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**The Use of English in Chinese Pop Music; Applying Andrew Moody's Categories of Language Mixing**

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Abstract

This study is focused on mapping the functions of English language in Chinese popular music, as well as measuring the extent to which English language is used. From a synthesis of literature describing a range of functions underlying the use of English in other Asian popular cultures, I speculate on what these functions in Chinese popular music could be. Moody (2006) categorizes different types of language mixing with which English use in Japanese popular music can be measured. I will investigate if the same model is applicable to Chinese popular music. From the results of this research, I will argue that one of the types of language mixing - the use of phrases and clauses - is to be regarded as a sub spectrum in which songs can be identified as either containing a limited amount of English sentences, or an extensive use of English sentences. Qualitative assessment of the content in songs with extensive code switching revealed that this seems to be accompanied by cultural mixing. From these findings I will argue that cultural mixing provides a valuable marker to justify and explain the categorical split of the use of phrases and clauses.

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**Inhoud**

## 1. Introduction & Background

In recent years there has been a growing body of research on the use of English in Asian pop music, which in itself has been gaining global attention. Researchers have been identifying in which ways English is employed lyrically in K-pop, J-pop and Cantopop, and to what purpose (Moody, 2006; Chan, 2009; Lee, 2004; Jin & Ryoo, 2012). Jin and Ryoo (2012) note that English use in K-pop started in the 1990's and has grown to be present in 56% of 2010's Top-50 in Korea. Moody (2000) had already found a staggering 62% English use in J-pop lyrics in the Top-50 Oricon chart of the year 2000. Takahashi & Calica (2015) identified 100 popular Japanese songs out of the Oricon Chart that sold the most copies, and found that 73 of them contained English. Thus, for both genres we have reason to assume that the use of English is at least stable, or even still growing. K-pop has seen a dramatic change in the topics it addresses, and how attitudes towards these topics are expressed, compared to only 3 decades ago. For example, Jin & Ryoo (2012) have observed an increase in Western musical arrangements and cultural norms as well, besides the use of lyrics. This ongoing process has led to extensive discussions about why this might be happening. Chan (2009) had argued earlier that one of the most important reasons for this phenomenon is the desire to connect and address a global market of popular music, as well as to overcome international language barriers within Asia. Where listeners from different Asian countries might not understand a Korean song for example, they may understand the English words that are used in the chorus of that song. This would make the Korean popular music more relatable and recognizable within different Asian countries. Lee (2004) argues another function of English is that the use of code switching may be the consequence of sociopolitical processes, such as using English as a means of resistance against traditional conservative cultural values in Korea. He describes a sense of two different sets of values being practiced through these two languages, with Korean representing the traditional, conservative/collectivist, and English functioning as

the global, individualist and critical agent. He notes that Korean lyrics functioning as the latter would be censored in Korean mass media, but that English language with the same content would be accepted. An interesting notion can be derived from this, namely that the mere use of English in a foreign - in this case Asian – country does not necessarily indicate the extent to which certain Western cultural norms are being embraced by the artists who use English. Little can be said about to what extent these different values are actually being internalized. Jin & Ryoo (2014) have found in many cases that incorporating English language accompanied by elements of Western popular culture into Korean pop music, are merely a respectful tribute, and not an attempt to copy the style of Western popular culture. They argue however that this could still fit into the image of an internal struggle to simultaneously identify with traditional Korean culture and an explosively globalizing society.

Moody (2006) conducted research on the use of English in J-pop music, and argued that code switching, as well as code ambiguation, challenges the traditional beliefs of uniqueness that Japanese culture seems to attribute to the Japanese language. In an earlier co-authored study he identified four categories of language mixing in J-pop: 1) Musical filler, 2) Single words and phrases, 3) Clauses and sentences, 4) Code ambiguation (Moody & Matsumoto, 2003). Musical fillers are identified by simple words, most commonly *yeah*, *oh*, or *uh*. Single words and phrases are usually widely understood loanwords, such as *walking*, *winner* or *happy*. Clauses and sentences often take up an entire line, and can start to contain idiomatic expressions, in this case derived from Western pop culture (Moody, 2006). Code ambiguation happens when English or Japanese words are used with possible meanings in both languages. This can be identified only by closely examining the lyrics. It seems to indicate that the artists are trying to obscure their ethnicity, or at least to place its relevance into the background. The following example illustrates the phenomenon:

*"I, I, I, I Tender*

*- The Southern All Stars – "Atto Iu Ma-no Yume-no Tonight'' [Night of Dreams]*

*(sounds like Japanese aittendaa 'I love you!')"*

(Moody, 2006)

Categorizing these types of language mixing provides a measurable insight into how frequently English language is used, and how it functions in Chinese pop music.

The research conducted thus far on the use of English in Asian pop music has generated profound findings in understanding the sociopolitical attitudes and ideological underpinnings in attitudes towards English. One interesting aspect of popular music is that its goal is to convey a cultural message, as well as to aim for mass consumption, and therefore economic profit. In this growing body of research, remarkably little has been written about popular music in China. This is surprising, as China is a large scale economic and cultural driver within Asia, as well as on a global scale. Therefore, it can be expected that the Chinese pop industry is also of importance in China's economic and cultural expansion. Since English may perform the important aforementioned functions in popular music, analyzing the current use of English in Chinese pop music would provide insight into the status of English in Chinese culture and how that relates to sociopolitical processes. According to a national survey in 2012, there were approximately 390.16 million Chinese people who had learnt English at some point in their lives, out of the 1,4 billion people in total (Wei & Su, 2012). The same survey reports that 30% of these learners use English in their daily lives. English is not an official language in China, but is the most studied foreign language by people who have received junior secondary education. Research on attitudes towards English has shown that students, as well as university teachers hold native speaker models to a high regard, and thus hold exonormative views on the acquisition of English (Kirkpatrick & Zhichang, 2002). For example, the majority of Chinese EFL learners do not prefer literal translations of Chinese

idioms into English, as there is a fear of being perceived as an unsuccessful 'Chinglish'

speaker (Wang, 2014).

This interestingly relates to similar believes when reflecting on popular music in

China. Research conducted on the current state of popular music in China within the context

of intercultural identities has shown how Chinese artists experience difficulty with a sense of

authenticity when negotiating between their 'Chineseness' and the adoption of music

traditions that originate from the West. De Kloet (2005) states that Chinese musicians "face

the constant danger of being labelled mere copycats as the perceived origin and authenticator

of popular music is located in the West, at least in popular (and, unfortunately so, also

academic) discourse".

In order to contextualize the findings of this research, it is important to have an

understanding of  the current state of popular Chinese music and how it developed over the

course of the past decades. Fung (2007) provides a clear analysis on how China's change of

cultural policies after The Cultural Revolution (1969-1978) has shaped the current landscape

of popular music. During the Cultural revolution, the Communist party exerted a high level of

control on the music industry to flatten out its purpose for revolutionary purpose "thereby

eliminating those emerging forms of western populism of culture embedded in Shanghai pop

music since the 1930s" (Fung, 2007). Taiwanese pop in the 1990's, which had a more

apolitical mainstream character, as well as popular artists from Hong Kong started gaining

enormous popularity in. As the demand for such artists started rising in mainland China, the

authorities slowly changed to more flexible ways of controlling popular music. This process

can be linked to mainland China's rise in economic power in the first decade of the 21'st

century. Chu and Leung (2013) explain how this period initiated the rise of Mandapop, which

replaced the former popularity of Cantopop. As Hong-Kong became more economically

dependent on mainland China, the more hybridized and internationally oriented tradition of

Cantopop, slowly gave way to the rising status of Mandarin. Cantopop was arguably more hybridized as it contained English language, Western Rock arrangements, and frequently translated famous Western songs into Cantonese covers. As Mandapop took its place, it has now also adapted to a more globalizing market within the music industry, and therefore has become more hybridized to a certain extent (Chu & Leung, 2013). Currently, these policies are exemplified in the Chinese superstar Jay Chou, who produces his music exclusively in Mandarin. Fung (2007) explains that despite Jay Chou's integration of Western musical arrangements and occasional R&B rap, he is backed up and funded by semi-governmental organizations. This also puts him in a position of having to guarantee an image of "'safe' Chineseness". "Jay's case demonstrates that, rather than passively controlling the 'undesirable' popular culture, the authorities have transformed themselves into a proactive agent to embrace the popular culture that they think can extend the Chineseness nationalist ideology" (Fung, 2007). However, as Jay Chou is in fact Taiwanese, as well as other popular artists, and despite the authorities' efforts to reformulate them into an emblem of Chineseness, they are still regarded as foreign. This raises the interesting question of whether the same musical practices can be found in artists from mainland China, who would arguably be under greater pressure. As Fung (2007) conducted his research in 2007, this situation may have progressed today.

The aforementioned studies on English in K-pop and J-pop have shown how the use of English in popular music can challenge and criticize contemporary views on language and national identity. With the background set on the current state of popular music in China and its negotiating position between the authorities and expanding sociocultural identities, this research might add an addition to understanding how English language functions in Chinese popular music.

The categories of language mixing Moody (2006) suggests for analyzing the use of English in J-pop may provide a good basis to examine the current status of English in Chinese pop music. Obtaining information about how English is currently being used in China is crucial for our understanding of how the English language will develop in the future, as researchers argue that China's economic power is expected to have significant consequences for the English language as a whole (Kirkpatrick & Zhichang, 2002). This article aims to employ the same categorization that Moody (2006) used to measure the extent to which we can identify the aforementioned functions of language mixing in Chinese pop music. This research is also aimed at investigating to what extent this particular categorization is fitted to analyze English use in Chinese pop music.

Research question:

1) Which functions of language mixing can be found in Chinese pop music?
2) To what extent are the categories of language mixing in Moody (2006) for analyzing J-pop applicable to Chinese pop music?

## 2. Methodology

The method will revolve around the categories of language mixing in Moody (2006). First, the amount of instances in which English language is used will be measured for all songs in the Popnable (https://popnable.com) top 100 chart for China. The China Top 100 music chart is compiled and based on the most popular songs for the period 12/07/2019 - 18/07/2019. The source of their rankings comes from the most frequently watched music videos of Chinese artists on YouTube, by Chinese citizens. The minimal requirement for a song to contain English is the presence of musical fillers, as described by Moody (2006). Words like *yeah, oh, ey*, can be considered as English features as they originate from Western popular music. In order to find these features I will listen to every song, as they cannot always be found in the written lyrics. The other categories of language mixing will then be counted.  As songs can contain several of these types of language mixing, it might be worth investigating whether a given category of language mixing functions differently within the presence of another category. For example, single word utterances might function a certain way in a song that exclusively contains single word utterances, whereas they might function differently in songs containing phrases and clauses. Therefore, the Results section will also show the distribution of these categories within songs.

By using the categorization of Moody (2006), it becomes possible to speculate on the extent to which English is being internalized in Chinese pop culture in terms of quantity, as well as cultural content. In order to place the English lyrics into context, the Chinese lyrics will have to be translated. If there are no translations of the song available, then Google Translate will be used (https://translate.google.com/?hl=nl). For twenty of the songs that contained English language, there were official lyrics and translations available. There were fan translations available for the twenty-three songs with no official lyrics. Google translate had to be used for examples (1) to (8).

It is to be expected that the top-100 consists out of several Chinese dialects. There are several hundreds of dialects spoken in China, of which some are bound to small geographical areas. However, based on the background literature it is safe to say that popular music will mainly consist out of Mandarin or Cantonese. Since this study is about China's pop culture as a whole, the argumentation and focus of this study will not be directed to one specific dialect. All the Chinese dialects that can be found in this top-100 will be treated as one category in this study. One important factor that in some cases might be taken into account, is the linguistic/national background of certain artists. Even though artists will primarily use Mandarin in popular music, they might be native speakers of a different Chinese dialect. Therefore it might be worth speculating about sociolinguistic issues if an artist shows affinity to a more localized identity, rather than a national one. My lack of proficiency and knowledge of the different most widely spoken Chinese dialects prevent me from researching the presence of code-ambiguation, which is a drawback of this study.

As this study is also aimed at discussing to what extent the categories of language mixing in Moody (2006) are useful in analyzing Chinese popular music, I might expand on the data after the initial analysis.

### 3. Results & Discussion

Table 1

*Chinese popular songs containing English lyrics in the top 100 chart, as established by examining the lyrics and listening to each respective song.*

| Languages used | Count |
|---|---|
| Chinese languages only | 55 |
| Chinese and English languages | 43 |
| English only | 2 |

The first observation drawn from this table is that there are very few songs in this chart that contain only English lyrics. However, they all managed to reach into the top 100, which shows the possibility that songs with only English lyrics that are produced by Chinese artists can be very popular in China. On the other hand, it is clear that Chinese only, or English/Chinese songs are more prevalent in music regarded as the most popular. A slight majority of the songs were still exclusively written in a Chinese language. Forty percent of the songs also contained English, ranging from musical fillers to phrases and clauses. These songs were scattered evenly across the hierarchy of the top 100 list, which tells us that the songs containing English language were not more or less popular than songs containing exclusively Chinese lyrics. The fact that there were only two songs by Chinese artists exclusively containing English represented in the list could suggest that the interest in these type of songs is not as high as the demand for Chinese and English/Chinese containing songs. On the other hand, it shows that China is also answering to the observed English use in popular music throughout Asia.

Table 2

*The number of instances and percentages of the three types of code-switching. This was established by examining the lyrics and listening to the songs.*

| Type of English used | Count | Percentage |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Musical filler | 29 | 67,4% |
| Single words | 27 | 62,8% |
| Phrases and clauses | 33 | 76,7% |

Table 3

*The number of instances of code-switching within songs as established by reading the lyrics and determining the presence of different types of code-switching.*

| Type of language mixing used | Count | Musical filler | Single word | Musical filler & single word |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Musical filler | 4 | / | / | / |
| Single words | 6 | 3 | / | / |
| Phrases and clauses | 33 | 22 | 21 | 14 |

## 3.1 Musical Filler

Musical fillers are single meaningless utterances like 'oh' and 'yeah' (Moody, 2006). As shown in Table 3, there were 4 songs that contained only a few musical fillers. As shown in example (1), the mere use of English stylistic fillers, without any English words that actually

contain meaning, could be interpreted as an intention to make the given song sound more like pop music.

(1) 所有事我承担不需借口 Oh yeah oh yeah yeah

Suǒyǒu shì wǒ chéngdān bù xū jièkǒu Oh yeah oh yeah yeah

I don't need an excuse for everything Oh yeah oh yeah yeah

- Kris Wu – "Tough Pill" (Chinese Version)

Recognizable fillers like these that mimic musical fillers of Western popular music could be intended to appeal to the listener as a feature of familiarity (Lee, 2004). It should be noted that the given example is also translated into an English version, of which the lyrical content differs from the Chinese version, in order to make it rhyme. However, the English version is not nearly as well known in China as the Chinese version is. This may have been the reason this particular artist chose to include the same *Oh yeah* fillers in the Chinese version, as they are also found in the English version. From the results it seems that there generally is a low interest in making a song sound like Western pop music with mere empty fillers, without actually using English content words. Perhaps it is the case that even if artists want to adopt a western pop sound in terms of language use, they feel that musical fillers by themselves would not suffice. This echoes to the findings of Lee (2004), which indicated that the use of English and Western musical arrangements are supposed to be a tribute to the origins a particular Chinese artist was inspired by. Examples (2) and (3) showing musical fillers in the presence of other forms of code-switching might support this argument.

(2) 春閨夢裡

無人問津 孤城落日鬥兵稀, yeah

恨別家萬裡

雙眼迷離 羌笛胡琴碎鐵衣, yeah

Chūn guī mèng lǐ

wúrén wènjīn gūchéng luòrì dòu bīng xī, yeah

hèn bié jiā wàn lǐ

shuāng yǎn mílí qiāngdí húqín suì tiě yī, yeah

Spring boudoir dream

No one cares, the sunset in the isolated city is scarce, yeah

Hate farewell

Blurred eyes, broken iron clothes of Qiang flute and Chinese piano, yeah

- Lexie Liu – "Mulan"


(3) Yeah, I'm born to die 我不可辜負的使命

Yeah, I'm born to die Wǒ bùkě gūfù de shǐmìng

Yeah, I'm born to die my mission

- Lexie Liu – "Mulan"


All three categories of language mixing are represented in Lexie Liu's "Mulan". Example (2) shows how *Yeah* is used to create an A B A B rhyme scheme, switching between Mandarin and English. This might have been used to make two sentences rhyme, which could not have rhymed with only Mandarin. This was not observed in the 4 songs that only contained musical fillers. Despite the fact that *yeah* is not a content word, the integrated and commonly occurring use of it like in example (2) might resemble the function of a loanword, at least within popular music. In example (3), the use of a self-affirmative *Yeah* shows that perhaps these musical fillers comfortably used at the start of a sentence, when followed by a strong statement in English, whereas only saying *Yeah* in a song without any other forms of English

use is not desired. This might be reflected in the low number of songs containing only a few musical fillers.

### 3.2 Single words

Table (3) shows that most instances of single words are found in songs that also contain phrases and clauses. Of the six songs that contained exclusively single word utterances in English, three of them also contained English musical fillers. For the latter, the sample size might be too small to reflect an objective view on how these two categories relate to each other.

Exmples (3) and (4) show songs that had exclusively had a single instance of single word language mixing:

(4)  父親只好把她寄託給了新家室 hello

Fùqīn zhǐhǎo bǎ tā jìtuō gěile xīnjiā shì hello

My father had to take her to a new family home hello

- Boon Hui Lui – "Grandmother's Sea"

(5)  悶蛋一打開不 OK 我現在帶你飛

Mèn dàn yī dá kāi bù OK wǒ xiànzài dài nǐ fēi

I feel free to open up OK I am flying with you now

- Eason Chan & Eason and the Duo Band – "Po Huai Wang"

In both songs these two words *hello*, and *OK* were the only English words that were used. It is interesting that these words were used, considering how little content, or stylistic value they add to the songs. Arguably, these words resemble the function of fillers, and they are not used to fit any rhyme scheme.

Example (6) shows an interesting single word utterance that may fulfill a different function:

(6) 切都要感覺 so 絕 oh yeah

Qiè dōu yào gǎnjué so jué oh yeah

Everything feels so absolute oh yeah

- Karen Mok –"Ultimate"

This majority of the lyrics in this song are in Mandarin, but it contains a bridge part where the artist switches to English entirely. Using the nonce-borrowing *so,* is thus in the presence of phrases and clauses. Interestingly, the artist uses *so* in a sentence where it was not necessary, as this could well have been expressed in Mandarin. The artist consciously used the English *so* to highlight the feeling of absoluteness. The more intrinsically motivated use of *so,* in absence of its immediate necessity, might indicate that not all nonce-borrowings relate to the same level of integration of English language. The single English words in example (4) and (5) are also nonce-borrowings, but they do not indicate the same level of language integration as in example (6)

### 3.3 Phrases & clauses

The majority of the songs that contain English contain whole clauses and sentences. As mentioned earlier, it seems that these hybrid songs are almost, if not as popular as Chinese songs at the moment. The fact that songs containing whole sentences form the majority of English containing songs in the Top-100 most popular songs, suggests that an engagement with English beyond mere musical fillers and single words is desired. However, it is hard to determine whether it is desired by artists or by the audience. By principle of supply and demand the commercial nature of the pop industry could influence the way artists create their music to answer to a trend in this regard. On the other hand, pioneering artists that reflect a new underlying sociocultural development with a new sound can also shape what the audience demands. The English sentence in example (7) is the only one in the entire song.

The song expresses a feeling of desperation after many attempts at love relationships that seem to fail every time.

(7)    誰來推我一把 on to the next one

Shuí lái tuī wǒ yī bǎ on to the next one

Who will push me on to the next one

- Jolin Tsai – "Ugly Beauty"

The phrase *on to the next one* is a well-known idiom that is commonly used in the face of adversity. The artist thus decided not to construct a self-made sentence that reflects more specificity. Therefore, if we were to regard this as a spectrum, the extent to which this sentence reflects a more integrated engagement with the English language can be regarded as closer to the use of single content words.  In example (8) by artists Shi Shi and ØZI, there are several sentences that rapidly switch between English and Chinese.

(8)    這真的不合乎邏輯 this feeling girl i just don't get it

Zhe zhen de bu he hu luo ji this feeling girl i just don't get it

This is really illogical this feeling girl i just don't get it

奇妙的感覺 就慢慢的淪陷

Qi miao de gan jue jiu man man de lun xian

The strange feeling slowly fell

I just don't wanna hold back 這引力就像是磁鐵

I just don't wanna hold back zhe yin li jiu xiang shi ci tie

I just don't wanna hold back this attraction is like a magnet

你先 還是我先 會不會是重疊

Ni xian hai shi wo xian hui bu hui shi zhong die

Are you first or am I first

- Shi Shi 孫盛希 feat. ØZI – "Ai 曖 (Tensions)"

The way English is used here can be found in two other parts of this song. The song itself is about two strangers who frequently see each other appear in a public space and feel attracted to one another, but both are afraid of taking the first step. In contrast to the previous example, the number of English sentences is higher in this song, and the rapid way in which this code-switching is employed suggests a more integrated nature of English use. The final English sentence and the Chinese sentence that follows in example (8) seem to rhyme with *back* /bæk/ and *tiě (鐵)* /tɪjæ/. This in turn rhymes with the last word in the final sentence of the song *chóngdié (重疊)* /tʃoːŋdæ/.

The skillful and conscious use of rhyme between English and a Chinese language hints at a type of language mixing that could be characterized as being more extensive. This means that within the group of artists that use English phrases and clauses, I would suggest there is a sub spectrum of artists that use basic and limited amounts of sentences, and artists who seem to engage with code-switching more extensively and in a more authentic way. The artists discussed in example (3) and (6) seem to place themselves in the latter category as well. In order to determine what the general trend is among the artists that use phrases and clauses, the songs were identified as having limited amounts of code switching, or as having more extensive code switching. This was done by looking at the number of sentences, and by determining whether sentences were repeated. An obvious drawback of this method is that establishing an objective method for this would be a study of its own. The results are thus based on subjective assessment. However, a clear trend is still observable in this dataset. Out of the thirty-three artists using phrases and clauses twenty-four of them used extensive code switching. The nine songs showing limited code switching were significantly more limited, as there were generally less than four English sentences found, which were occasionally

repeated. The general trend thus seems to be a significant split between artists using limited code switching, and extensive code switching.

Besides the use of extensive code switching, it comes to notice that artists like Karen Mok (6), and Lexie Liu (3) use Hip Hop musical arrangements and a striking difference in the appropriation of what could be generalized as cultural norms derived from Western Hip Hop. This is highlighted in another section of Lexi Liu's "Mulan" :

(9)     騎著戰馬with that whip yeah I'm born to ride

Qízhe zhànmǎ with that whip yeah I'm born to ride

Riding a warhorse with that whip yeah I'm born to ride

- Lexi Liu –"Mulan"

This exemplifies an engagement with Hip-Hop language practices, as its character is partly defined as instigating and boastful (Barret, 2012). The same phenomenon can be observed in another artist from the Top-100 list called Vava:

(10)    Whatever I say bitch no lie no hype

Coz I been doing shit these hoes don't like

你知道的我可能代表未来

我要我的名字出现把全国覆盖

Whatever I say bitch no lie no hype

Coz I been doing shit these hoes don't like

nǐ zhīdào de wǒ kěnéng dàibiǎo wèilái

wǒ yào wǒ de míngzì chūxiàn bǎ quánguó fùgài

Whatever I say bitch no lie no hype

Coz I been doing shit these hoes don't like

You know I may represent the future

I want my name to appear to cover the whole country

-Vava –"Rap Star"

This raises the suspicion that the use of extensive code switching is inherently related to cultural mixing. If this argument holds true, then determining the presence of cultural mixing, in contrast to an objective and quantitative method of counting phrases, might provide a valuable addition to argue for a sub-spectrum of phrases and clauses. In order to investigate this notion, a case study is implemented on the artist group Higher Brothers who consistently show extensive code switching, and seem to appropriate Hip Hop culture. In fact, they seemed to be paramount in this regard, compared to the aforementioned artists. Another motivation for focusing on this artist group, is that they provided fourteen songs out of the twenty-four songs that showed extensive code-switching.

**Case study: Higher Brothers**

The artist group Higher Brothers is an upcoming rap group in China and show the creative interplay of Chinese and English rap lyrics. Their rise in popularity has allowed them to work with famous Western rappers such as Famous Dex, which has continued to bring spread their music into the Western rap industry (https://www.xxlmag.com/the-break-presents-higher-brothers/). The rap group was signed to New York based 88 Rising in 2016; a mass media record label that promotes Asian/American and Asian artists in the United States. A closer look into one of their hit songs 'Made in China', could help gain insight into the nature of language mixing and cultural mixing that characterizes their music.

### 3.3.1   *General vs Authentic*

The hit song 'Made in China', by Higher Brothers shows extensive code switching. The song was produced in collaboration with American rap artist Famous Dex, but since this research is on the use of English by Chinese artists, I will not take his lyrical content into account. The song starts off with the instrumental beat and a short section of spoken word vocals in example (11).

(11)    Rap music? China?

What are they even saying?

Is this Chinese rap music?

Sounds like they're just saying 'ching chang chong'

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

Example (11) shows a humorous hint to the level of awareness the group possesses in dealing with bringing Chinese rap into an intercultural context. This introduction ironically contains a reference to an old Chinese stereotype in the West that is being directed at them, but in making that reference they also play into the stereotype of the American who is unfamiliar

with foreign cultures. Simultaneously ridiculing themselves, as well as a potential American audience gives the listener an impression that they will encounter rappers who are highly familiar with how Western and Asian culture contrast each other. The introduction reflects an openness to intercultural contact, as well as an authentic and playful use of the English language. The content of this English introduction is closely tied to the topic of the song, and it would not make sense in a different context, whereas more general expressions in example (7) *on to the next one* can be imagined in other contexts.

Perhaps something could be said about the nature of rap music in relation to this matter. This genre emphasizes a high level of lyrical creativity and authenticity and this might influence the way these particular Chinese artists use English in contrast to their more pop oriented peers (Barrett, 2012). But whether this level of language use is due to a tribute to the culture of rap, or for any other reason, the result is still an artist group that is capable of integrating more authentic and contextualized content into their English lyrics.

This observation could also be explained by their level of proficiency, because they would not use this amount of English, if they were not relatively good at it. Of course this claim is to be made with caution, as it might not always be the case that Chinese artists who only write in a Chinese language, do so because they lack skill in their English use. They might choose not to because of other reasons. One of these reasons could also be a lack of confidence in using English, unrelated to one's skill. This argument might in turn be supported by research on Chinese educational settings where students report feelings of shame when they are required to speak English (Kirckpatrick & Zhichang, 2002). Another reason may be that they simply do not have the desire to express themselves creatively by using English.

The following section will expand on the idea of critical cultural elements that also distinguish Higher Brothers from other Chinese artists.

### 3.3.2   Cultural Mixing

As I claimed earlier, the song "Made In China", contains not only code switching, but also a mix of Chinese culture, and rap/western culture. One classic and central characteristic of Western rap music is a rather individualistic form of accentuating one's own accomplishments. This showboating of expensive items is a recurrent theme in contemporary rap music and hip-hop (Sköld & Ren, 2007).  Lyrics that contain boastful claims about materialistic success can be found in almost every song by Higher Brothers. Usually these lyrics go hand in hand with much profanity and violent imagery to communicate a certain attitude. In 'Made In China' we see the same kind of lyrics displayed in the main chorus:

(12)    My chains, new gold watch, made in China

We play ping pong ball, made in China

给bitch买点儿奢侈品 made in China

Gěi bitch mǎidiǎn er shēchǐ pǐn made in China

Buy designer for my bitch made in China

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

The classic characteristics of Western rap lyrics can be clearly seen in this examples, as well as in other parts of this song. One interesting fact about this example is the second line: *We play ping pong ball, made in China*. Although this sentence is an example of English rap lyrics, it does not fit in the same category. The use of the word *we* in traditional rap should always refer to the rapper's immediate social connections, usually meaning his/her most trusted friends, or gang members. By those means, the meaning of the word *we* still contains a strongly distinguishing line between 'us' and 'them' (rivals, the police), who *we* are usually experiencing friction with. In other words, Western rap highly accentuates the local. Barrett (2012) discusses how the globalization of Hip Hop culture involves a negotiation between

highly localized identities (the hood), and the foreign. As the background literature suggests that localized and intercultural identities are traditionally less well received, at least in terms China's sociopolitical climate, might explain why this instance of *we* refers to a national identity. The use of the word *we* in example (11) is used in combination with an original national practice; ping pong, and therefore it is more likely that the rappers in question are actually connecting themselves, not to a subcultural realm, but to their entire country. However, example (12) might show a careful hint towards highlighting a local identity:

(12)   Chinese入侵 local口音

Chinese rùqīn local kǒuyīn

Chinese invasion local accent

- Higher Brothers –"Made in China"

It is unclear how evidently this use of *local accent* refers to local identities in relation to Hip Hop. Within the context of *Chinese invasion*, it would be too ambiguous to claim that this is the case. Nevertheless, as all the artists within Higher Brothers originate from Szechuan province and therefore speak a local dialect, this might be a small step against a norm of nationalism.

(13)   相框里面框住全家 全部 made in China

Xiāngkuāng lǐmiàn kuāng zhù quánjiā quánbù made in China

The picture frame that frames the whole family, all are made in China

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

On the other hand and more evidently so, important national values like family, shown in example (13) seem to represent not a subculture of resistance against the norm, but more a proud embrace of ones nationality. As we will see in other examples like (14) and (15), these kinds of sentences will start to reflect a nationalistic approach to Chinese culture:

(14)     Made in China 的货

Made in China de huò

Made in China the goods

**老百姓用的开心**

Lǎobǎixìng yòng de kāixīn

Made with the joy of the people

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

(15)     **肩膀上扛下的**责任就像国家队赢得尊重用跳水游**泳**

Jiānbǎng shàng káng xià de zérèn jiù xiàng guójiā duì yíngdé zūnzhòng yòng tiàoshuǐ

yóuyǒng

The responsibility I feel is like the Chinese national team winning respect in

swimming

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

As the song progresses, we can see how the Chinese lyrics develop to be a clear example of
nationalism. They emphasize a certain devotion to their nation, whether that is by stating the
importance of family, the happiness in industrial work, or honoring your nation by winning
respect in the Olympic games. Further on in some of the verses, there are even sentences in
example (17) that directly express a great pride in their own culture and in one historical
cultural hero.

(16)     **兄弟我**欢迎你来到这五千年历史中创造着神奇的国度里

Xiōngdì wǒ huānyíng nǐ lái dào zhè wǔqiān nián lìshǐ zhōng chuàngzàozhe shénqí de

guódù lǐ

I welcome you to the nation that makes magic from 5,000 years of culture

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

(17)　我的上辈子是李白 看我写歌那么厉害

Wǒ de shàngbèizi shì lǐbái kàn wǒ xiě gē nàme lìhài

I was Li Bai in a past life, my lyrics are so great

- Higher Brothers – "Made in China"

The artist is proudly forwarding the legendary romantic poet Li Bai, while also boasting how he approximates that same level of genius. As this reference to national pride happens within a broader presentation of cultural artifacts and practices, this again reflects the Chinese side of the cultural mix. However, in the same sentence he is also showing a more Western lyrical practice, which is boasting. The fact that these two cultures can be retraced in one Chinese sentence, shows how integrative and flexible these artists are in language mixing as well as culture mixing. They express two cultures in the languages they originate from, but also in the opposite language. Finally, this argument could be supported by *"Made in China",* the well-known phrase at the core of this song, as a means to ridicule materialistic boasting by American rappers, because the materials they are boasting with might very well be made in China. This in turn can simultaneously be interpreted as a boast in itself by Higher Brothers.

Cultural mixing happens here through the use of two different languages. However, this can also happen without language as the medium and can rely on different techniques people use to communicate (Bakic-Miric, 2008). This is important to note, for this is where a study within World Englishes on changing attitudes and practices in the use of a foreign language ties in with Intercultural Communication Studies. In a discussion about characterizing Western Hip Hop practices as rather foreign to an assumed 'polite' Chinese culture, it is important to avoid sweeping generalizations. There has been research on politeness in China that may provide support for this argument. Gu (1990) identifies several

maxims that constitute politeness in China. One of these maxims is the Self-denigration

Maxim, which is exemplified in purposefully denigrating the self while praising the other,

when introduced to another person. The fact that this cultural dissonance translates to the

musical realm is supported by the background literature provided in this article, where Fung

(2007) discusses Jay Chou's success as not being unrelated to the authorities' gradual

softening of cultural policies.

Cultural mixing can also happen without using the language of which the appropriated

culture originates from. This can be observed in the lyrical content of a Chinese rap artist

called Ty. His music is not incorporated in the corpus of this study, but adds valuable support.

The following example (18) from his song 凹造型 (Style Fresh), which was banned from

Chinese internet[1], contains references to using and selling drugs.

(18)　　哎呀，脑壳晕

　　　　Āiyā, nǎoké yūn

　　　　Oops, the brain dizzy

　　　　哎呀，脑壳不晕的氯胺酮再来5斤

　　　　āiyā, nǎoké bù yūn de lǜ'āntóng zàilái 5 jīn

　　　　Oops, the ketamine with no dizziness in the brain is another 5 pounds

　　　　- TY- "嗨药上了瘾" (Addicted to Medicine)

The nature of these lyrics combined with the music itself, being a typical contemporary rap

beat, gives a sense of Western culture being displayed here. The adaptation to foreign cultures

in artistic expressions, without language as the prime medium of communication, is a separate

field of research and to treat it on its own goes beyond the scope of this article. However, it

has relevance in relation to the status of attitudes and use of English in Chinese pop culture.

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[1] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/chinese-hip-hop-is-banned-as-it-emerges-from-the-underground-1.3374171

## 4   Conclusion

The categories of language mixing that were used in Moody (2006) are a useful and easily applicable framework to gage to what extent any given country is integrating English language and culture into their musical lyrics. It managed to provide measurable categories of code switching that seem to be useful in identifying how the English language functions in Chinese popular music. However, I would argue that the Chinese artists who use English phrases and clauses find themselves on a spectrum, in which a distinction can be made between the use of limited amounts of sentences, and a use of English that is more extensive and simultaneously bound to cultural mixing. This form of English use rests on a number of criteria. Firstly, a high amount of English sentences are used, with the intent of communicating authentic and more complex sentences than the use of English as a mere stylistic component to attract the listener's attention.  More idiomatic and stylistically intended lyrics nevertheless go hand in hand with the lyrical content that contains more intrinsic meaning, but they are not used by themselves. Secondly, there is a clear integration of Chinese culture and Western culture. Artists who use extensive code switching showed a more intercultural approach in the use of phrases and clauses, as well as in using single words. Higher Brothers drew on cultural values from each respective language, and expresses them in both languages, as nationalistic, and individualist (sub)cultures were both expressed and brought together in the code switching process. In conclusion, the use of phrases and clauses can be regarded as a sub spectrum of limited code-switching and extensive code switching. As cultural mixing seems to be bound to the presence of extensive code switching, this phenomenon might be incorporated to function as a marker for categorizing songs on this sub spectrum.

Possible drawbacks of this study can be found on the analytical level. Firstly, the use of google translate might have distorted the interpretations of could have distorted some of the

translations on which I speculated. Researchers with more expertise and fluency in this area could provide a deeper analysis. Secondly, generalizing trends in popular music is not without possible confounding factors. Popular music as a product can be shaped and manipulated by its suppliers, as well as its demanders. Sociocultural phenomena in popular music are discussed in this research, but it is difficult to determine how the people of China truly relate to this topic. Local attitudinal studies that incorporate questionnaires might give a clearer view on the relationship between supply and demand in the context of cultural mixing in popular music. Finally, the choice to regard the category of phrases and clauses as a sub spectrum was partly based on a non-statistical analysis of a small data set. Statistical research with larger data sets could provide objective results on a possibly significant difference between limited code switching and extensive code switching. Such analytical methods would also be a reliable way of investigating how the use of extensive code switching may develop in the future.

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# 6   Attachments

## 6.1 Attachment 1

Lyrics from Made in China – Higher Brothers. Taken from https://genius.com/Higher-brothers-made-in-china-lyrics

[Intro]

Rap music? China?

What are they even saying?

Is this Chinese rap music?

Sounds like they're just saying 'ching chang chong'


[Chorus: MaSiWei]

My chains, new gold watch, made in China

We play ping pong ball, made in China

给bitch买点儿奢侈品 made in China

Yeah Higher Brothers' black cab, made in China

She said she didn't love me (Yeah) (3x)

She lied, she lied

She all made in China (3x)

She lied, she lied

[Verse 1: MaSiWei]

闹钟**把你叫醒** made in China (Yeah)

牙膏牙刷上面挤 made in China (Yeah)

把早餐放进**陶瓷碗** made in China (Yeah)

搽唇膏出门**打起**伞 made in China

坐到公司里 旋转办**公椅**

360度 熟悉的印记

钢**笔画了一朵莲花** cookin'需要放点盐**巴**

相框里面框住全家 全部made in China

全身上下总**有中国**货

亚**利桑那也有中文**课

Chinese入侵 local口音

野火燎原淋上酒精

[Verse 2: DZ]

Made in China的冠军

Made in China别**挑衅**

Made in China的货

老百姓用的开心

Made in China的knowknow

Made in China的trap

Made in China的higher

Made in China的帅

抬头和观众say hello 戴起拳套的我不会退后

训练让我掌握节奏 几分钟内裁判宣布K.O

Tell me I'm good 音乐节舞台的正对面

Made in China 寓言般的歌词都兑现

大晴天醒来我充满了力量和高傲的斗志走进录音棚

肩膀上扛下的责任就像国家队赢得尊重用跳水游泳

现实让我不断吸取教训才会不断出现重复做过的梦

跨越了障碍那是我的工作别再抱怨起跑线有所不同

[Verse 4: Psy.P]

She lie, she lie, she lie 不要觉得意外

女孩 女孩 女孩为什么要离开

我的上辈**子是李白** 看我写歌那么厉**害**

所以不会感到奇怪 十二点的时**候叫我起来**

伴奏画龙**点睛** 我们**那么年**轻

不是和尚念经 也不可能变**心**

桌子上面放的麻将 一瓶老干妈**的辣**酱

外地人会受不了的辣 嘴巴开始发烫

咋个样 麻辣烫 回到属于我的Chinatown

四只手 舞狮**子**头 点燃火炮现**在是**时**候** (Aye, aye)

你无法预**料被我吓一跳** 一直围**到**这**个**话题绕 (Aye)

Higher风**格**屌 啥**到弄得到** 你们**家的**东**西全部都是中国造**

[Verse 5: Melo]

阴阳风**水** made in China

从太极两仪**到八卦**阵 made in China

万里长**城** made in China

从秦始皇陵到紫禁城 made in China

You don't really know me

没得时间**休息**

藏在我的抽屉

捏在我的手里

兄弟我欢**迎你来到**这**五千年**历**史中**创**造着神奇的国度里**

Made in China能折服你

沦**陷着** nobody saves me

**6.2 Attachment 2**

Lyrics from Made in China – Higher Brother, with English translation. Taken from

https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-higher-brothers-made-in-china-english-translation-lyrics.

[Intro]

Rap music? China?

What are they even saying?

Is this Chinese rap music?

Sounds like they're just saying 'ching chang chong'

[Hook: MaSiWei]

My chains, new gold watch, made in China

We play ping pong, made in China

Buy designer shit for my bitch, made in China

Yeah Higher Brothers' black cab, made in China

She said she didn't love me (3x)

She lied, she lied

She all made in China (3x)

She lied, she lied

[Verse 1: MaSiWei]

The alarm that wakes you up, made in China

Written on your toothbrush and toothpaste, made in China

Put your breakfast in a bowl, made in China

Heading out the door, put on chaptstick and open an umbrella, made in China

Sit in the office, spin in the chair

360 degrees of that familiar stamp

Drew a lotus with an ink pen, need some salt when you're cookin'

The picture frame that frames the whole family, all are made in China

From head to toe, something's gotta be made in China

Even Arizona teaches Chinese

Chinese invasion, local accent

Sprinkling alcohol on the wildfire

[Verse 2: DZ]

Made in China, champions

Made in China, don't fuck with me

Made in China, goods

Made with the joy of the people

Made in China, knowknow

Made in China, the trap

Made in China, the Higher

Made in China, the swag

Say hello to the crowd, I got my boxing gloves on and won't back down

My coach made me master the rhythm, the judge calls K.O. within minutes

Tell me I'm good across from the festival stage

Made in China, cashin' in on those metaphorical lyrics

I head into the studio first thing in the morning filled with power and fighting spirit

The responsibility I feel is like the Chinese national team winning respect in swimming

I learn from reality so I make my dreams real

My job is overcoming obstacles, don't complain, the starting line is the same

[Verse 4: Psy.P]

She lie, she lie, she lie, don't be surprised by that

Girl, girl, girl why you gotta go?

I was Li Bai in a past life, my lyrics are so great

So you don't think it's strange waking me up at 12?

The beat is the icing on the cake, we're so young

We aren't monks reading scriptures, we won't have a change of heart

Mahjong set on the table, a jar of hot sauce

So spicy foreigners can't handle it, their mouths start to burn

What's up, numbingly spicy, I'm back in my Chinatown

Four arms and a dancing lion head, it's time to light the artillery

You could have never guessed, I freaked you out and we stay on this topic

Higher style is sick, we can do anything, everything in your house is made in China

[Verse 5: Melo]

Yin and yang, feng shui, made in China

From tai chi to I Ching, made in China

The Great Wall, made in China

From Qinshihuang to the Forbidden City, made in China

You don't really know me

No time to rest

Hidden in my drawer

In the palm of my hand

I welcome you to the nation that makes magic from 5,000 years of culture

Made in China will amaze you

I'm trapped, nobody save me

**Attachment 3**

Popnable Top-100 list: https://popnable.com/china/charts/top-40/week-237?page=3

*Note: the website indicates a Top-40 list, but it extends to two more pages containing a hundred songs in total.