

# »Pidgin English«—Its Perspectives as Seen by Lin Yutang in the 1930s

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*Perspektívy pidgin English očami Lin Yutanga v 30. rokoch minulého storočia*

**Resumé** Tento článok sa zaoberá úvahami významného čínskeho intelektuála Lin Yutanga, ktorý sa v 30. rokoch 20. storočia domnieval, že Čína sa musí začať brániť jazykovému a kultúrnemu imperializmu, konkrétne, keď rázne vystúpil proti snahám zavádzať BASIC English ako celosvetový jazyk komunikácie. Lin Yutang namiesto neho navrhuje vytvorenie takého jazyka, ktorý by vychádzal z (čínskej) *pidgin* English.

**Abstract** This article examines how the influential Chinese intellectual Lin Yutang, starting from the 1930s, believed the China must start fighting against linguistic and cultural imperialism, namely when rigorously opposing efforts to introduce BASIC English as a language of international communication worldwide. Instead, Lin Yutang proposes to create such a language on the basis of (Chinese) *pidgin* English.

**Keywords** China, Language (19th–20th c.) · Language, Hybridization (Creolization, *pidgin*, *yangjīng-bang* 洋涇浜) · Language, Simplification, British American Scientific International Commercial English (BASIC; 1930) · Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895–1976) · Charles K. Ogden (1889–1957) · I. A. Richards (1893–1979)

## I *The Setting*

Lin Yutang, a bilingual himself,<sup>1</sup> strictly refuses the idea of artificial *BASIC English* as a universal language of international communication. Yet, he does not

1 Lin Yutang, son of a Chinese Baptist minister, was brought up in English, started his higher

reject it in terms of ideology or on the basis of a nationalist agenda, but mainly by pointing out its numerous linguistic and socio-linguistic shortcomings, which, after all, exist in all artificial languages.<sup>2</sup> Lin Yutang admits that there is a need of a universal international language—and he does not question the role of English in this respect, at least in his times. Yet, he strongly advocates that the role of China and the Chinese language may by no means be underestimated in the process, and that Chinese will play an important role in the future. This is a crucial perspective on which he elaborates his ponderings why and how Chinese should be instrumental in a process of tailoring a future language of international communication.

Since the proposed *lingua franca* is referred to as *pidgin* by Lin Yutang, let us start with a general definition of this very term:

*Pidgins* are rudimentary communication systems that are developed when people speaking different languages come together (often in a commercial setting or when one people has conquered and is exploiting another) and need to communicate about practical matters.<sup>3</sup>

Or, to move closer to our topic, Chinese English is defined as a *pidgin*, i.e. a »language without native speakers« which is a »particular product of language contact, and arise[s] in a fairly limited set of situations as a result of certain social conditions.«<sup>4</sup>

education at St. John's University (Shanghai) and can be considered perfectly bilingual. Thus, he was well equipped to become a prolific essayist and writer both in Chinese and English.

2 Leo Lee Ou-fan, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 308–312, claims that colonial dominance in Shanghai was perceived by cultural and literary producers only as an economic affair. Because of this perception, he asserts that Chinese writers did not fear losing their identity as Chinese nationals and therefore freely adopted Western ideas for their own quest of modernity.

3 *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s. v. »Innateness and Language« <plato.stand.edu/entries/innateness-language> (last retrieval 29 July 2015).

4 Jonathan Culpeper & al., *English Language* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 389.

But is »[Chinese] Pidgin English« as advocated by Lin Yutang as a future global language of communication, really a *pidgin*?<sup>5</sup> Not at all, as a matter of fact. What Lin Yutang has in mind is a very specific kind of *pidgin* (which he also labels as »real pidgin«).<sup>6</sup> Jing Tsu in her book *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* defines its nature very precisely when saying that »Pidgin English« as proposed by Lin Yutang is not *creole*,<sup>7</sup> rather it is a very specific kind of *pidgin* which actually is »a re-translation, created through a secondary export from Chinese back into English«.<sup>8</sup>

Lin Yutang comes up with the proposal that a supposed role of BASIC English can be perfectly replaced (not only in China, but within a horizon of 500 years all over world) by what he calls »[Chinese] Pidgin English« (*yangjingbang Yingyu* 洋涇浜英語). However, before we start with a further enquiry of the topic, it is necessary to point out that Lin Yutang's ponderings and 'inventions' related to a possible role of »[Chinese] Pidgin English« display a strong ironical overtone. As an essayist, he was famous for his acute observations of all kinds of ill phenomena of his times, as well as for his humorous, ironic or satirical processing of them into the form of short essays or glosses. The chief aim of such essays and glosses was to point out what he disliked in Chinese society and

- 5 As Yamuna Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson point out in their *World Englishes in Asian Contexts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 167–168, British traders first arrived on Chinese shores in 1637, and the first citations of Chinese Pidgin English date back to the 1740s, »the term Pidgin English [*pidgin* itself being the Chinese pronunciation of the English »business«] did not appear until 1859.«
- 6 Lin Yutang, »In Defense of Pidgin English«, in *Selected Bilingual Essays / Shuangyu wenxuan* 雙語文選, comp. and ed. by Qian Suoqiao 錢鎖橋 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 123.
- 7 »*Creoles* arise when pidgins are elaborated both syntactically and semantically, and take on the characteristics of *bona fide* natural languages.« *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s. v. »Innateness and Language«.
- 8 Tsu Jing, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 63.

culture.<sup>9</sup> Always keeping this in mind, we may continue our inquiry and examine which factors Lin Yutang's thought would tailor the shape of a future global *lingua franca*, which he proposed to be »[Chinese] Pidgin English«.

By the late 1920s, Lin Yutang had become famous as author of essays and columns in journals and periodicals, reflecting all kinds of cultural, social or political phenomena of his times—which gradually made him an influential intellectual of his times. Given his humorous approach, Lin Yutang does not provide us with manuals how to solve the problems of various aspects in the life of Chinese society, but rather sharply highlights the core of problems he is considering not sufficiently discussed in Chinese society. And to present them humorously, he thinks, is a very legitimate and efficient way.

How the issue of Chinese Pidgin English was elaborated by Lin Yutang, we can basically see in his two essays »In Defense of Pidgin English«, published in the journal *The China Critic* in 1933,<sup>10</sup> and his own Chinese remake of it which appeared in the Chinese-language periodical *Lunyu*.<sup>11</sup>

- 9 As Madalina Yuk-Ling Lee argues in her »The Conceptual Origins of Lin Yutang's Cultural Internationalism, 1928–1938 (Ph. D. thesis College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2009), 30, it is because of the imposed GMD censorship and potential threats, Lin Yutang tended to employ measured sarcasm in his satirical essays when attacking the Nationalist Party. But when Lin Yutang dealt with a topic pertaining to Western imperialism, his satirical attacks were always devastating.
- 10 The Little Critic [i.e. Lin Yutang], »In Defense of Pidgin English«, *The China Critic* 6,29 (22 July 1933), 54–59. In the years 1930–36 (with the exception of the period from May 1931 to May 1932, when he traveled in Europe), Lin Yutang was a columnist for *The China Critic* (1928–45), an English-language weekly, published by a group of Western-trained Chinese intellectuals, and very influential among foreigners and Chinese intellectuals living in China. His column was titled »Little Critic«. Most of these English writings later appeared in Chinese versions in a number of journals, founded or co-founded by Lin Yutang.
- 11 »Wei yangjingbang Yingyu bian« 為洋涇浜英語辯, *Lunyu* 論語 no 23 (16 Aug 1933), 836–838. Most of the »Little Critic's« essays appeared later in Chinese versions, in a number of journals founded or co-founded by Lin Yutang. Lin Yutang established several journals during the 1930s, namely the journals *Lunyu* (Analects; 1932–48), *Renjianshi* 人間世 (In the Human World; 1934–35), *Yuzhoufeng* 宇宙風 (Cosmic Winds; 1935–47) and *Yijing* 逸經 (Heterodox Canonical

These two essays in question (or rather an English precursors and its respective rewritings into Chinese) appear to be a reaction to the fact that I. A. Richards (1893–1979), a representative of British »new criticism« also well known in China, started a project of propagating to learn BASIC English in China at the beginning of the 1930s, even wrote *A First Book of English for Chinese Learners* (1938), and thus initiated discussions that lasted until his last lecture tour in China shortly before his death.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 The BASIC Project

Now let us see what kind of language *BASIC* English actually was: *BASIC* English is an acronym for 'Basic (British American Scientific International Commercial) English'—one of the earlier global English movements in the 20th century, certainly also designed against *Esperanto*, the artificial language created in 1872 by the Polish physician Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof (1859–1917), and soon propagated by Russian bolshevists and also radical Chinese linguists as a possible future universal means of communication. *BASIC English* was designed by the linguist and writer Charles K. Ogden (1889–1957) in cooperation with I. A. Richards.<sup>13</sup> It was promoted as

- a new international auxiliary language intended to facilitate the ease of learning English for non-English speakers; and was
- intended as a practical alternative to literary or Standard English for purposes of communication, commerce, and governance.

Writings; 1936–37). *Lunyu* was Lin Yutang's own enterprise; he was also seminal in the foundation of *Renjianshi* and was an important contributor to the other journals mentioned. During their time of publication, all these journals enjoyed considerable success among a wide readership.—The texts of the essays we will refer to are published Qian Suoqiao's compilation *Selected Bilingual Essays of Lin Yutang* (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 59–60.

<sup>13</sup> No wonder that the former highest officer of the British Navy, Winston S. Churchill (1874 to 1965), as well as the WW II US president Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945), at some point lent their support to the project.

In Ogden's programmatic book *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* (1930), we also read the following characteristics of *BASIC English* that hardly hide the concern about an Empire seen compelled to retreat:

English has been made part of the school system of countries with interests as widely different as Japan, the Argentine, and Estonia; it is the language of the taking pictures and of over 500 radio stations; and experts in all countries have for a long time been of the opinion that if only it was simpler it would quickly become international for trade and for all other purposes.<sup>14</sup>

And he goes on as follows, making an attempt at a definition:

*Basic English is this desired simpler form* [emphasis mine, throughout hereafter; J. B.]. The complete word-list goes on the back of one bit of business notepaper, and takes only 15 minutes on a small phonograph record. In theory, anyone with no knowledge of English might get it into this head in less than 24 hours; but it is wiser to take two hours a day for a month, giving one hour to the words and the other to word-order and to the 250 special uses ('idioms') which are needed to get the natural effect of everyday talk.<sup>15</sup>

Charles Ogden's idea was to extract a limited number of simple words from Standard English that can be combined in different ways to express more complicated ideas, the vocabulary which may cover all essential needs of communication in English. He extracted a list of *BASIC English* vocabulary amounting to 850 words<sup>16</sup> (plus 150 words from technical and scientific vocabulary).<sup>17</sup>

14 Charles K. Ogden, *Basic English: A General Introduction*, part II, ch. 2: »Basic as an International Language« <ogden.basic-english.org> (last retrieval 29 July 2015).

15 *Ibid.*, part II, ch. 2: »Basic as an International Language«.

16 Ogden in his *BASIC English: A General Introduction* (1930) explains the principle on which he composed a list like the following: »It is an English in which 850 words do all the work of 20,000 and has been formed by taking out everything which is not necessary to the sense. *Disembark*, for example, is broken up into *get off a ship*; *I am able* takes the place of *I can*; *shape* is covered by the more general word *form*; and *difficult* by *hard*. [...] In addition to the Basic words themselves, the learner has, at the start, fifty words which are now so common in all languages that they may be freely used for any purpose. Examples are *radio, hotel, telephone, bar, club*.« (Part II, Ch. 2).— All three citations are from *ibid.*, part II, ch. 1: »What is Basic English?«.

A list of 850 words included 600 nouns, 150 adjectives, and 82 grammatical words, such as

*BASIC English* extracted from Standard English the minimum grammar and the easy-to-learn syntax<sup>18</sup> that would take little time to be learned and learned »properly«.

*BASIC English* was also proposed to become an adequate channel through which the world's great literature could be resented to all peoples. Yet the selection of vocabulary ended up to disqualify words with chiefly metaphorical value and technical abstruseness. Charles Ogden's sample *BASIC English* text, translated excerpts from Leonhard Frank's (1882—1961) novella *Karl und Anna* (1926; turned into the movie *Heimkehr* by Joe May in 1928).<sup>19</sup>

Examples are:

- *beard—hair on chin*
- *woman's breast—milk vessel.*

The co-author of *BASIC English*, Richards, also translated *Mencius* into *BASIC English*—and it was harshly criticized.

Regarding the previous use of English in China, i.e. before *BASIC English* was promulgated, Yamuna Kachru explains that the beginning of the 19th century saw an influx of missionary schools teaching language norms and classical British literature, stressing an expectation of Chinese students' need to learn Standard English. English »was not adapted, since it was intended to be learned as an intact foreign language, with norms and models coming from outside.«<sup>20</sup> But the

*across, all, can*, and so-called 18 *operators* (such verbs as *get* and *put*). *Operators* had three roles: 1) to replace more difficult words (*get* replacing *receive, obtain, become*); 2) to form phrases that would obviate other verbs (*give money for* replacing *buy*, *give him a push* instead of *push him*), and 3) to be part of a phrasal verb (*put together* replacing *assemble*).

17 The general list could have been enriched by supplementary lists, customized for local needs in places like India.

18 For example, its minimal syntax has a fixed analytic word order (as in »I will put the record on the machine now.«) and six affixes (→ for plurals and verbs, *un-* to negate adjectives, *-ed* and *-ing* to form participles, *-ly* for adverbs, and *-er* as an agent suffix).

19 Leonhard Frank, *Carl and Anna*, tr. into Basic English by L. W. Lockhart (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930); quoted from Lin Yutang, *Bilingual Essays*, 121.

20 Kachru and Nelson, *World Englishes in Asian Contexts*, 168.

situation gradually changed, and, as Cassel Busse points out, »as the use of English increased within China in the early to mid-twentieth century, so did its more 'adaptive' form, Chinese Pidgin English. Busse further argues that it was this hybridization—deemed 'indigenous deformation'—that was considered a serious offense to language purists, so, »an instrumentalist form entitled 'Basic

English' was developed by Charles Kay Ogden.«<sup>21</sup> However, despite Busse's claims, *BASIC English* itself was, of course, not a direct reaction to 'distortions' of Standard English inflicted by Chinese Pidgin English, though this development of this project of artificial language was influenced by Ivor A. Richards's visits to China.<sup>22</sup>

The propagation of *BASIC English* in China was indeed initiated by the co-author of *BASIC English*, by I. A. Richards, literary critic and professor at Cambridge University. He first visited China in 1929, and—as Jing Tsu points out, when Richards returned from in 1931 (when Ogden had just worked out the schematics of *BASIC English*), »he had a new revelation after visiting China, partly *spurred by the negative reception of his translation of Mencius*.« His feelings were commented by Richards as follows:

I felt that I had realized too deeply ever to forget what extreme dangers lay for the future of mankind in the miscomprehensions that were active between the Western world, our tradition, and the Chinese tradition, miscomprehensions of such depth and scale between China and the West.

And thus, after his return from China Richards took on the project of propagating the learning of Basic in China (and continued to refine his methods

21 Cassel Busse, »"Signs" of Change: Chinese English, Hybridity, and Public Media«, *The English Languages: History, Diaspora, Culture* 2 (2011), 4.

22 On the other hand, *BASIC English* must have been motivated by the growth of political and economic power of the 'East', as we can gather from Ogden's *Basic English*: »Twenty or thirty years back it was possible to put together a language based on European roots in the belief that it might one day become international; but now that the East is fully awake, and in the very front of our political picture, such as idea is foolish.« Part II, Chapter 2: »Basic as an International Language«.



from the 1930s until his last lecture tour there in 1979, shortly before his death).<sup>23</sup>

Further on, Busse argues that

this rather Orwellian model of language was perhaps one the first major moves toward 'purifying' or standardizing the English spoken in China, and the beginning of an ongoing struggle between monolingualistic and hybridized language in modern China.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, Basic English had to compete with other artificial languages, as Esperanto.

### 3 *Lin Yutang's Outdoing BASIC by Chinese Pidgin*

In his polemic, yet still humorous rejection of the use of *BASIC English* in China in favour of »(Chinese) Pidgin English«, Lin Yutang basically specifies three main reasons why the latter is more likely to become a language of international communication in the future:

- 1) (Chinese) Pidgin English will be the »only respectable international language«<sup>25</sup> by the year 2.400, since »the future of the world commerce will be around the Pacific«;<sup>26</sup>
- 2) A simplified form of Standard English, *BASIC English*, is too detached from daily used form of language;
- 3) the Chinese language is superior to English language because of its analytical character (i.e because of its word formation).

To support the superiority of the Chinese language, Lin Yutang claims that it had also been recognized by philologists like Otto Jespersen (1860–1943) and

23 In 1938 he published *A First Book of English for Chinese Learners*. However, it is commonly held that the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War prematurely ended the Basic English movement (cf. Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, 60).

24 Busse, »"Signs" of Change«, 4.

25 Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 122.

26 *Ibid.*, 122.

Hans Georg Conon von der Gabelentz (1840–1893) as the simplest, most advanced and most logical language.<sup>27</sup>

But although the Chinese language »is superior« to English, Lin Yutang admits that the future global *lingua franca* might be English, not Chinese. Chinese Pidgin English in turn might become a unique hybrid of English and Chinese, and the analytical character of (word formation in) Chinese makes it an ideal candidate for a language of international communication. Thus, he does not question the role of English in this respect, yet it should not be its standard (luxurious) register, nor its distorted Basic form, but rather a *pidgin* English, which should in fact become gradually a language composed mainly of re-translations of Chinese translations of modern English back into English. In other words, what may be gathered from Lin Yutang is that he considers Chinese Pidgin English superior to Basic English, namely in the patterns of word-formation previously shaped in Modern Standard Chinese (i.e. ‘re-translation’).

How the unique hybrid from English and the analytical character of Chinese—i.e. also (Chinese) Pidgin English—should progress, Lin Yutang first demonstrates on showing how, for example, neologisms (which are of great importance in the language of global communication) should be created.

Proposed and even established neologisms as ‘electric report’ (*dianbao* 電報), ‘electric talk’ (*dianhua* 電話), ‘electric picture’ (*dianying* 電影) or ‘no-wire-electricity’ (*wuxiandian* 無線電) should replace Standard English neologisms such as »telegraph«, »telephone«, »cinema« or »radio«, and terms alike.<sup>28</sup> Such proposed terms would perfectly follow the analytical principle of word formation in Standard Mandarin Chinese.

#### *Chief Perspectives Humourously Discussed by Lin Yutang*

Now, let us have a look at Lin Yutang’s elaborations on the topic in more detail.

Lin Yutang’s essays have become famous and influential among Chinese mainly due to their publication in journals written in Chinese. Therefore, the

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

text I shall refer to is the Chinese version. Moreover, the Chinese version is more complex than its English precursor. If the parts I am citing also appear in the English version, I am using their English counterparts. Otherwise, I shall offer my own translations of the Chinese text (with no English counterpart).

### *Artificiality*

Lin Yutang's criticism of *BASIC English* is hardly ever arguing from a strictly linguistic perspective, but is foremost organized a satire ridiculizing Ogden's pragmatic approach. One of the arguments put forward emphasizes the abstract nature of Ogden's word formation, as opposed to the concrete development undergone in Chinese Pidgin English. »Basic English is a list that smells of psychological laboratory (and is detached of everyday life phenomena)«<sup>29</sup> additionally underlines that Lin Yutang has a negative opinion about the author's approach:

It is an unfortunate fact that Professor Ogden has been forced to select words of an abstract, generic character, instead of those of a more specific character. It is a list that smells of the psychological laboratory (with words like *behaviour*, *reaction*, *impulse*, *observation*, *normal*), unlike pidgin English which grows out of the real workaday life, and which, therefore, includes, by necessity, the words proved by practice to be indispensable.<sup>30</sup>

Lin Yutang also does not refrain from quoting a then in China almost uncontested authority, i.e. George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950),<sup>31</sup> who supports his position with regard to the 'natural' emergence of Chinese Pidgin English and had, at least since his 1933 journey to China, acquired an ultimate canonical position not only in matters of theatre:

In a newspaper interview, [George Bernard] Shaw is quoted as saying that the pidgin »no can« is a more expressive and more forceful expression<sup>32</sup> than the »unable« of

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Li Kay, *Bernard Shaw and China: Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Gainesville, FA: University Press of Florida, 2007. The Florida Bernard Shaw Series).

<sup>32</sup> In the Chinese version of this essay, »expressive« and »more forceful«, are rendered as *dayi* 達意 and *xiangliang* 響亮, respectively (cf. Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 123).

standard English. When a lady says she is »unable« to come, you have a suspicion she may change her mind and perhaps come after all, but when she replies to your request with an abrupt, clear-cut »no can«, you know you have to reckon without her company.<sup>33</sup>

What makes this statement particular is not only the authority of the source, and of course its substantial contribution to assess the artificial language proposal, but the fact that Lin Yutang could rightly rely on a wide-spread knowledge about Shaw's statements—unlike the degree of knowledge about Ogden's *BASIC English*, despite its design for Chinese purposes.

#### *Considerations About the Future Role of the Pacific Area*

In his argument, Lin Yutang also takes into consideration a possible future role of the Pacific area in a future world economy—thus strikingly anticipating a present-day discourse of geopolitics, mainly articulated in US politics. No matter how analytical Lin Yutang's considerations were actually designed, it remains to be highlighted that he has emphatically situated linguistic issues into the context of power relationships:

Students of world events, like those fellows in Williamstown Institute, always tell us that the future of the world commerce will be *around the Pacific*, and remember, furthermore, that the future will be a proletarian world, and you have, before your mind, all the historical factors<sup>[34]</sup> that will make pidgin the inevitable international language five hundred years hence.<sup>35</sup>

Though present-day geopolitical analysts would probably modify the temporal horizons of Lin Yutang's argument and speak of periods of neatly less than one century, he does again prove a very considerate and circumspect sociologist in linguistics—whose arguments, though satirically designed as a rhetorical exaggeration,

33 *Ibid.*, 121.

34 In Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 121, the author writes that »even the historical dialectics of Karl Marx makes it inevitable that *pidgin* English shall become the language spoken by all the respectable people of the world in the twenty-fifth century.« Of course, such arguments have to be read ironically, and just reflect the omni-presence of the technical term 'historical dialectics' in the discourse of that time.

35 Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 122.

ration, might prove accurate far before the half-millennium he anticipated out of understandable care.

*Pidgin English as Natural Hybrid*

Lin Yutang believes that Pidgin is the most natural hybrid of English and Chinese. Unlike in his previous argument, here Lin Yutang completely loses sight of the same sociological consideration he had employed before. Of course, the relationship between English and Chinese is by no means equal, not politically, not linguistically, and not socially. What Lin Yutang had in mind here is its uncontrolled and unplanned development, in opposition to the design of *BASIC* that has been produced at the green table, unlike the already living Chinese Pidgin that has passed through the test of communication practice.

English common sense has triumphed over grammatical nonsense and refused to *see sex in a tea-cup or a writing desk*, as modern French and German are still doing. It has practically abolished gender,<sup>[36]</sup> and it has very nearly abolished case. [...] It has now reached a stage where Chinese was perhaps ten thousand years ago. [...] In fact, the whole trend of the development of the English language teaches us that it has been steadily advancing toward the Chinese type.<sup>37</sup>

Here Lin Yutang, apart from ironically referring to the importance of grammatical gender in French and German (but forgetting that even the word »China« in English has the female gender...), seems himself in turn to suggest that »common sense« may keep control of language development. On the other hand he considers the slowly but steady disappearance of inflections in English and proudly points to much earlier similar development in China—again crossly exaggerated, because we know nothing about the Chinese language ten millennia ago. In the meantime, linguists have developed a circular hypothesis, according to which languages might go through isolating, inflecting agglu

36 The Chinese version adds: 本刊第十六期，就有英人投稿的一篇『又發見添新花樣的代名詞』，取笑我們新造的『她』字。[In no 16 of this journal, there is an Englishman who contributed an article entitled »Another New Pronoun Has Been Added to Chinese«, in which the creation of the female pronoun *ta* 她 is ridiculed. Cf. Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 125.]

37 *Ibid.* The Chinese version of the last sentence reads as follows: 其實英語在歷史上全部演化的趨向，就在告訴我們，英語是在逐漸演變趨近中國語言信一派的。

tinating, and synthetic stages and then back to an isolating stage.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Lin Yutang would be surprised to see the Chinese language displaying phenomena of inflection.

*Supposed Lack of Analytical Character of the English Language*

Mutual prejudices converge when Lin Yutang is talking about the ‘analytical’ potential of Chinese, as well as of Chinese Pidgin and of Ogden’s *BASIC English*. Though not made explicit, the balance for *BASIC* is disastrous—and may only be demonstrated by an ultimately confusive menu-card compiled on the basis of *BASIC English*. As a counterpart, the indeed intelligent word-formations for neologism in Chinese are listed. Not surprisingly, Lin Yutang politely but determinately rejects Ogden’s proposals:

The trouble with Basic English is that it is not analytic enough. We find the word *gramophone*, for instance, circumlocuted in Basic English as »a polished black disc with a picture of a dog in front of a horn« (Carl and Anna, p. 39). In 2400 A. D., we could call it more simply in real pidgin as »talking box« (*bua be* 話盒).<sup>39</sup>

Follows a list of word-formations created by Chinese Pidgin English,<sup>40</sup> from which it is becoming evident that *BASIC English* is doomed to fail, simply because Pidgin solutions created far before *BASIC* have proved accurate and efficient.

*A BASIC Menu*

In the end of his article, Lin Yutang mockingly uses *BASIC English* to denote some traditional British and North American dishes:

38 Cf. Gustav Ineichen, *Allgemeine Sprachtypologie. Ansätze und Methoden* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), 51–54.

39 In the Chinese version we learn that the term »talking box« is a *retranslation* of the Chinese term *huabe* 話盒 (*ibid.*).

40 Cf. Lin Yutang, *Bilingual Essay*, 122–125.

## A BASIC MENU

False soup of swimming animal with round hard cover (*jiajia yutang* 假甲魚湯)

Soup of end of male cow (*niuweitang* 牛尾湯)

\*

Fish with suggestion of China or the Peking language («*Mangda renyu*» 『滿大人魚』)

\*

Young cow inside thing nearest the heart boiled in oil (*chao xiaoniugan* 炒小牛肝)

\*

Fowl that has red thing under mouth, that makes funny, hard noise and is eaten by Americans on certain day, taken with apple cooked with sugar and water, but cold

(*huoji leng pingguojiang* 火雞·冷蘋果漿)

\*

Meat with salt preparation that keeps long time (*buotiao* 火腿)

\*

Hot drink makes heart jump or you don't go to sleep (*kafei* 咖啡)

\*

The notes added by Lin Yutang go as follows:

- 1) We find the word »cow«, but not the word »ox« in Basic.
- 2) This is fried calf's liver. It is not likely to be ambiguous, since the only thing nearest the heart of a calf that the Europeans eat is its liver.
- 3) In Chinese, »turkey« is simply 'fire-hen', from its reputation for eating burning coal.<sup>41</sup>

In this menu which, following the Basic English limited vocabulary, can be composed by any Cathay Hotel waiter, seems to push Basic English *ad absurdum*.

All what may be gathered from Lin Yutang is that he considers Chinese Pidgin English superior to Basic English, namely in the patterns of word-formation previously shaped in Modern Standard Chinese (i.e. 're-translation').

<sup>41</sup> Lin Yutang, *Selected Bilingual Essays*, 124.

#### 4 *Conclusive Remarks*

»Pidgin English« as proposed by Lin Yutang is a very specific kind of *pidgin*, which actually is »a re-translation, created through a secondary export from Chinese back into English.«

What may be gathered from Lin Yutang is that he considers Chinese Pidgin English superior to *BASIC English*, namely in the patterns of word-formation previously shaped in Modern Standard Chinese (i.e. 're-translation').

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