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Towards a theory of vernacularisation: insights from written Chinese vernaculars

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This paper examines the history of four Chinese vernaculars which have developed written forms, and argues that five of the patterns Hanan identifies in the early development of Bai Hua can also be found in the early development of written Wu, Cantonese, and Minnan. In each of the cases studied, there is a clear pattern of early use of the vernacular being sanctioned by the following factors: (1) a tie to oral literature; (2) use in texts written for less literate audiences; (3) a tie to low prestige domains; (4) association with groups that have little fealty to the dominant culture; and (5) use in new genres, where conventions are not already set. The strength of these patterns, found in cases that differ in both social and historical setting, suggests that they are rooted in inherent attributes of L varieties in diglossic situations, and that similar patterns may well be found in other cases where L varieties begin developing written forms.

Keywords: diglossia; vernacular languages; sociolinguistics; multilingualism

Introduction

In recent decades, scholarly and public attention has increasingly been drawn to issues concerning the history of the social roles of languages; phenomena such as language death and the rise of English as a global language have attracted considerable attention not only because of their sheer scope but also because of their dramatic social impact.

A massive historical shift in the social roles of languages that has attracted somewhat less attention is the decline of diglossia. Diglossia is a form of societal multilingualism in which a society has two language varieties with distinct social roles. The 'L' (low) variety is a low-prestige spoken vernacular used for daily conversation by all or most members of the society. Any written form it has is generally only used for a limited number of less-respected kinds of writing. The 'H' (high) variety is a prestigious language, often a sacred or classical language that is used for socially respected functions, including most or all writing (Ferguson [1959] 1972). In pre-modern societies, diglossia was quite widespread; societies that can be described as diglossic would include pre-modern Europe (Latin as H), East Asia (Classical Chinese as H) and South Asia (Sanskrit as H); pre-modern Mayan society may also have been diglossic (Gnanadesikan 2009). However, in many once-diglossic societies, changes associated with modernisation such as the rise of mass publishing, literacy and education have resulted in a vernacular L variety being chosen and

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promoted as the national standard language, with a consequent reduction or elimination of the social role of H. For example, Latin (H) was gradually displaced throughout Europe by national languages based on spoken vernaculars (Burke 2004); similarly, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, Classical Chinese (H) was replaced in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam by vernacular-based L varieties (Snow 2010a). In short, whereas diglossia was so common in the pre-modern world that it might be described as the norm, it is much rarer in the modern world, and has virtually vanished in many places where it was formerly prevalent.

When examining the decline of diglossia, our attention is quite naturally drawn to the climax of the story, where the vernacular-based L variety conquers the old H variety and drives it from its place of honor. One example of this is China's Vernacular Language Movement (*baihuayundong*) of the early 1900s, during which reformers concerned with China's survival as a nation advocated abandoning Classical Chinese as China's written language and replacing it with a modern written language based on northern Chinese vernacular speech. A similar campaign took place a few decades earlier in Japan, where reformers successfully argued that replacing Classical Chinese with a written Japanese vernacular would facilitate Japan's efforts to educate its population and modernise, and also serve to enhance Japanese nationalism (Twine 1991).

However, we should also consider the less dramatic but equally important early chapters of the story. In China, Japan and many other societies, the L contender did not spring from nowhere to contend with H for dominance. Instead, over a long gestation period, the L variety developed a written form and gradually expanded into the domains of H, establishing a limited but significant role in the domain of written discourse. In fact, one reason written vernaculars were able to replace Classical Chinese so quickly in both Japan and China was that both countries already had a substantial, albeit low-prestige, written tradition in the vernacular, so reformers did not have to create a vernacular written language from scratch. In order to fully understand the process of vernacularisation – the process by which spoken vernaculars develop written forms (cf. Pollock 2006) – we need to understand how written vernaculars first grew and developed so that they were later available as candidates for higher social roles.

One starting point for the present paper is a question posed in Alan Hudson's (2002) article 'Outline of the theory of diglossia'. Having noted that one important aspect of historical shifts in diglossic patterns is L's development of a written form and its gradual expansion into the domains of written language, Hudson asks 'whether the course of functional expansion of L follows a fixed pattern once instability in the functional assignments of H and L has set in'. Hudson goes on to mention several patterns, noting, for example, that L often appears early in texts portraying natural conversation, in religious texts and in texts that do not threaten established intellectual or professional interests (30). However, his discussion here is brief, and is not intended to provide a definitive answer.

A second starting point is provided by Patrick Hanan in his (1981) *The Chinese Vernacular Short Story*, which discusses the early history of texts written in vernacular written Chinese – BaiHua – and calls attention to several patterns found in the characteristics that 'sanction' the use of the vernacular in these texts, in other words, attributes of the contents of the texts, of their physical and social setting, and of their users that make it more acceptable to use the vernacular. Hanan notes that early use of BaiHua:

- (1) Appears in relation to oral literature.
- (2) Is found in texts written for less literate audiences.
- (3) Is associated with low-prestige domains.
- (4) Is associated with individuals/groups that have little fealty to the dominant culture.
- (5) Is found in texts of new genres and functions, where conventions are not already set.

Hanan offers these generalisations only in relation to early BaiHua literature, and while he does refer briefly to the concept of diglossia, he does not address the larger question of whether the same generalisations would hold true for the early development of other written vernaculars.

The larger issue I will address in this paper relates to Hudson's question: are there fixed patterns of development that L vernaculars follow when they expand into the domain of written language? If so, what are these patterns? I will pursue this issue by asking the more specific question of whether the patterns described by Hanan in the early development of BaiHua also to be found in the early development of other written vernaculars.

In this paper, I focus on the cases of the four written Chinese vernaculars that have historically attained the highest levels of use and most substantial social roles – BaiHua, written Wu, written Cantonese and written Minnan. My logic in choosing these four cases – and limiting my discussion to them – is as follows. In order to establish general patterns in the development of written vernaculars, it is necessary to examine multiple cases that differ to some degree in historical setting. Such comparison helps ensure that any discernible patterns are somehow inherent to the process of vernacularisation itself, rather than resulting only from one historical set of circumstances. However, for a brief paper such as this, it is also necessary to limit the number of cases in order that each can be discussed in some detail. These four cases were chosen because they are similar enough to make comparison meaningful and relatively manageable, and differ enough in their historical settings that they ensure shared patterns are not the result of identical historical circumstances. Of course, shared patterns found in these four cases will not necessarily represent all cases of vernacularisation worldwide, but they provide a solid starting point from which to begin establishing a set of general patterns, which could then be compared with cases elsewhere.

My main argument is that we can make rather strong generalisations about patterns in the early phases of vernacularisation, and that Hanan's list serves as a useful starting point in identifying those general patterns. I will attempt to show that the patterns Hanan sees in the early development of BaiHua are also generally found in the early development phases of other written Chinese vernaculars, despite the fact that these often differ from written BaiHua in the historical and social conditions under which they developed. Furthermore, I will suggest that because these patterns are rooted in inherent attributes of L varieties in diglossic situations, they are likely to be relatively universal rather than unique to a given case.

Before proceeding to discussion of the cases and patterns, two points require clarification. First, 'early' development of written vernaculars refers to a rather long period during which the vernacular is used in some types of written and published texts, but has not received any official recognition and is not taught in the education system. Of course I do not assume that all written vernaculars go on to achieve

official recognition and/or a role in the school system, but I do assume that study of the written vernaculars that have not become national languages is still significant for what it can teach us about how written vernaculars develop.

Second, when I speak of early use of the vernacular, normally this does not mean the sudden appearance of texts that are written entirely in the vernacular, adhering closely to the vocabulary and syntax of a spoken vernacular. Instead, as Hanan notes with regard to BaiHua, early ‘vernacular’ texts were generally a mix of vernacular and Classical Chinese elements, and it was only much later that texts began appearing that more or less faithfully reflected the syntactic and lexical norms of spoken language (1981). The same pattern is found in other written Chinese vernaculars.

Four Chinese written vernaculars

For readers unfamiliar with the history of the written Chinese vernaculars discussed in this paper, here is a very brief introduction to each.

BaiHua

In pre-modern Chinese society, Classical Chinese was the prestige H variety and the language of written texts. However, by the Tang dynasty (618–907), texts written in a language based on northern vernaculars had begun to appear, mainly in various genres of texts associated with Buddhism such as stories and ‘sayings of the masters’ (*yulu*). This written northern vernacular – early BaiHua – continued to develop through use in various genres of folksongs and fiction, and by the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) was used widely in both short stories and novels, albeit works that were considered to be relatively low in literary prestige.

As mentioned above, in the late 1800s, reformers began calling for the replacement of Classical Chinese by BaiHua, and the success of the BaiHua Movement in the early 1900s made BaiHua the standard written language of China, taught in schools and used in print media (Hanan 1981; Norman 1988; Xu 2007).

Written Wu

Written Wu, primarily Suzhounese, first appeared in various genres of folk songs in the Ming Dynasty, and later came to be used in printed versions of chantefables (*pingtan*), a narrative song genre especially popular among women, and also in some dialogue sections of Kun opera scripts. The heyday of written Wu was from the 1890s to 1910s when it was used in dialogue sections of courtesan novels set in Shanghai, the best known of these being Han Banqing’s *Flowers of Shanghai* (*Haishanghua lie zhuan*).

Even as of the 1920s, as authoritative a figure as Hu Shi ([1926] 1974) felt that the dialect literature with the brightest future was Wu. However, as China moved into the modern period, and literacy in BaiHua was increasingly promoted, use of written Wu in literature declined and essentially died out. While today one can find written Wu in a few kinds of texts, such as Shanghainese language textbooks, its use in print culture is otherwise fairly rare (Qian 1989; Bender 2003; Shi 2009; Des Forges 2007).

Written Cantonese

Written Cantonese first appeared in various song genres of the late Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty (1644–1911), such as the southern songs (*nan yin*), wooden fish songs (*mu yuge*) and Cantonese love songs (*yueou*). By the early 1900s, it had also come to be used in printed versions of Cantonese operas, some other kinds of popular stories, missionary publications and even some literacy materials.

The real growth of its social role, however, began when it started being used in various newspaper article genres in Hong Kong in the late 1940s, and it later moved into genres such as diary-format fiction, advertising and youth-oriented magazine articles. While its social role today is still quite limited, and it is used predominantly in Hong Kong rather than mainland China, it is now the most widely used and vital written Chinese vernacular other than Standard Chinese, and also the most standardised (Bauer 1988; Snow 1993, 2004, 2008, 2010b).

Written Minnan

Written Minnan first made its appearance in Qing dynasty song and opera texts in southern Fujian and northern Guangdong. In the 1800s, a Romanised written form of the language created by Protestant missionaries also came to be used quite widely in Min-speaking areas among Chinese Christians, and Church Romanisation not only survived but also influenced written Minnan beyond church circles.

An important milestone in the story of written Minnan occurred under Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan in the 1930s, when for a brief time reformers promoted the idea of writing in Minnan as a way to defend local identity in the face of colonial efforts to promote the Japanese language and culture; however, little was actually written in Minnan during this period, and the movement had already lost much of its steam by 1937 when Japanese authorities stepped up promotion of Japanese. Interest in use and promotion of written Minnan revived in the 1970s when it again became a vehicle for defending a Taiwanese cultural identity, this time in the face of efforts of a mainlander-dominated KMT government to promote Mandarin as Taiwan's national language (*guoyu*). Taiwan nationalists not only promoted the idea of writing in Minnan (Taiwanese), but also wrote poems, short stories and even academic essays in Minnan. Written Minnan continues to be promoted and used to some degree in Taiwan, and is now even taught in some schools in 'mother tongue' language courses; however, it has not achieved the degree of popular use or standardisation found in written Cantonese (Cheng 1989; Gu 1989; Hsiao 2000; Klöter 2003; Gunn 2006).

Patterns

The written vernacular tends to appear early in texts that simulate oral language use

Perhaps the most obvious pattern in the early appearance of the vernacular has to do with its ties to oral language use; as Hanan (1981, 5) notes:

As a rule, it is exclusively in relation to oral literature that a written literature in the vernacular first develops Oral literature provides the model – the sermon, the saga, the song – that the vernacular requires, as well as its sanction.

Examples of this pattern in the early use of BaiHua would include use of the vernacular in dialogue sections of texts such as *New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shi shuoxinyu*), or Buddhist sayings of the masters (*yulu*), and also use of the vernacular in texts to be sung (Hanan 1981; McLaren 2005).

Examination of the other written vernaculars clearly shows a tie between texts intended for oral performance and early use of the written vernacular. For example, the earliest uses of written Cantonese are found in printed texts of songs such as those of the southern song and Cantonese love song genres. Likewise, early use of Wu (generally Suzhou) vernacular is found in printed song texts, such as Feng Menglong's *Mountain Songs* (*Shan ge*), Suzhou chantefables (*ping tan*) and the songs of Wu (*wuge*) genre, and early use of Minnan varieties from southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong is found primarily in texts of local songs and operas.

There is also a strong pattern of early use of the vernacular in texts – or sections of texts – that replicate dialogue. This pattern is particularly clear for use of written Wu in Shanghai courtesan novels of the late 1800s/early 1900s, such as *Flowers of Shanghai* and *The Nine-tailed Turtle* (*Jiuweigui*), where Suzhounese is used extensively but also exclusively confined to dialogue sections of the texts, with narrative portions in BaiHua. A similar, albeit weaker pattern is seen in the case of written Minnan, where early use of the vernacular is most likely to be found in text that replicates dialogue; for example, use of the vernacular in Lai He's (1932) short story *Getting in Trouble* (*Re shi*) occurs mainly in dialogue. As to the history of written Cantonese, even today Cantonese is far more likely to be found in texts that explicitly replicate dialogue than in texts that do not have a visible narrator. For example, paperback books that make heavy use of Cantonese tend either to confine it to dialogue sections of the text, as was the case of fiction published in *CITY* magazine in the 1970s, or to be written in a diary format with an explicit first-person narrator, such as the popular late 1980s *Diary of the Little Man* (*Xiao nanren zhouji*) series. Use of Cantonese in news articles has also generally been confined to quotes.

The existence of this pattern is well established; as we saw above, it is among those mentioned by Hudson in his (2002) article, and has been noted by other scholars as well (e.g. Mair 1989). The main point to note here is not so much that the pattern exists, but rather that it is very strong; in fact, it is so strong that it has survived into the modern period, long after the notion that 'you should write as you speak' (to paraphrase the Chinese reformer Huang Zunxian) has become national policy in many countries, and the assumption that written vernaculars are inherently unworthy vehicles for serious writing has been widely rejected.

The vernacular tends to appear early in texts that are intended for less literate audiences

A second pattern that Hanan points out is that the vernacular tends to appear early in texts that are associated with less literate audiences. As he notes, 'That use of the vernacular did give access to a wider readership can scarcely be doubted, despite the fact that education was in Classical Chinese', and in the case of BaiHua he sees a clear pattern of works designed for a wide readership being in either simple Classical Chinese, vernacular, or most frequently some mixture of the two. Use of the vernacular expanded the potential readership of texts by including a less literate

audience of ‘boys and women and also of the less lettered classes – merchants, shopkeepers, shop assistants, lower functionaries and the like...’ (1981, 10–11; see also McLaren 2005). As Brokaw (2005) suggests, some texts written in the vernacular, such as the famous literati novels of the late Ming and Qing, may actually have been somewhat more difficult to read than texts written in easier forms of Classical Chinese. However, in general, for texts written in comparable styles, those written in the vernacular were easier for audiences with lower levels of education to comprehend.

When we turn to texts using other Chinese vernaculars, we not only find evidence of this pattern in the many song and opera texts that were popular among women, but also among educators making use of the vernacular in texts designed to promote literacy. With regard to written Cantonese, reformers such as Chen Ronggun and Lu Zijun, both students of Kang Youwei, produced textbooks that taught ‘women and children’ to read in Cantonese, or made use of Cantonese in textbooks designed to teach literacy in simple Classical Chinese (Luk 1984; Snow 2004). Another example is Wang Bingyao’s 1901 literacy textbook *An Introduction to New Characters* (*Xinzi qi zhipian*), which not only makes use of written Cantonese but also promotes a new set of phonetic symbols intended to make it easier for people to learn to read and write. For written Minnan, a similar example is a 1925 textbook written by Presbyterian pastor Cai Peiho that promotes written Taiwanese as a route to improving literacy and educational levels in Taiwan (Zhuang 1989).

We see evidence of the same pattern in the use of the vernacular by those who wish to reach less literate audiences in an effort to promote a particular ideology. As we will see below, much early use of BaiHua in China was made by Buddhists, an evangelical faith interested in reaching a wide audience (Mair 1994). Similarly, Christian missionaries were often not only in the vanguard with regard to writing in Chinese vernaculars, but well ahead of it. Writing in 1894, Dyer Ball introduces dozens of works written in Cantonese, either in Chinese characters or in Romanisation, that were intended to facilitate promotion of the Christian message among less-literate Cantonese-speaking audiences. For written Wu, a similar example is James Summer’s (1853) *Gospel of Saint John*, written in Romanised Shanghainese with the intent of making the text available to ‘those natives who have not, or never have had, time to devote to the study of the native characters’ (1853, iv). And in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was a substantial and fairly successful effort by Christian missionaries in southern Fujian and Taiwan to promote literacy in Church Romanisation, a Romanised version of Minnan, and during this period ‘a vast amount of literature in Church Romanisation was published’ (Klötter 2003, 92).

However, it was not only Buddhist and Christian missionaries who saw use of the vernacular as a vehicle for reaching less literate audiences. In Taiwan in the early 1930s, one reason nationalist activists promoted the idea of writing in Minnan (Taiwanese) was that they wished to reach Taiwan’s masses. Reformers such as Huang Shihui and Guo Qiusheng argued that it would be easier for the people of Taiwan to learn to read and write if they used written Taiwanese (Gu 1989; Hsiao 2000). A similar pattern was seen in the late 1940s Dialect Literature Movement in Hong Kong, during which leftist intellectuals promoted creative writing in Cantonese, Chaoshan and Hakka as a way to reach out to the less literate masses (Snow 2004).

The vernacular tends to appear early in texts associated with low-prestige domains

A third clear pattern is early use of the vernacular in texts associated in some way with low-prestige domains. To be more specific, early use of the vernacular generally appears in texts that:

- are written for and by people who are low on the social ladder,
- are printed in inexpensive low-quality formats,
- are in less-respected genres and
- associated with topics and social settings that are socially marginal.

In Hanan's study of BaiHua, the best evidence for this pattern is found in the strong connection between use of BaiHua and fiction, a genre that was not respected in pre-modern Chinese society. As Hanan notes, 'Even Classical fiction had never claimed a high place in literature, and the vernacular fiction suffered the extra cultural handicap of its language' (1981, 12; see also 15).

Much early use of written Cantonese was found in song genres associated with low-prestige domains. For example, dragon boat songs (*long zhouge*) were generally sung by the poor to the poor (Ye 1996; Yung 1989; Chen 2005), and wooden fish songs also tended to be sung by the uneducated to an audience often consisting mainly of 'housewives and maid-servants' (Yung 1989, 138). Cantonese love songs were written in a more literary style, and were widely popular among the upper as well as the lower classes (Clementi 1904; Xu 1958; Yung 1989). However, most of these were love songs sung by customers to courtesans, hence closer to the margins of respectable life than its centre, and they were also widely published in inexpensive woodblock print wooden fish books (*mu yushu*). Later, Cantonese opera scripts were widely published in the same wooden fish book format.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when written Cantonese began to make the transition from an idiom associated with pre-modern Guangdong to one associated with modern urban Hong Kong life, its first foothold was in inexpensive entertainment-oriented newspapers marketed to the less affluent (*xiaobao*); in fact, written Cantonese was often associated in the public mind with pornography, though the actual latter connection was apparently more imagined than real (Snow 2004).

The development in written Wu follows a similar pattern. Early use of written Wu is found in texts of songs associated more with the general population than with the educated classes, such as the songs of Wu and mountain songs, and its later development tends to be found mainly in fiction, especially turn-of-the-century courtesan fiction. While one example of the latter, *Flowers of Shanghai*, later received a degree of critical acclaim (Des Forges 2007), at the time of its initial publication it was presented as a work of popular literature, and other novels in the genre such as *Nine-Tailed Turtle* were generally considered low-brow works.

Early use of written Minnan was also in texts of popular folk songs and operas rather than respected works of literature. The case of written Minnan, however, begins to deviate from the pattern of the other written vernaculars when it comes to be associated with local Taiwanese identity and nationalism in the 1900s, and from that time on works using written Minnan are often in genres such as poetry, modern fiction and even expository prose that do not have marked ties to low-prestige domains.

Early use of the vernacular tends to be associated with groups who have little fealty to the dominant cultural authorities

A fourth pattern noted by Hanan is that early use of the vernacular tends to be associated with groups that do not have high levels of allegiance to the dominant culture; in fact, it is often associated with groups that challenge the dominant culture in some way. As Hanan notes, ‘...the vernacular fiction, because of its ambiguous position in Chinese culture, frequently served as a vehicle for criticizing the culture’s dominant values...’ (1981, 13). The most salient example of this is the strong tie between Buddhists – originally cultural outsiders in China – and early use of the vernacular. ‘Buddhism was an imported ideology which owed little fealty to the dominant Chinese culture and its canonical models, even though it was influenced by them’ (1981, 6). Buddhists had little reason to make use of a difficult classical written language that was ‘the jealous possession of an entrenched bureaucratic or priestly elite who would actively oppose the spread of potentially subversive ideologies that are directed toward the populace’ (Mair 1994, 721).

With regard to the other written vernaculars, we sometimes find examples of individual authors using the vernacular as they critique or satirise the dominant society of their day. One example of this is Zhang Nanzhuang’s 1874 *What Kind of Book is this?* (*He dian*), which has both strong elements of social satire and also Wu vernacular (Qian 1989; Wang 1997; Huang 1998). However, the pattern is more compellingly demonstrated by many examples of outsider groups being forerunners in use of written Chinese vernaculars.

As for BaiHua, early use of other written vernaculars in China is often found among religious groups, especially Christian missionaries. Like the Buddhists, Christian missionaries not only had a desire to make their message accessible and appealing to the general population, but also had little loyalty to cultural norms that privileged a classical language most closely associated with a cultural elite that generally opposed promotion of Christianity. The degree to which missionaries were willing to ignore the cultural norms of this elite is suggested not only by their willingness to use local Cantonese, Wu and Minnan vernaculars in their publications, but also by their willingness to adhere closely and consistently to the norms of the spoken language, rather than mixing the vernacular and classical languages, as was often the case when the vernacular was used by Chinese writers. For example, missionary-produced texts such as the American Bible Society’s 1899 *Gospel of St. Mark in English and Cantonese* reflect spoken Cantonese to a greater extent than contemporary Chinese-produced texts such as the Cantonese love songs. Furthermore, missionaries often abandoned Chinese cultural norms entirely by writing vernaculars in Romanised script rather than Chinese characters.

Early use of the written vernaculars is also found among outsider political groups. An interesting example of this is the Dialect Literature Movement in Hong Kong. In the late 1940s, during the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists in China, there was a movement in Hong Kong among leftist activists to promote vernacular writing as a vehicle for arousing the masses to support the Communist revolution. The movement had little impact on the overall spread of written Cantonese, and it ended quite abruptly in 1949 when many of the writers involved in the movement returned to the mainland (Snow 2004). In fact, the power of this pattern is suggested by the fact that as soon as the outsider group, the Communists, came to power, the Dialect Literature Movement abruptly ended.

A similar case is that of the association in Taiwan between use of written Minnan (Taiwanese) and groups attempting to resist the imposition of other cultures and languages. This pattern first appears in the 1930s when Taiwanese nationalists advocated use of written Minnan as one way to preserve Chinese culture in the face of attempts by the Japanese colonial authorities to promote Japanese and make Taiwan culturally and linguistically a province of Japan (Gu 1989; Hsiao 2000). While little actual literature in written Minnan was produced during this period, promotion of written Minnan by nationalists such as Guo Qusheng and Lian Yatang also promoted the idea that writing in Minnan was a way to challenge political authorities who were trying to suppress local culture and identity. Written Minnan was later adopted for the same reason by Taiwanese cultural nationalists who resisted efforts of the KMT-dominated government to promote Mandarin Chinese at the expense of Taiwanese and other local vernaculars; as one of the main advocates of written Minnan, Lin Shuangbu, points out, he and other writers use written Taiwanese not because it is superior to other languages but to increase Taiwan people's self-respect and to protest against government denigration of the Taiwanese language and culture (1989). In fact, as Hsiao notes, '... the advocates of [written Taiwanese] in the last decade have been, almost without exception, Taiwanese nationalists' (2000, 139).

A final example that can arguably be interpreted as evidence of low fealty to cultural norms is the relatively heavy use of written Cantonese in publications that are marketed to young people in Hong Kong, such as various kinds of youth magazines (Snow 2004). Here we need to bear in mind that in school, young people are taught to read and write in Standard Chinese, and often actively discouraged from writing in Cantonese. As Li (2000, 224) notes, '... teachers and students alike are either taught or socialized to believe that [using Cantonese-specific characters] is "wrong". When they do surface in student writing, which is not rare, they are purged or discouraged'. In contrast, publishers of youth-oriented publications often feel little need to support the no-Cantonese norms promoted in schools, and the popularity of their products among students seems due, at least in part, precisely to the fact that they break the language-use rules schools try to promote.

In summary, all of the written vernaculars show substantial evidence of a pattern of the written vernacular being adopted early and promoted used by outsider groups. It should also be noted that generally these groups are radical in their willingness to depart from accepted cultural norms, using the vernacular in more genres and kinds of texts, using it in ways that are more consistently faithful to the spoken language and writing it in forms such as Romanisation that break dramatically with Chinese tradition.

The vernacular tends to appear early in new genres and functions

A final pattern in the early development of BaiHua is a tendency to appear in new genres where conventions were not already well established. As Hanan notes, 'Since the position of standard written medium was already occupied [by Classical Chinese], a distinct vernacular literature could grow up only to fill some new, additional function that Classical could not perform...' (1981, 5; see also Norman 1988). One early example of this pattern was the tendency to use vernacular elements in Chinese translations of Buddhist religious texts or genres such as *yulu* that recorded teachings by Buddhist masters. Because these genres were new to China,

they were not affected by existing linguistic conventions to the degree that language use was governed by convention in already established genres. A later example of this pattern is the heavy use of the vernacular in short stories that were modelled on tales told by oral storytellers. While genre conventions did not necessarily determine the variety of language to be used within a certain kind of text, they did suggest and influence choices to a significant degree, so it was easier to use the vernacular in new genres where conventions were not yet established.

This pattern is also clearly seen among the other Chinese written vernaculars. For example, the heaviest use of Suzhounese in written form is associated with a new fiction genre that emerged in the late Qing dynasty, courtesan novels set in the world of courtesans and their clients in Shanghai around the turn of the century, such as *Flowers of Shanghai* and *Nine-Tailed Turtle*.

In the history of written Cantonese, we see many examples of a similar pattern. One is the appearance of the Cantonese love song genre in the early 1820s; the publication of Zhao Ziyong's *Cantonese Love Songs* in 1828 popularised and established the genre, inspiring other similar songs and collections over the next century. While the texts of Cantonese love songs were actually written in a mix of literary Chinese and Cantonese, they included more markedly Cantonese vocabulary than previous Cantonese song genres had.

An interesting later example of the tie between Cantonese and new genres is the association of a kind of satirical newspaper genre called the 'odd opinion' (*guailun*) essay and a writing style known in Cantonese as *saamkapdai* (*san ji di*), continuing elements of Classical Chinese, Standard Chinese and Cantonese. While this genre was especially associated with the popular Hong Kong writer Saam So, such columns were written by many others as well, often the head editors of newspapers, and were found in many Hong Kong newspapers from 1940s through the end of the century. A more recent example would be appearance of diary-format paperback novels in the late 1980s in Hong Kong (Snow 2004).

Overall, this pattern appears to be a very strong one. The interesting exception here is the case of written Minnan, where use of the vernacular has often been found, especially in recent decades in well-established genres such as short stories, poems and even academic essays and dissertations. The difference here is best attributed to the fact that the spread of written Minnan (Taiwanese) has been driven to a large degree by political and cultural agendas – the preservation and promotion of Taiwanese identity. The choice to use Taiwanese in these well-established genres makes a strong statement about the value of Taiwanese, and for many who choose to write in Taiwanese making this statement is more important than reaching a large audience (Lin 1988; Lin 1989).

Discussion

Returning to Hudson's question, study of China's written vernaculars suggests that there is not a fixed pattern in the route that L takes as it moves into the realm of written language. As Hudson himself notes (2002), the factors that lead to changes in the roles of H and L are historically contingent, and the degree to which a given sanction or motivation is responsible for the expansion of the vernacular into the realm of written language varies considerably from case to case. For example, the relative importance of reaching less literate audiences as a motivation for choosing to write in the vernacular is affected by the existing degree of literacy of the population in question. In pre-modern China, the fact that there was a large population of people who were only semi-literate

in Classical Chinese created an opportunity for writers to produce commercial fiction that was written in a vernacular-based language that was easier for these people to read. Furthermore, the fact that many of China's people were illiterate was a major reason why Chinese reformers in the late 1800s and early 1900s advocated increased use of BaiHua. In contrast, in contemporary Hong Kong, where most people are not only literate in Standard Chinese but also more accustomed to reading in Standard Chinese than in Cantonese, ease of reading is less important as a motivation for choosing to write texts in the vernacular.

Another example illustrating the importance of historical contingency is that of written Minnan in Taiwan in the early 1900s. The fact that Taiwan had been ceded to Japan, and that Japanese colonial authorities were promoting Japanese language and culture with the express intention of making Taiwan's population Japanese, was a major reason why Taiwan nationalists advocated written Minnan as a means of resisting imposition of Japanese. In contrast, BaiHua was never promoted as a symbol of national or cultural identity in China because Classical Chinese, the 'other' with which it was in competition, was as closely associated with the Chinese nation and culture as BaiHua was. This difference meant that the degree to which desire to assert an in-group identity played a role in motivating use of the vernacular in writing differed greatly in the two cases.

However, the evidence above suggests that strong generalisations can be made about the conditions that sanction early use of the vernacular in written texts. Despite considerable differences in the historical setting and development of the four Chinese written vernaculars examined in this paper, they all exhibit the patterns Hanan noticed in the early development of BaiHua; many of these patterns are also apparent in the development of written vernaculars elsewhere in East Asia (Snow 2010a), and probably in other parts of the world as well.

Furthermore, we should note that these patterns fall into two larger categories, each of which is related to an inherent attribute of L varieties in diglossic situations. One fundamental attribute of L varieties is that they function as the language of daily oral communication in the community, and this attribute underlies the first two patterns discussed above. It is in close correspondence with the community's daily spoken language that gives sanction to use of the vernacular in writing when the texts need to convincingly simulate oral language use; it is also in close correspondence to daily speech that makes the written vernacular easier for people who speak the vernacular to learn to read and write it.

A second fundamental attribute of L varieties is their low level of social prestige, and this attribute underlies the remaining three patterns. First, and most obviously, use of a low-prestige variety in written texts associated with low-prestige domains is more acceptable than use of the variety in texts associated with more prestigious domains. Second, given that the prestige of an H variety is closely associated with a social and cultural elite, it stands to reason that outsider groups who are not part of that elite will have less reason to uphold the cultural norms that help H maintain its social position; they are also more likely to compete with established cultural elites by making use of popular L varieties as one measure for enhancing their influence by reaching out to a larger audience. Third, the tendency of the vernacular to appear in new genres is also arguably related to the low social position of L, in the sense that cultural elites are more likely to oppose violations of language use conventions in established genres, especially relatively prestigious one, than in newer genres for which there are not yet established conventions and norms.

In other words, what we see in these four cases is not just common patterns in the ways spoken languages develop written forms; rather, we are seeing patterns in the routes that L varieties in diglossic situations take as they expand into the domain of written language, and the patterns can be linked to inherent attributes of L varieties that would presumably often be found not only in China or East Asia, but in cases of diglossia all over the world.

Conclusion

Study of the four cases above does not provide a theory of vernacularisation, at least not in the sense of a theory that would allow us to predict the developmental path any given L variety might take as it expands into the domains of written language use. However, it does show clear patterns even in cases that differ from each other significantly in their historical and social settings, giving us a good starting point from which to build a fuller set of generalisations that can be made about the early phases of vernacularisation. These cases also remind us that what we are looking at is not simply the process of a spoken language developing a written form; rather, we are looking at how L varieties in diglossic situations develop written forms, and, as we look for patterns, we need to seek them in fundamental attributes of L varieties – both their role as widely used spoken languages and their relatively low social prestige.

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