RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Bilingual Puns in the Linguistic Landscapes of Guangzhou, China

Junhua Peng*, Nor Shahila Mansor, Zalina Mohd Kasim, and Lay Hoon Ang
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: penghuahua2019@gmail.com

Abstract: Punning, either monolingual or bilingual, is a significant action in creating literal humor and rhetorical jokes. Notwithstanding, there is a dearth of linguistic studies on punning, particularly bilingual punning. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a sociolinguistic appraisal of Chinese-English bilingual puns in Guangzhou, an international Chinese metropolis, by presenting and analyzing the data collected from the linguistic landscapes of Guangzhou. A qualitative method was employed in analyzing the data collected from 18 commercial signages with visible bilingual puns that were located in two popular commercial centers of Guangzhou. Resultantly, Chinese-English puns largely occurred at the word level with bilingual homophones as the core of the puns on Guangzhou's commercial signage. The wide use of the word *Fun* showed the conventionalized, context-dependent, and intertextuality features of bilingual puns. Furthermore, bilingual puns displayed an emerging feature of translanguaging in the public space. Hence, this study sheds light on the features of Chinese-English bilingual puns and contributes to existing literature by discovering the sociolinguistic dynamics of bilingualism in Chinese communities.

Keywords: bilingual puns, linguistic landscapes, translanguaging, English, homophone

Punning is a significant form of wordplay in demonstrating language creativity that serves as a device in creating literal humor and rhetorical jokes through the deliberate manifestation of ambiguous characteristics contained in words, morphemes, or syllables (Härmävaara & Frick, 2016). As such, the core feature of punning is purposefully displaying linguistic ambiguity (Li & Costa, 2009). A bilingual pun emerges when the ambiguity is derived from the interlingual similarity and the meaning is created from the words, morphemes, or syllables that are homophonous in two languages (Rivlina, 2020). Furthermore, monolingual or bilingual puns are highly context dependent because they "exist only in the context of disambiguation and therefore only in context" (Attardo, 2018, p. 93).

Although punning phrases have been frequently discovered in both written and conversational discourses, particularly in the advertising domain, limited studies were investigating the application of puns in different contexts and media (Attardo, 2018). Taxonomy is the major approach yet less productive in generating sufficient "explanatory patterns" (Attardo, 1994, p. 108) of the puns. However, in recent years, puns as a predominant form of wordplay have increasingly

received higher levels of attention from scholars of the respective fields. On the one hand, pun types have been documented in an array of linguistic studies over the decades (Giorgadze, 2014; Heller, 1983; Li & Costa, 2009; van Mulken et al., 2005), but on the other hand, the context- and culture-specific nature of puns encourages scholars to continue exploring the universal mechanism of pun generation across different languages (Attardo, 2018; Guidi, 2012). Nonetheless, previous studies provided lower levels of focus on the potential functions of puns in real-life discourses (Partington, 2009) while primarily centering research on puns in a single language (Knospe, 2015).

Punning is a ubiquitous phenomenon across various geographical, linguistic, or even cultural boundaries. The integration of business activities worldwide leads to a surge of language contact between English and native languages wherein the process of globalization, to a significant extent, facilitates the assimilation of English into different nations and cultures (Bolton, 2012). For the countries located in the outer and expanding circles (Kachru, 1992), English coexists or is incorporated with the local languages, thereby creating language varieties, mixtures, and hybrids, including bilingual puns. The salience and visibility of English in the public space also largely lead to the emergence of bilingual puns in the cityscapes. Thus, the global dissemination of English facilitates the evolvement of punning in the bilingual direction, and future studies examining the characteristics of punning should no longer be confined to a single language when bilingual puns require further exploration and research.

The public space is defined as a physical field wherein one could witness the global spread of English in different usages. As delineated by Gorter (2006), the linguistic landscape (LL) is an alternative approach in investigating bilingualism or multilingualism in the era of globalization in which English is a dominant language employed across different sectors and industries. Therefore, the LL presented in the public space could also be referred to as an innovative perspective in studying bilingual puns as an important form of bilingual wordplay and creativity. Instead of becoming a linguistic battlefield, cityscapes have recently evolved and transformed into a playing field for linguistic creativity wherein new words, language varieties, and hybrids are produced (Lamarre, 2014). This transformation can be illustrated by the emergence of bilingual or multilingual shop names, billboards, or posters in different metropolises, particularly the manifestation of bilingual puns. As such, LLs in major cities, especially megalopolises, provide a primary source in exploring the integration of bilingual puns in different sectors and industries.

Guangzhou, a city with more than 2,000 years of history, is renowned as a highly internationalized metropolis in China equipped with highly vibrant commercial activities and selected as a residential city by a large number of foreigners (Peng et al., 2021). The robust commercial activities in Guangzhou have considerably facilitated the dissemination of English across various areas of the city compared with other Chinese cities and encouraged various forms of wordplay to appear in the business world. As a result of the language contact between English and Chinese, signages depicted in either English or both Chinese and English are highly visible along the streets of Guangzhou, leading to a growing number of bilingual puns displayed in the public space. Moreover, punning poses a great significance to Chinese culture in which China has had "a long tradition" (Li & Costa, 2009, p. 78) in demonstrating wordplay or generating puns, which is known as *shuāng guān* (双关) in Chinese, that functions as a significant device in creating humor and rhetorical joke in Chinese literature and advertisements. Therefore, the emergence of bilingual puns with crucial historical background in the Chinese cities and communities should be provided with a significant amount of focus in linguistic studies.

This study aims to perform a sociolinguistic analysis of Chinese-English (C-E) bilingual puns in Guangzhou, an international Chinese city, by presenting and analyzing the data collected from the LLs of Guangzhou's cityscape. The major research question is as follows: what are the major features of Chinese-English bilingual puns discovered from the LLs of Guangzhou? Given the research question as described above, the study attempts to shed light on the major features of C-E bilingual puns and reveal the effect of English on language use in the Chinese community.

Bilingual Puns and Linguistic Landscapes

Several studies discussed the presence of bilingual puns in bilingual or multilingual societies (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2008; Luk, 2013; Peng et al., 2021),

particularly in the countries of the expanding circle wherein English coexisted or was assimilated in the native languages as an important foreign language (Kim, 2020), such as German (Stefanowitsch, 2002), Russian (Rivlina, 2015), and Cantonese (Li, 2000) communities that actively created fertile and productive ideas of bilingual puns. For instance, German-English puns were frequently found in advertisements, media, and Internet genres in which a majority of bilingual puns occurred below the word level that portrayed high levels of semantic motivation (Stefanowitsch, 2002). The study conducted by Stefanowitsch (2002) could be regarded as a milestone in encouraging future bilingual punning studies wherein a growing number of scholars commenced in studying bilingual puns thenceforth in Germany.

A similar punning situation also existed in Russia in which English-Russian bilingualism was discovered as a "mass societal phenomenon" (Rivlina, 2015, p. 438) that resulted in a myriad of bilingual creativity and language wordplay. Furthermore, both studies in Germany and Russia had identified that bilingual puns, along with "near-pun" bilingual wordplay in the public space, such as billboards and posters, were commonly regarded as part of the LLs (Rivlina, 2015; Stefanowitsch, 2002). Apart from that, through the review paper delineating the process of Cantonese-English code-switching or language alternation, Li (2000) suggested that the wide spread of bilingual puns across various advertisements in Hong Kong was a significant motivation for code-switching. As such, the deliberate bilingual punning as depicted in the advertisements motivated an attractive and innovative manner of code-switching between Cantonese and English.

Although the three studies in Germany, Russia, and Hong Kong were conducted at different periods and countries (Li, 2000; Rivlina, 2015; Stefanowitsch, 2002), they revealed a similar notion wherein bilingual puns were not a random phenomenon but a universal feature of wordplay and language creativity in the nations from the expanding circle (Kim, 2020) as a result of being "conventionalised and reproduced in different contexts" (Rivlina, 2015, p. 446). Furthermore, the puns discussed in the three aforementioned studies largely stemmed from the billboards portraying the cityscapes, propounding that LLs could be an indispensable source in collecting bilingual puns embedded in real-life discourses. Thus,

previous studies conducted in Germany, Russia, and Hong Kong (Li, 2000; Rivlina, 2015; Stefanowitsch, 2002) have provided insightful enlightenment for this study in analyzing the Chinese-English puns by assessing the LLs of Guangzhou.

LL research could be dated back to the 1990s when Landry and Bourhis (1997) published their seminal work regarding LLs in Québec, Canada, whereby the dual nature of LLs, including texts and tools, led to an exponential growth in linguistic and semiotic studies (Garvin, 2010). Over the two decades, the definition of LLs has been expanded to any form manifesting the visible display of written languages in the public sphere (van Mensel et al., 2016). The "presence, representation, meanings, and interpretation of language displayed in public spaces" became the foci of LL studies (Shohamy, 2012, p. 538). Subsequently, a plethora of LL studies have been conducted across various cities in revealing the dynamics and social changes of languages in the given areas or territories (Alomoush, 2018; Han & Wu, 2020; Huebner, 2006; Lawrence, 2012).

For a certain period, the LL is regarded as a battlefield of languages due to the differences existing in the linguistic hierarchies, resulting in different forms of competition and negotiation for different languages (Blackwood & Tufi, 2015). Besides, the LL is also the field in presenting the ethnic identities of diverse social actors (Shohamy, 2012) and the methods in performing language maintenance and revival of the minority languages (Holmes, 2013). However, it has recently transformed into an arena of languages wherein bilingual wordplay and linguistic creativity burgeon across the world (Luk, 2013).

Amongst various LL studies, bilingual punning in different cityscapes has been occasionally identified. For instance, Lamarre (2014) investigated the bilingual winks and bilingual wordplay in the LLs of Montreal, a southern city of Québec in Canada, before summarizing the major features of bilingual wordplay in the Canadian cityscape. Lamarre (2014) proposed that bilingual puns had a higher tendency to exist "in cities where there was a historical context of language contact and a targeted population of bilingual sign-readers and writers" (p. 147). This postulation was concurrent with similar findings discovered from other studies (Kim, 2020; Peng et al., 2021). For example, Kim (2020) reported that Korean-English puns in the cityscape of several Korean cities occurred at the word

level wherein Korean words were commonly replaced by their homophonous English counterparts. However, Kim's (2020) findings contrasted with the findings by Stefanowitsch (2002) in which German-English puns existed below the word level. Nonetheless, both studies revealed that bilingual puns delivered "a high degree of semantic motivation" amongst the citizens residing in their respective cities (Kim, 2020; Stefanowitsch, 2002, p. 68).

The punning circumstances appear in higher levels of complexity in the Chinese context, owing to China's vast geography and complex linguistic situation that engender the diversification of Chinese-English bilingual puns. For example, Cantonese, a major dialect in China (Ji, 2018), is widely employed in Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangdong Province wherein Cantonese-English puns have been intensively examined and discussed in several studies (Li, 2000; Luk, 2013). Aside from that, the linguistic situation could also be different in Mandarin-dominating cities in which Mandarin-English puns are frequently discovered in the public space and the cityscapes. In a study conducted in Suzhou, a Chinese city located in the Yangtze River Delta, Li (2015) explored the incorporation of English in nonofficial public signage and discovered the existence of Mandarin-English bilingual paronomasia in the cityscape. Through the study findings, Li (2015) explained the nature of Mandarin-English bilingual puns whereby an English word replaced a Chinese word in displaying the overall meaning of a Chinese phrase and posited that homonyms and syntaxes were the major features of bilingual puns in Suzhou's LLs. Similarly, another study conducted by Peng et al. (2021) in Guangzhou, a Chinese city located in the Pearl River Delta also revealed the emergence of Mandarin-English bilingual puns in the cityscape. However, Peng and colleagues (2021) did not provide a detailed discussion on the development of the puns in Guangzhou.

Drawing upon cognitive linguistics, Knospe (2015) explored how bilingual puns are understood, based on the theory of conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008), and identified the structural and discursive functions of the wordplay. Knospe (2016) provided a more detailed analysis of bilingual puns in public signage by centering on the structures and functions of German-English puns portrayed on the signage in the city of Berlin, Germany, from the perspectives of cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics. By concentrating on the understanding and ideas of readers, Knospe conducted interviews with passers-by to explore their perceptions about various signages in selected locations of the study, and the results showed that bilingual punning would be considered as a precarious choice in naming the shops, owing to few consumers could entirely comprehend the meanings intended by the puns. Besides the forms and functions of bilingual puns, Nash (2013) categorized and summarized the general means of producing bilingual puns, namely, homophonic accident, homonymic or semantic contrivance, and literal translation, which provided deeper understandings of the resources in generating the ideas of bilingual wordplay.

Based on the aforementioned findings, it is discovered that bilingual punning is a universal phenomenon in the cityscapes of the expanding circle. However, previous studies have mainly been regarding bilingual puns as a by-product of the actions observed from bilingual wordplay and language creativity while diverting a lower degree of attention in evaluating the features, functions, and motivations of bilingual puns. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of studies investigating Chinese-English punning, a phenomenon that is increasingly significant in various Chinese cityscapes. As such, this study aims to explore Chinese-English bilingual puns in the LLs of Guangzhou, a global metropolis in China, wherein Mandarin is the official language in formal situations, Cantonese a major dialect employed in informal occasions, and English a medium of communication in commerce. The current study was conducted by deploying a sociolinguistic analysis of bilingual puns observed from the Chinese context in revealing the dynamics of bilingualism and dissemination of English amongst the Chinese communities.

Methods

This study adopted an ethnographic approach in collecting the data required for the analysis of bilingual puns. A total number of 18 commercial signages with Chinese-English puns were selected during the walking tours conducted in Shangxiajiu and Beijing Road Pedestrian Streets between September and October 2020. With a history of over 1,000 years, Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street is one of the earliest centers in performing commerce and international

communication, whereas Beijing Road Pedestrian Street is the existing trading hub with the highest level of robustness for commercial activities (Han & Wu, 2020). As the two pedestrian streets are the predominant commercial centers in attracting numerous local and international visitors to Guangzhou, the streets were chosen for investigation in this study due to the high levels of commercial activities (Ben-Rafael, 2009) and high visibility of English (Alomoush, 2018) in creating a significant degree of LLs. Hence, the magnitude of commercial activities in both Shangxiajiu and Beijing Road Pedestrian Streets has a higher tendency in producing larger amounts of bilingual signage.

The purposive sampling method was administered to collect the data in the form of photographs from bilingual commercial signages, including posters, billboards, and notices due to the high salience level of punning in the advertising domain (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2008; Rivlina, 2015; van Mulken et al., 2005), whereas signages without bilingual puns and repeated signs were excluded from this study. Through the process of scrutinization and determination, 18 signages were employed in studying and analyzing Chinese-English bilingual puns qualitatively by adopting and adapting Luk's (2013) analytical framework that covered textual, semantic, and sociopragmatic dimensions. Although Luk's (2013) analytical framework was initially employed in appraising bilingual wordplay and creativity, it could be adapted in analyzing bilingual puns, which were also a significant form of bilingual wordplay. Hence, this study focused on the textual, semantic, and sociopragmatic dimensions of the collected data during the stage of data analysis. The textual and semantic dimension includes the lexicogrammars, semantics, discourses, and visual features of bilingual puns, while the sociopragmatic dimension on the social context and functions of the puns.

Results and Discussions

Homophone: The Core of Chinese-English Puns

Through the analysis of the data collected, the findings showed that catering and fashion services provided a significant number of bilingual puns, accounting for approximately 88.89%. Among the 18 commercial signages with bilingual puns, a total number of nine signages were associated with catering services, while seven signages were related to fashion services, including clothes, glasses, and cosmetics. The remaining signs were pertinent to health services. Although scattered in several business sectors, all of the Chinese-English puns found in Guangzhou's cityscape occurred at the word level wherein a Chinese word was replaced by an English homophone (similar pronunciation but different meaning) or vice versa. Compared with bilingual puns in the German or Russian context, there is no bilingual pun occurring below the word level in the Chinese context. In other words, homophones appeared to be the biggest source of Chinese-English bilingual pun generation as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. An ad for a grilled fish restaurant.

Figure 1 shows an ad with a bilingual pun to introduce a new set meal for a grilled fish restaurant. The English word *New* is inserted into a Chinese phrase, by replacing its Chinese homophone *niú*/牛, thereby creating a disyllabic pun, namely, New气, which sounds like a Chinese phrase *niú qì*/牛气. It is self-evident that the disyllabic pun occurs at the word level. From the semantic perspective, the mixed phrase *New*气 contains a three-layered meaning wherein the first meaning is related to the literal meaning of the English word *New*, indicating that the set meal is newly launched and welcomes customers to taste, while the second and third meanings are more

associated with its Chinese homophone *niú*/牛 (*bull* in English). On the one hand, it refers to a commonly used Chinese phrase *niú qì* (牛气), a metaphor for prosperous businesses, outstanding performance, or high reputation in Chinese culture; on the other hand, it suggests beef tallow serves as the cooking ingredient of grilled fish. In contrast to its monolingual pun *niú qì* (牛气), the creative and mixed bilingual pun *New* 气 not only has expressed higher level connotations but also doubles the effect of publicity when the meanings intended from the bilingual puns could be perceived and comprehended by native and international tourists, owing to bilingualism creates "a window onto different worlds of meaning" that is associated with both local and global codes in creating a unique style of a store (Knospe, 2015, p. 222).

Figure 2. The slogan of Grandbuy Outlets.

Another similar example was discovered from the slogan of Grandbuy Outlets as shown in Figure 2 of this study. The English word *Young,* homophonous with Chinese characters *yang* (羊/扬/样), is frequently employed in replacing the related Chinese character in phrases, creating manifold Chinese-English puns in the Chinese cityscapes. From the bilingual code-mixed phrase花*Young*盛会, the English word *Young* replaced the Chinese character *yàng* (样, similar pronunciation to *Young*) and produced a phonosemantic matching phrase to the disyllabic Chinese word *huā yàng* (花样). As a result, the bilingual pun still appears at the word level, similar to the one in Figure 1. As described in the Chinese language, *huā yàng* (花样) is a highly conventionalized phrase with multiple meanings and is widely employed in written and oral conversational discourses, including the following meanings, such as all kinds or styles, tricks, and the basic styles for Chinese embroidery. Furthermore, the relevant Chinese slang *huā yàng nián huá* (花样年华) refers to the youthful years of men and women, like the beautiful flowers. As such, the homophonic wordplay herein expresses two vital aspects of information, including that the shopping mall provides a wide variety of products and it could offer the young customers an opportunity to get together.

The examples discussed above elaborated on the insertion of English adjectives into a conventionalized Chinese frame, to create disyllabic bilingual puns. However, apart from adjectives, the English verbs present another significant source of generating Chinese-English puns. Figure 3 displays the use of the English verb *GO* in a code-mixed verbal phrase, which aims to promote an online shopping mini-program of a cosmetic brand store. Here, the equivalent homophone is the Chinese verb *gòu* (购), sounding like the English word *GO*, which means to buy something. By inserting the English verb *GO*, the verbal phrase with two verbs could express the meanings of three relevant verbs, such as scan, go to the online store, and buy. The code-mixed phrase suggests their customers scan the QR code first and then go to the online shop to buy their products.

Figure 3. An ad for a cosmetic brand.

Compared with its equivalent Chinese phrase 扫码购 (*scan and buy* in English), the mixed phrase 扫

码GO (*scan and go* in English) extended semantic meanings to a certain extent. Besides, the appearance of the English word, more associated with a global code, probably creates a sense of modernity and sophistication (Luk, 2013) and serves as "the carrier of international and global values" (Manan et al., 2017, p. 15), which would facilitate the construction of the international image of the cosmetic brand.

Given these, it is easy to find that Chinese-English puns largely occur at the word level wherein English words replace their Chinese homophones or vice versa. The figures discussed above illustrate the frequent insertion of adjectives or verbs in Chinese-English puns; however, nouns are also widely inserted into a disyllabic phrase and thereby produce a code-mixed bilingual pun, further described in the next section. Similar to German-English and Korean-English bilingual puns, the Chinese-English equivalents are found to be constrained in a "highly conventionalised linguistic frame" while being "highly motivated semantically" (Stefanowitsch, 2002, p. 68). In addition, the results are in line with the findings related to Korean-English (Kim, 2020) or Cantonese-English puns (Li, 2000) but conflict with that of German-English puns (Stefanowitsch, 2002). In the German context, a majority of bilingual puns occur below the word level and indicate high levels of semantic motivation; nevertheless, bilingual puns largely appear at the word level in the Asian context. The underlying reason may be related to the linguistic distance among different languages. According to a quantitative measure of the distance between English and other languages, Chiswick and Miller (2005) indicate that English is closer to western European languages in terms of linguistics than it is to East Asian languages, such as Chinese and Korean. The linguistic gap between Chinese/Korean and English, including vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and script writing, probably prevents bilingual puns from occurring below the word level in these contexts. The hypothesis could explain the reason for bilingual puns appearing at the word level unless a wide variety of comparative studies have been conducted to confirm it.

Funny "FUN"

The use of English words in creating bilingual puns, such as young and go, seems not to be a random phenomenon but a conventionalized one, since several words are frequently inserted into the Chinese phrase

to deliberately produce bilingual puns. In terms of frequency, the English word *Fun* is the most common, embedded in the Chinese phrases to create various forms of bilingual puns. As determined from the collected data, approximately one-third of Chinese-English puns (a total number of six signages) were created from the substitution of *Fun* by replacing its relevant Chinese homophones, including *fàng* (放) in Mandarin and 分/纷 in Cantonese. These code-mixed bilingual puns were found on the posters of optical and bubble tea shops, billboards of cafeterias, electronic products, dairy products, etc.

Figure 4. A poster of an optical store.

Figure 4 was captured from an optical chain store located in the Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street during Chinese National Day in 2020. The Chinese National Day is a public holiday when Chinese citizens have a one-week-long vacation, which is also known as *fàng cháng jià* (放长假) in Chinese. The poster aims to inform the customers of the new discount if they buy the new glasses during the holiday. The bilingual pun appears in the mixed phrase *FUN*长假, wherein the English word *FUN* substituted its Chinese homophones *fàng*/放, with attempts to express the meaning of having a long holiday, which is the superficial denotation of the bilingual pun. In addition, the word *Fun* potentially connotes the experience of having fun during the holiday. As a result, the deliberate ambiguity displayed by the word *Fun* not only creatively expresses the

literal meaning and its connotation but also attracts passers-by's attention immediately, due to the mixed form between the local and global codes.

Figure 5. A billboard for a cafeteria.

The high frequency of the English word *Fun* substituted into various Chinese phrases discovered in the current study was arisen from the conventional, instead of a random or unique, phenomenon in Guangzhou wherein there was an existing homophonous relationship between the English word *Fun* and the Chinese character *fàng* (放) and the potential semantic matching between the word *Fun* and the given context. The equivalent Chinese homophone *fàng* (放) is so commonly used in the Chinese language that the English word *Fun* is widely employed in those phrases, such as *fun*长假，*fun*心食, *fun*心玩, and 心花怒*fun*. Despite sharing the same homophonous relationship, those phrases generate different semantic meanings based on the context.

The finding indicates that the use of the English word *Fun* is conventional in bilingual puns, but its semantic matchings are context dependent. In other words, the semantic meanings of bilingual puns with the word *Fun* vary according to the given context. In addition, the recurrence of the word *Fun* in the set of unrelated phrases probably illustrates intertextuality, a process by referring to textual and contextual aspects from which the user draws the readers' attention to original sources that are similar in content and form

(Al-Siyami, 2013). The intertextuality among different phrases is likely to grab the passers-by's attention (Chan, 2009) to promote the products or services.

It is noteworthy that Guangzhou, as an orthodox Cantonese community in which Cantonese is a prestigious dialect in daily communication (Ji, 2018), hardly found Cantonese or the traditional Chinese written in the commercial signage in the public space as an outcome of the national language policy. According to the existing national and provincial language policies, dialects and language varieties are largely confined to informal domains (Han & Wu, 2019). The LLs in Guangzhou are virtually displayed through Mandarin instead of the local dialect (Cantonese). However, the use of the word *Fun* in bilingual puns seemingly exposed the influence of Cantonese on local business activities, because the word *Fun* also has the phonemic overlapping with the Cantonese morphosyllabic character 分/纷. Figure 6 displays several implicit Cantonese-English puns in an innovative advertising poster designed by a famous bubble tea shop named YH TANG.

Figure 6. Cantonese-English puns on an advertising poster.

The poster was creatively designed in the form of a test paper to introduce the promotion named as 满FUN计划 in the simplified Chinese (*Full Score Plan* in English), each promotion activity of which was presented in different question types. The word *FUN* appears five times and produces two different bilingual puns, one of which was 满FUN repeated

four times and the other 加FUN. According to the context, the word *FUN* replaces its Cantonese homophone 分 (pronounced as *fan1*), instead of its Mandarin homophone 放. The deliberate design of a test paper would quickly motivate the association between *Fun* and 分. In order to follow the language policies, the poster was written in simplified Chinese, and Cantonese-English bilingual puns were disguised as implicit ones. The first pun 满*FUN* refers to the full score, while the second one加*FUN* means bonus points, all of which are closely associated with the test. If the readers take them as Mandarin, they would most likely miss those wonderful bilingual puns.

The findings echoed with the discovery of Li (2000), which revealed the highly salient existence of the English word *FUN* in generating Cantonese-English punning in the advertisements and newspapers. The findings in this study, along with Li's (2000) findings, suggest the conventionalized nature and intertextuality of bilingual puns across the territories. Nonetheless, the common use of bilingual puns with the English word *Fun* is in contrast with the claim of Ritchie and Bhatia (2013), who posited that bilingual wordplay was a transient or short-lived phenomenon and not a priority of investigation in linguistic research. Consequently, those puns across the time and territories, found in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, demonstrated the significance and sustainability of bilingual creativity and wordplay in the public space, and thereby, they should receive higher levels of attention and interest in future studies, particularly in the Chinese context.

On the other hand, Guangzhou's LLs provide a visual reflection on the decline of Cantonese as an essential native dialect in the public and commercial signage. The national and provincial language policies have exerted a negative impact on the process of language maintenance in which the direction is accelerated towards language shift and death while witnessing the dominant status of Mandarin nationwide. However, disguised as Mandarin Chinese, those implicit Cantonese-English bilingual punning manifests the robust vitality of Cantonese in Guangzhou's communities, indicating the struggle and resistance of the local dialects at the same time. In what way the local dialect could survive and to what extent the local dialect could be displayed in the public space are existing problems to solve for language policy makers and administrators.

Translanguaging in Bilingual Puns

The representative examples analyzed from Figures 1 to 6 showed that Chinese-English puns largely occurred at the word level with the bilingual homophones as the core of bilingual wordplay. Similar to German-English and Korean-English bilingual puns, the Chinese-English equivalents were also found to be constrained in a "highly conventionalised linguistic frame" while being "highly motivated semantically" (Stefanowitsch, 2002, p. 68). However, as discovered from Guangzhou's cityscape, the existing Chinese-English bilingual puns were not only generated through the process of substitution with homophones but occasionally also through translanguaging by involving various languages and different modals. Translanguaging is a linguistic practice that involves different languages, varieties, and modals (Li, 2016), gaining much attention within the educational domain (Jonsson & Blåsjö, 2020). With the surge of multilingual and multimodal signs in the public space, Gorter and Cenoz (2015) contend that translanguaging could be an approach to LLs. Bilingual puns found in Guangzhou's cityscape seem to prove that translanguaging is not a practice merely confined to the educational setting but a practice also rooted in the public space and business settings.

Figure 7. Bilingual puns for a local night market.

Figure 7 provides a piece of empirical evidence for the generation of Chinese-English bilingual puns via translanguaging. The signage, found in a shopping mall called i-club in Beijing Road Pedestrian Street, included two bilingual puns in a conventionalized Chinese phrase. The phrase *Young* 城*Yeah*市, meaning the night market in Guangzhou (*yáng chéng yè shì*/羊城夜市), contains two Chinese-English puns that occur at the word level. The first Chinese character yáng (羊)

is replaced by its English homophone *Young*, creating the first disyllabic pun, namely, *Young*城 for *yáng chéng* (羊城), when translated into English as the *City of the Goat*, a well-known nickname for Guangzhou city. The nickname for Guangzhou is derived from an ancient legend in which five celestials were riding five goats with their respective rice spikes, thereby creating another famous nickname for Guangzhou, that is, the City of Rice Spikes (Xu & Yeh, 2003). Therefore, the bilingual pun is highly context specific. The bilingual pun *Young*城 deliberately conveys two layers of meanings here wherein the first meaning refers to the nickname of Guangzhou (City of the Goat), while the second meaning suggests that Guangzhou is a city with vitality as the English word *Young* has the connotation of youthfulness in Chinese culture.

On the other hand, the Chinese phrase *yè shì* (夜市) is also disyllabic with the meaning of night market, symbolizing the prosperity, vitality, and inclusiveness of a place in Chinese culture. The third Chinese character *yè* (夜) is substituted by its English homophone *Yeah*, thereby producing the second pun, that is, *Yeah*市 for *yè shì* (夜市). The English word *Yeah* is a common loanword as an exclamation widely employed in China to describe joyful and fantastic feelings during a conversation without a particular semantic sense. Compared with the monolingual Chinese phrase, the mixed disyllabic word *Yeah*市 not only expressed the literal meaning of *yè shì* (夜市) but also added a sense of passion and vitality to the night bazaar and city.

The hybrid phrase *Young*城*Yeah*市 employed a translanguaging practice by purposeful switching between languages, wherein the innovative expression not only promotes the reputation of the local night market but also serves as a visual effect for customers, such as eye-catching, attention-grabbing, and memory facilitating. Compared with its Chinese equivalent phrase 羊城夜市, the insertion and substitution of English words could effortlessly catch the passers-by's attention due to the higher degree of uniqueness in the combination of words from different languages.

Translanguaging involves switches among different languages and language varieties; nevertheless, it may also occur when the user goes beyond languages, such as multimodality (Li, 2016). Figure 8 indicates another representative instance of bilingual puns with translanguaging where purposeful switches appear between different languages and modalities. The translanguaging sign was placed in front of a pet shop front to greet the customers. At the first sight, the passers-by probably recognized it as a translanguaging practice without punning, due to the appearance of a rabbit head and the English abbreviation *U*. However, the image of the rabbit head would quickly evoke the semantic meaning of the Chinese character *tù* (兔), thereby creating a code-mixed sentence *Nice*兔*meet you*, through the combination of image and words.

Within the code-mixed sentence, it was easy to identify that the Chinese character *tù* (兔) was utilized in replacing the relevant English word *To* via the similar pronunciation. After the multilevel decoding, a bilingual pun emerged. The image of a rabbit head replaced the Chinese character *tù* (兔) and the English word *TO* at the same time and functioned as a semantic and syntactic property in the greeting sentence *Nice*兔

Figure 8. A multimodal sign with a Chinese-English billingual pun.

meet you. On the one hand, it delivered the semantic meaning of the equivalent Chinese character, by attracting passers-by's attention and implying the pet shop with available rabbits offered; on the other hand, it served as a syntactic hinge in the original English phrase *Nice to meet you* when delivering the intended connotation through a greeting. If the image of the rabbit head was not used instead of the corresponding Chinese character *tù* (兔), the humorous and rhetorical effect intended would be reduced significantly as the image was highly semantically motivated. As such, a translanguaging bilingual pun beyond languages and modality could be considerably more conspicuous than a bilingual equivalent in conveying subtle connotations. The translanguaging bilingual puns create a higher degree of uniqueness in advertising products and services by demonstrating a high innovation manner in the process of attention grabbing.

Although translanguaging signs, as indicated in Figures 7 and 8, was not a conventional bilingual pun in a cityscape, merely accounting for a small proportion, it has attested to Li and Shen's (2021) assumption that bilingual wordplay and language creativity involving translanguaging was chiefly employed in the LLs with higher potential levels for commercial interests. Furthermore, the deliberate and frequent insertions of the English homophones not only demonstrate the increasingly active linguistic contact between Chinese and English in the Chinese communities (Han & Wu, 2020) but also reveal the decorative and symbolic functions of English in the commercial domains, where English is more associated with a sign of modernity, sophistication, and international image (Han & Wu, 2019). The involvement of bilingual codes and different modalities not only produce uniqueness in conveying the intended meanings but also have a higher tendency in engendering a sense of internalization, modernity, and high quality.

Based on the analyses of the figures above, Chinese-English punning discovered in Guangzhou's cityscape largely occurred at the word level in which Chinese words were frequently replaced by their homophonous English counterparts or vice versa when homophonic elements were the predominant means in creating bilingual puns. Bilingual puns are not a random phenomenon in the public space but a deliberate method of expressing the intended humor through a high saliency degree by presenting a high level of semantic motivation as well as the syntactic hinge in a phrase. Besides, translanguaging, mixed with bilingual puns, has been found to gradually emerge in the cityscape of Guangzhou as the process is regarded as more complicated in generating bilingual puns which required further exploration.

As a deliberate form of language creativity and bilingual wordplay, Chinese-English punning in Chinese cityscapes facilitates the publicity of products and services, while the incorporation of English in the puns presents a symbol of youth, modernity, internalization, and sophistication to the customers. In essence, bilingual puns are considerably more eye-catching, attention-grabbing, and memory facilitating than their monolingual counterparts. Besides, bilingual puns are playing a higher importance level than monolingual puns in terms of the symbolic value when the puns are composed of English since the English language functions as a symbol for modernity, sophistication, and youth.

The field-based research on bilingual puns in the Chinese LLs also provides an apposite glimpse on the rise of English in contemporary Chinese society. As delineated by Bolton and Graddol (2012), "the current popularity of English in China is unprecedented and has been fuelled by the recent political and social development of Chinese society" (p. 1). The unprecedented popularity of English probably stems from China's educational policies, which require all students from primary schools until colleges or universities to learn English as their primary foreign language (Shi, 2013), contributing to the exponential growth of English learners and the ELT market in China. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) (2020), China has moved from a country with low proficiency in English to a moderate proficient nation. As such, the growing English proficiency of Chinese learners becomes a premise in creating and understanding bilingual wordplay and linguistic creativity, including bilingual puns.

Conclusions

This study predominately examined the features of Chinese-English puns in the LLs of Guangzhou. The findings discovered that Chinese-English puns largely occurred at the word level wherein English words were frequently employed in substituting the homophonous Chinese characters in various Chinese phrases

or vice versa. Adjectives, verbs, and nouns were explicitly inserted into conventionalized linguistic frames, thereby producing creatively bilingual puns. Bilingual homophones found in Chinese commercial signages were the core punning strategy by different enterprises in attracting potential customers. As such, the high usage level of homophones in the puns was significantly motivated by the semantic properties and occasionally syntactic properties of both Chinese and English words.

Besides, the examples of Chinese-English puns analyzed in this paper appeared to be conventionalized as the instances were frequently identified as repeat employment in the public space, particularly the English word *Fun*. The wide spread of bilingual puns with the word *Fun* demonstrated that Chinese-English puns were not random but conventionalized, context dependent, and intertextual. The implicit Cantonese-English puns suggest the strong vitality of Cantonese and also indicate the struggles of the local dialect due to the negative impact of the national language policies.

Moreover, bilingual punning through translanguaging was observed in the cityscape, suggesting that the cityscape became a ground of creativity between various languages, instead of competition and conflict. The translanguaging practice was displayed in the form of purposeful switches between languages and modalities. The combination of languages and images exposed the most distinct feature of Chinese-English punning, hardly found and discussed in previous studies. The incorporation of translanguaging and bilingual puns would be a future direction of commercial advertising.

In a nutshell, the instances of bilingual puns collected and analyzed in the current study provide clear evidence of the gradual trend of bilingualism in Guangzhou's cityscape in which English serves more than a decorative purpose in the current Chinese cityscape when the language is developing its localized role in contemporary Chinese communities. The discovery of the conventionalized puns in the study also suggests the investigation of bilingual punning and wordplay in China should be prioritized in future studies with further and in-depth research. A larger number of samples is recommended in exploring the linguistic features and sociolinguistic functions. Moreover, the comparison of bilingual puns with other Chinese major cities is also required in summarizing the

current trend of Chinese-English puns disseminated across geographic boundaries in China.

Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

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