone educational industry. Innovation implicitly can only occur within this locus. As a result, we can predict that Taiwanese institutions of higher education will be completely unable over the long term to preserve autonomy vis-à-vis the aggressive expansion of anglophone universities in east Asia (and elsewhere) described by Andrew Ross. Similar developments are occurring elsewhere in east Asia, notably in South Korea and the People's Republic of China. As we witness the emergence of transnational chains of higher education, we should begin to think about what it means and where the possibilities for creative transformation lie.

10. Under the regime of colonial/imperial modernity, it was assumed that the rationale for Institutions of National Translation such as the University of Culture lay outside those institutions (residing most likely in the State, or, depending on one's view, the nation). Today, however, the supposed exteriority of the university (vis-à-vis the putatively "organic" interiority of national language) no longer matches the needs of the postfordist economy for flexible accumulation across different linguistic markets. As the value of the Humanities declines, linguistico-cultural training is becoming their sole reason for existence. Especially in non-elite, second- and third-tier universities in geographical locations considered peripheral to the centers of innovation, the function of the Humanities is being retooled towards imparting a set of linguistic and cultural skills considered necessary to the Creative Industries in a global environment. As Brian Holmes remarks, "identity formations are encouraged as stylistic resources for commodified cultural production, with the effect of deflecting the issues away from social antagonism...Using the enormous resources concentrated by the major commercial media--television, cinema, pop music--regional cultures and subcultures are sampled, recoded into product form, and fed back to their original creators via the immeasurably wider and more profitable world market." As the Humanities are restructured into the function of cultural "sampling," the University preserves its former importance as an Institute of Translation, but the operation of translation is displaced from a national subject of citizens rights (and the non-rights of non-citizens) to a cultural subject of intellectual property rights.

We often hear that under the postfordist regime, language (communication) is immediately productive. This is most easily seen in universities in the construction of elaborate bureaucracies of "quality assurance auditing," which require a constant input of labor--much of it by un(der)paid graduate students--in order to notch up ratings that garner more revenue. But it is also to be seen in the use of global English, which like computer science and biotechnology, contributes directly to the valorization of capital and labor in diverse processes of production. In line with these developments, the differences between global languages are now being incorporated directly into the university through global English as a model of translation; thus it becomes an organizing

principle for *both* the value of knowledge *and* the cartography that maps knowledge onto regions and anthropological difference.

The multiplication of class differences by linguistico-ethnic, as well as gender and racial, differences forces us to rethink both the Foucaultian notion of the university as a site of discipline and the Althusserian notion of it as an ideological state apparatus. What neither Foucault nor Althusser foresaw was a situation in which entire languages--the products of nationalization now subsumed by the emerging global-State--could in themselves become ideological beyond the determinate content of communication. (And here we could, with sufficient space, explain how translation constitutes the exact linguistic situation most likely to reveal the rift between communication and address, content and the event of language, essential to every instance of linguistic communication).

11. The problem is not that global English is coming to dominate the higher education market, but rather that English language has insinuated itself as an implicit model of translation. It is precisely as a model of translation that global English operates in tandem with the proliferation of "class"-like codings of anthropological difference internal to the emerging global State and crucial to the management of university markets. It is this articulation of translation to anthropological difference internal to the globalizing education markets that must be addressed, utilized and transformed. **In other words, we should use the internalization of global English as a model of translation as a point of departure to forge new subjects capable of engaging in a new social contract** (pending revision of the entire concept of "contract" beyond the obviously failed model of rational consensus). The "nomadic university" of the future should take full advantage of the specificity now being accorded to the biopower of language *within* the university system in order to effectuate a biopolitical transformation that could be exported or externalized.

12. Discussions of global English dominance have intervened largely in the cultural and educational spheres, where they tend to divide into either a defense of national linguistic markets or a celebration of international ones. Proponents of some of the interesting utilitarian variants, such as "Globish," argue that a lingua franca based on simplified English usage can effectively combine both aims of promoting international exchange and defense of national cultures. Pro or con, the supposition of national forms of organization continues to underlie many of the best critiques of English-language dominance and neoliberal market universities. we must ask if this is not because they share the assumption that language and linguistic difference correspond--naturally--to anthropological difference? Normally, the assumption of putative linguistic unity will efface differences due to gender, "race," and class in the socio-linguistic formation.

Now is the time to consider the revolutionary potential in an idea gaining ground within linguistics and language pedagogy to distinguish English-as-a-native language (ENF) from English-as-lingua franca (ELF). Drawing from the historical experience of radical linguistic experiments in early 20th century such as Esperanto and Basic English, Barbara Seidlhofer, a linguistics professor at the University of Vienna and a major proponent of ELF, notes the advantages of subtracting the assumption of a native/non-native, authentic/inauthentic dichotomy from transnational linguistic exchange. Seidlhofer argues that ELF is not only an effective pedagogic tool enhancing possibilities for rapid linguistic acquisition, it is also capable of shifting the focus in linguistic training

from “instrumental pay-off in terms of practical communicative skills [to] long-term humanistic, pedagogic objectives.” I would like to highlight Seidlhofer’s initiative, in which I detect a counter-practice such as we described above. Against the corporate-state-social science nexus that is commandeering the University towards exclusively market-oriented temporalities, Seidlhofer’s promotion of a ELF as a form of social relation no longer based on the assumption of an identity between language and people is potentially revolutionary.

ELF intervenes--perhaps for the first time in the history of the modern University--precisely upon the foundational modern link between language and anthropological difference. Although this was not the goal of its early proponents, ELF undeniably offers pedagogical and critical elements that would be crucial to an institutional reformation of the disciplinary divisions inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries. This reform, as I envision it, would be a departure from both “area studies” and “national history”; foreign language departments as well as national ones. In short, it would be the end of the principle of homolingual address as the organizational basis for both the disciplinary divisions of the human sciences and the nations of the world. Premised upon removing language from the foundational oppositions of native/non-native, grammatical/non-grammatical, authentic/inauthentic, etc., that have structured modernity’s notion of geocultural regions, ELF proposes a radical pedagogy of the Common. Although there is certainly the possibility that ELF will merely reinforce these oppositions by displacing them onto other languages now being privatized by the dominance of global English, we cannot overlook the potential for innovation.

13. In lieu of conclusion, I would like anecdotally to refer to the example of Qu Qiubai (1899-1935), a former leader of the Chinese Communist Party during its pre-Maoist days. During the 1930s, after Qu left Party Central, few writers familiar with the colonial situation approached the possibility of creating a new people with as much innovative vision and revolutionary passion as Qu Qiubai. The heterogeneous population of migrant labor living in Shanghai under conditions of extraterritoriality and primitive accumulation provided the template that enabled him to articulate surprisingly creative solutions to the problems of culture and communication. Among these, Qu’s proposals for the formation of a “common language” that is neither national nor imperial but open to the future of a society constructed through migration, translation, and reappropriation of the means of production stand in a singular light.

Qu Qiubai presents us with a writing from the anomaly that attempts to wrest bodies out of their imprisonment by the burgeoning codes of grammar, law and value. It is a writing that does not take the anomaly as its object, but rather embraces the anomaly as a point of departure from which to build a future beyond both the disciplinary strategies of primitive accumulation and industrial production and the subjective techniques of social normalization condensed in the modern nation-State.

The anomaly consists, initially, in the revolutionary conjuncture of Shanghai in the early 1930s: the “permanent state of exception” formalized by the protocols of extraterritoriality; the overwhelmingly migratory background of its burgeoning population (approximately 80%); the lack of a lingua franca; the substitution of police force for sovereignty; and the articulation of politics with policing and policing with the disciplinary care of life. Qu’s response to this conjunctural

anomaly was to approach it from the ex-position of a revolutionary subject-still-to-come (sujet-à-venir) rather than the supposition of sovereignty derived from capitalist recomposition via colonial governmentality. Faced with the anomalous mixtures of spaces, populations, grammars, and values, that characterized the transition from a multicultural, multilingual imperial entity ("the Qing Dynasty," 1644-1911) to a modern nation in a world system of States ("China," 1911-), Qu Qiubai understood that to grasp this process by reference to the figure of return would serve only to sustain the miserable domination of the present into the future. Instead, Qu takes the predominantly migrant population of Shanghai as a clue for turning the anomaly into a new situation. Henceforth, the anomaly is not an exception that reinstates the rule, but the point of departure from which to break out, diagonally, of the stranglehold of mediation between the two. From this perspective, the only real anomaly is the oscillation between rule and exception that masks the capitalist system of accumulation-through-expropriation behind an ideology of national culture. Qu Qiubai was one of the first to sense that just as national culture is the ideology of capital, translation is one of its main subjective techniques.

Just as in Qu's time, the task ahead of us today remains that of asking how we can effectively appropriate linguistic elements from the global domination for the creation of a truly common language? The struggles in the globalizing university marketplace would seem to offer one of the places from which to start.

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