

## **From 'Sorry Sorry' to 'That Banana': the Subtitling of a Korean Music Video as a Site of Contestation in Taiwan**

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### **Abstract**

Focusing on contemporary Taiwanese popular culture, this paper delineates how the subtitling of a Korean music video has become a battlefield on which meanings are poached through punning in the process of translation. It contextualises Korean popular culture as one of the dominant genres in Taiwan and introduces 'Sorry Sorry,' a chart topper by Super Junior. In the specific social, cultural, political and linguistic context of Taiwan, the intensive commercial promotion of 'Sorry Sorry' in mainstream media has led to fans making sense of the lyrics through a hybridising process of wordplay, resulting in a steadily increasing number of online 'fan videos' with alternative subtitling. Circulating through online video streaming websites, these fan videos testify to the fans' talents as what Henry Jenkins terms 'textual poachers.' Through this poaching process, in one of the most popular online examples, 'Sorry Sorry' is nonsensically mutated into 'That Banana.' Calling upon Walter Redfern's pun theory in tandem with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of minor literature, I examine the linguistic mechanism involved in the mutating process as a springboard to re-articulate theories from anthropology, literary theory and music video studies in the age of the internet. This paper questions the idea of authorship in the age of the internet and points out how the grey area between anthropological definitions of translation and transcription has become an arena for utterance, allowing meanings in fan videos to be poached, negotiated and transformed.

## Introduction

As an award-winning chart-topper across Asian countries, officially named in Taiwan as the most-viewed video on *YouTube* in 2009 (I-Ju, Chen), the popularity of 'Sorry Sorry' by Korean boy band Super Junior is a contemporary phenomenon in the landscape of Taiwanese popular culture. Intensive commercial promotion of the Korean song has excited its Chinese-speaking Taiwanese audiences to make sense of the lyrics through punning. This has resulted in the large number of 'fan videos' with nonsensical subtitling now widely circulated through online video-streaming websites, primarily *YouTube*. In the subtitling process, fans play the role of 'textual poachers' (Jenkins). The subtitling of 'Sorry Sorry' has become a battlefield on which jokes are created in the process of translation. Focusing on 'That Banana' (2009), one of the most popular online examples, with a viewing record of more than 1.6 million views on *YouTube*,<sup>1</sup> this article uses the linguistic mechanism involved in the mutating process as a springboard to re-articulate theories from anthropology, literary theory and music video studies in the age of the internet.

### Framing 'Sorry Sorry' and 'That Banana' within the Field of Popular Culture in Contemporary Taiwan

Contemporary popular culture in East Asia testifies to the emergence of what Arjun Appadurai terms the transnational and ultra-regional cultural flow, which is the basic component of the new cultural topography: modernity. Appadurai distinguishes its five basic forms: ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas, and ideoscapas (33-36). Based on Appadurai's theory of cultural flow, with a focus on mediascapas, Koichi Iwabuchi argues that since the early 1990s the globalisation process has been 'drastically intensifying the intraregional flows and connections' (*Cultures of Empire* 144) demonstrated in the rising Japanisation of East Asian popular culture during this period. The ascent of Japanese transnational cultural power is, to quote Iwabuchi, 'most conspicuously illustrated in the specific cultural geography of East and Southeast Asia' (*Recentering Globalization* 47). In the new millennium, the speed of the intensification of media flow has increased, creating a mediascape in which agents are 'more collaborative' and media flow is 'more multi-vectored'

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<sup>1</sup> The exact viewing record is 1,670,899 (Super Junior).

(*Cultures of Empire* 151). This is marked by a conspicuous development of the rise of Korean popular culture, which often surpasses the appeal of its Japanese counterpart (*Cultures of Empire* 152). The phenomenon whereby popular Korean cultural products such as film, television drama, and popular music are systematically imported into various Asian locations is identified by a newly-coined phrase: the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) (Iwabuchi; Shim; Shin).

According to Hyunjoon Shin, the period comprising the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century was one of globalisation for the Korean music industry. During this time, Korean pop stars transcended the national boundary to be launched onto a transnational stage (514). Iwabuchi argues that 'cross-national industry cooperation in promoting a mutual media culture in East Asian markets' (*Cultures of Empire* 148) has played a significant role in this development. The popularity of Korean stars is described in *Asia Times* as follows:

teenagers from Tokyo to Taipei swoon over performers such as the singer Park Ji Yoon and the boy band Shinhwa, buying their CDs and posters and even learning Korean so that they can sing along in karaoke. [...] 'Korea is like the next epicenter of pop culture in Asia', says Jessica Kam, the vice president for MTV Networks Asia. (qtd. in Shin 513)

Despite the rave reception of the Korean Wave in Asia, it has, due to ideological and political conflicts, encountered some negative backlash. With the increasing popularity of the Korean Wave, anti-Korean sentiments have developed in Taiwan, China and Japan. In Taiwan there are counter-discourses that 'militarise' the Korean Wave as an 'invasion' (Chua 110-1), while in 2006, China government officials raised concerns over the excessive media inflow of the Korean Wave (Chan 32). In Japan, a newly-coined term 'hating "the Korean Wave" (嫌韓流)' materialised through the publication of a controversial, yet commercially successful manga (Japanese comic book) in 2005, which depicted a nationalist and xenophobic antagonism in Japan towards the Korean Wave (Allen and Sakamoto). In the linguistic landscape of Taiwan, anti-Korean sentiments have resulted in sarcastic statements from the media, and in some cases the sense of ridicule

has been deepened through punning in pejorative terms (Chen and Chiang).<sup>2</sup>

Despite such antipathy towards Korea, Korean pop stars remain relatively well-received in Taiwan. Over the past few years, the landscape of the Korean Wave in Taiwan has been characterised by the rise of a new pop group comprising thirteen boys: Super Junior. Renamed from its forerunner Super Junior 05, the group made its debut in Korea in 2005. With several chart-topping singles and albums in Korea over the course of the following three years, Super Junior was successfully launched in other Asian countries, starting with Thailand and China in 2006, followed by Taiwan in 2007, and Japan in 2008. As well as from the familiarisation of Korean stars in a trans-Asian context since the rise of the Korean Wave, it may be argued that Super Junior's success has derived from careful marketing strategies that take local linguistic factors into account. Super Junior adopted the idea of subdivision to form sub-groups for different markets: Super Junior-M ('M' stands for Mandarin), for example, was devised especially for the Mandarin-speaking market (I, Chen). In Taiwan, Super Junior released two albums during the period from 2007 to 2008,<sup>3</sup> one of them in Mandarin, both well-received.<sup>4</sup> However, the group's biggest success came from their third complete album, *Sorry Sorry*. Released in 2009, it is Super Junior's best-selling album to date in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, China and the Philippines. Its title track is credited as 'one of Asia's most popular songs' (Park). In Taiwan, where, as a result of cultural policy during the post-war era (Taylor 69), Mandarin pop as a genre dominates the landscape of popular culture, the popularity of 'Sorry Sorry' as a foreign-language song defied this domination to

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Chinese word 'kuo' (country) in 'han-kuo' (Korea) could be replaced by 'kou' (dog) to become a pejorative phrase, but the excuse might be offered that this racist expression was the result of a typographical error.

<sup>3</sup> A Korean album *Don't Don* (2007) and a Chinese album by Super Junior-M, *Me* (迷) (2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Don't Don*, for example, broke a record, following its release in 2007, as the highest-ranked Korean album on the *G-music Combo Billboard Chart*, surpassing the albums of TVXQ and Shinhwa. Super Junior's album also ranked above Taiwanese boy band K-One (Avex Taiwan, 'Super Junior: "Sorry Sorry"').

be proclaimed the most-viewed video of the year in the official 2009 statistics for *YouTube* in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

To explain this success, 'Sorry Sorry' needs to be analysed from the perspectives of its lyrical soundscape, linguistic viewpoint and socio-cultural context. From the perspective of its lyrical soundscape, 'Sorry Sorry' is repetitious in its construction: the chorus is repeated after each of the four verses; phrases within each verse are also repeated; and the English employed to construct the main body of the chorus uses a four-times repeated 'sorry' as its theme. According to the official promotional review, this repetition 'has a charm that immediately grabs the audience.'<sup>6</sup> This 'charm' seems to be well-received. In a Taiwanese magazine article, for example, one author describes his/her experience of listening to Korean pop music as follows:

Korean pop songs often choose a rhythm that is brisk and easy to follow. [...] Moreover, it contains some simple English words (for example, 'sorry sorry' and 'nobody nobody but you') and some cute sounds such as 'no no', 'oh yeah', 'do-lu-do' etc. [I] cannot help but sing along with the song and call out at the same time. It is catchy so that [I] master the song after several listening experiences. It creates a melody that constantly appears in [my] brain as if it's being poisoned.<sup>7</sup> (Hui)

It may be argued that the 'charm' – the quality of being catchy – is achieved through a focus that prioritises musical sound over linguistic meaning. Despite simple English words (such as 'sorry') being deployed to facilitate the distribution of the song outside a

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<sup>5</sup> 'Sorry Sorry' beat other Mandarin and Anglo-European videos ranging from music videos to Television advertisements, animations and television programmes (I-Ju, Chen).

<sup>6</sup> Author's translation: '歌詞中不斷重複的 'Sorry' 和意指 baby (稱呼戀人的暱稱) 的 'Shawty' 有著瞬間擄獲聽者的魅力' (Avex Taiwan, 'Album Information').

<sup>7</sup> Author's translation: '韓國偶像團體強打主打的一定是節奏輕快的舞曲, [...] 另外以簡單的英文編撰成副歌歌詞的主體 (如 'Sorry Sorry', 'Nobody Nobody But You, 啾'), 有時加入一些可以呼應歌詞的可愛合音如 'No No', '喔耶', '嘟嚕嘟' 等等 [...], 讓人聽下去之後情不自禁的開口跟著唱兩句或叫一聲, 於是聽幾次就很容易朗朗上口, 接著就在腦海裡產生了如中毒般的旋律'

Korean context, the principle of simplicity is, in some cases, compromised by the rhyme.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the repetitive phrasing and the use of expletives also seem to favour sound rather than meaning. In the above comment, for example, it is the melody, rather than the meaning of the lyrics, that 'constantly appears in [my] brain.' Indeed, the lyrics in the song are relatively meaningless: sentences are broken into repetitive words to serve the function of rhyming. The constructive principle of the lyrics therefore reflects Carol Vernallis's view that lyrics in the music video 'most commonly play a subservient role' (137).

Although the lyrics contain relatively little meaning, 'Sorry Sorry' is nevertheless a Korean song, with a majority of the words in Korean. From a linguistic viewpoint, this might mean one of two things. First, the popularity of 'Sorry Sorry' might indicate an extent of linguistic comprehension at the level of the lyrics. In Taiwan, however, Korean as a language is much less studied than English or Japanese. Despite a recent surge due to the popularity of the Korean Wave, the language does not hold a dominant position (Liu, Liu and Liu). Second, the limited understanding of Korean in Taiwan may further strengthen Vernallis's view concerning the lack of function of music video lyrics. However, 'Sorry Sorry' seems to be an exception to Vernallis's rule, in that the largely incomprehensible Korean sounds have become the centre of attention among Chinese-speaking audiences in Taiwan, especially those involved in a youth subcultural trend called *kuso* (parody).

*Kuso* is an internet-based subculture moderated mainly through BBS (Bulletin Board System), a computer network system developed during the 1970s (Senft 45-8). Despite BBS's fading popularity in an Anglo-American context with the rise of the internet during the mid-1990s, it has remained extremely popular among Taiwanese youth groups. For example, *PTT*, a student-operated and college-affiliated BBS established in 1995, has more than 1.2 million registered users (Tsai). BBS produces, in many ways, different trends in youth culture, including one of the most (in)famous trends, *kuso*.

The word *kuso* comes originally from the Japanese word for 'shit' (糞), which is a minor swear word in a Japanese context. It has taken on the new meaning of 'parody' after being re-adopted into Taiwan through youth subculture. *PTT* has played an important role in becoming one of the key sites where *kuso* is

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the use of 'shawty,' an American slang word, little known in Taiwan, which means an attractive girl, to rhyme with 'sorry.'

practised. Kuso practitioners on BBS, commonly known as 'peasants',<sup>9</sup> experiment with different forms and mediums with the aid of computer technology, and distribute their 'products' – ranging from re-made videos and political satires to nonsensical comics and senseless puns – online. Linguistic wordplay occupies a significant place at the heart of kuso. Hsi-Yao Su, for example, provides a detailed analysis of four major styles of BBS wordplay to argue that 'peasants' use the linguistic resources at their disposal to 'create innovative linguistic styles in response to a new medium' (83). It is important to point out that the monophonic principle of the Chinese writing system underpins the emergence of wordplay. The fact that each Chinese graph has a monophonic pronunciation in a given context creates 'a large number of homonyms,' which can lead to 'misunderstanding and confusion when spoken or read aloud without the aid of the graphs' ('Chinese Literature').

With regard to the above social, cultural, political and linguistic contexts, the intense commercial promotion of 'Sorry Sorry' through mainstream media has encouraged fans to make sense of the lyrics by phonetically subtitling the Korean in Mandarin Chinese. Linguistically, the act of subtitling involves a hybrid process of wordplay, which methodologically includes a mixture of phonetic 'transcription' and homophonic 'translation,' resulting in a new type of translation in which alternative meanings are generated. Through these linguistic activities, 'Sorry Sorry' has mutated nonsensically into 'That Banana': one of the best-known versions among a steadily growing number of online examples.

The linguistic activities involved are categorised in Taiwan under the title of 'mishearing' ('空耳,' pronounced 'kong-er,' literally meaning 'empty ear'), a term adopted from a Japanese phrase, *soramimi*, which denotes acts of mishearing or feigned deafness (Spahn and Hadamitzky 830). Mostly associated with kuso subculture, mishearing aims in most cases to achieve a parodic effect through punning. However, as the pun scholar Walter Redfern points out, one of the synonyms for puns is 'catches,' in that '[w]e are caught out, thrown, and, as on a switchback, the jolt can breed laughter, nervous or otherwise' (15). Mishearing causes annoyance for some audiences, and is regarded as hilarious by others. There are a few mishearing video producers

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<sup>9</sup> Originally a pejorative term to describe unsophisticated and gossiping online BBS users, the term has gradually become an appellation denoting BBS users in general (Tsai).

who state that their intentions are to serve an educational purpose (i.e. to teach the Chinese-speaking audience to sing a Korean song), rather than to produce parodies (Hangeng3939). I do not focus on the intention of these producers in this article, nor do I aim to locate their videos in the domain of parody and therefore argue an embedded subversiveness. Rather, following the insight of Redfern, who argues that pun 'is neither exclusively conservative nor subversive, but contestatory' (182), the following two sections delineate the contestatory quality of 'That Banana.' Through a textual analysis of the first forty-two seconds of the lyrics, this paper will analyse the linguistic mechanisms at play in order to contest theories from anthropology, literary theory and music video studies.

### Subtitling as a Site of Contestation: An Analysis

'Sorry Sorry' begins with a long instrumental prelude 24 seconds long, composed of the rhythmical sounds of bass and synthesiser. The voices of the group emerge, riffing monotonous sounds for the next 14 seconds (0:24-0:38). The sound resembles 'dance, dance, dance, dance,' but, without subtitling, the meaning is difficult to authenticate. Officially, the first line of the lyrics begins at 0:35 for three seconds, while the second line lasts four seconds. Both lines are subtitled and are characterised by phrase repetition, carrying fragmental meanings that can be interpreted as 'sorry, it is I who have first fallen in love with you' in the following way: 'Sorry, Sorry, Sorry, Sorry, I, I, I, first/ For you, for you, for you, fell, fell, fell, fallen, baby.'

In 'That Banana,' the subtitling begins at the moment when the vocals start. Therefore, the section between 0:24-0:35 is forced to materialise through 'mishearing.' As Chinese characters are monophonic in principle, the sound of 'dance' is separated into '*dan-ce*' and then slides into '*dian-shi*' to suggest the Chinese noun phrase 'television' (see Fig. 1). The instrumental part is therefore subtitled as 'television, television, television, television, there, there, oh, oh, oh.' In the first line, the four-times repeated 'sorry' in English is pronounced with a Korean accent, where the consonant sound 'r' slides to 'l.' It becomes phonetically '*solli*,' which slips into the sound of '*shou-li*' through mishearing from a Chinese ear to mean 'on the hand.' Similarly, the nuance between the Korean pronunciations of '*naega*' ('I') and '*nege*' ('for you') is reduced into Chinese to '*na-gen*' which means 'that.' Conversely, '*meonjeo*' ('first') becomes '*ma-de*' ('shit'), while '*ppajeo*' ('fell') becomes '*ba-*



*jiao* (‘Japanese banana’) and *‘beoryeo’* (‘fallen’) *‘bao-le’* (‘has exploded’). The first two lines, through re-subtitling, therefore become ‘On the hand, on the hand, through re-subtitling, therefore become ‘On the hand, on the hand, on the hand, on the hand, that, that, that, shit / That, that, that, Japanese banana, Japanese banana, Japanese banana, has exploded, baby’ (see Table 1 and 2).

En route from ‘Sorry Sorry’ to ‘That Banana,’ the song undergoes a constantly bifurcating process in which the sounds of Korean slide into Chinese vocabularies through ‘mishearing.’ This linguistic activity is foregrounded by the ambiguity of the sound in the translation process. Within the scope of one language, the sound resembles a homophone. A homophone is ‘a word pronounced *alike* with another but different in spelling and meaning [author’s emphasis]’ (*Chambers English Dictionary*). The similarity of the pronunciation, the *alike*, allows a space into which different meanings can be tacitly smuggled. Indeed, the idea of ‘room’ is argued to be the key to the pun; as Redfern succinctly puts it, ‘[s]lippage, flexibility, overlap are at the very heart of wordplay: room to manoeuvre’ (122). In other words, it is space that allows meaning to be bifurcated through sound. In the instance of a music video with a translingual and multimedia Table 1.

		Instrumental Opening (0:24-0:35)	First Line (0:35-0:38)		
‘Sorry Sorry’ (2009)	Official Korean Lyrics	-	Sorry x4	내가 x3	먼저 x1
	English translation of Korean lyrics	-	Sorry	I	First
	Korean Pronunciation	-	<i>sol-i</i>	<i>naega</i>	<i>meonje o</i>
‘That Banana’ (2009)	‘Mishearing’ <sup>10</sup>	<i>dian-shi x4, na-bian x3, oh oh oh</i>	<i>shou-li</i>	<i>na-gen</i>	<i>ma-de</i>
	Chinese subtitles	電視, 那邊, 喔喔喔 ( ^ ω ^ )	手裡	那根	媽的
	English translation of Chinese lyrics	Television, there, oh oh oh	On the hand	that	shit

Breakdown of Lyrics First Line (0:24-0:38)

<sup>10</sup> All phonetic transcriptions of Chinese are in *Hanyu Pinyin* (Taiwan) .

'Sorry Sorry' (2009)	Official Korean Lyrics	네게 x3	빠져 x3	버려 x1	baby
	English translation of Korean lyrics	For you	fell	fallen	baby
	Korean Pronunciation	<i>nege</i>	<i>ppajeo</i>	<i>beoryeo</i>	<i>baby</i>
'That Banana' (2009)	'Mishearing' <sup>11</sup>	<i>na-gen</i>	<i>ba-jiao</i>	<i>bao-le</i>	<i>baby</i>
	Chinese subtitles	那根	芭蕉	爆了	Baby (*' Д `) <sup>12</sup>
	English translation of Chinese lyrics	That	Japanese banana <sup>13</sup>	has exploded	baby

Table 2. Breakdown of Lyrics Second Line (0:24-0:38)

background, in a context where online youth subculture prevails, this 'room' is be maximised. The difference of the intonations between speaking and singing and the multilingual context allows leeway and creates great flexibility for the words to be manipulated. For example, the pronunciation of 'sorry' by a native English speaker in everyday conversation would easily be distinguished from 'shou-li' (on the hand) in oral Chinese where the first sound is stressed. However, in a multilingual context where the Korean accent reduces the 'r' sound in English and the stress on the first syllable of 'shou-li' in Chinese is decreased owing to the modification to singing tone, the distance between the pronunciation of 'sorry' and 'shou-li' is truncated, producing a soundscape where the two sounds overlap to a great extent. This overlap underpins the process of bifurcation, enabling different meanings to travel through puns across the boundaries between media, language and nation.

The process of bifurcation is, in this lyrical part, characterised by four modes: materialisation, localisation, generalisation and re-routing. In the first mode, materialisation, 'That Banana' testifies to the materialisation of lyrics in the instrumental opening, when ambiguous vocal sounds are actualised in the subtitle. Moreover, typographical emotions are

<sup>11</sup> All phonetic transcriptions of Chinese are in *Hanyu Pinyin* (Taiwan).

<sup>12</sup> Emotion symbols commonly used in Taiwanese youth subculture on BBS, see Fig. 2 (PTT Emotions).

<sup>13</sup> The Chinese term refers to *musa basjoo*, a seeded banana species which is known more commonly as the Japanese banana ('Japanese Banana').



Fig 1. 'That Banana (0:26).  
The original un-subtitled scene in the instrumental opening materialises through mishearing into 'television, television, television, television.' Photo courtesy of Mr. Long Hair (YouTube, Wwwwssps)



Fig 2. 'That Banana' (0:42).  
The originally absent emotions – (\* ㄐ `) – are inserted. This emotion symbol is specific to Taiwanese youth subculture. Photo courtesy of Mr. Long Hair

inserted in the instrumental opening, as well as at the end of the second line,<sup>14</sup> adding an extra emotional property to the lyrics. In the second mode, localisation, the typographical emotions used in 'That Banana' do not belong to the set of commonly-used emotions used in the Anglo-European context<sup>15</sup> but, with specialised fonts and combinations, refer especially to the kuso subculture on BBS.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Such as ( ^ ω ^ ), denoting a happy face, and ( ' ㄐ ` ), expressing an angry mood. See Fig.2.

<sup>15</sup> Common typographical emotions in Anglo-American are composed of symbols such as colons, hyphens, equals signs, parentheses, brackets, and Roman letters. They are generally written from left to right and most commonly have the eyes on the left, followed by the nose and mouth. For example, :) denotes smiles; :D denotes a large grin; while :( denotes frowning faces. In the context of East Asia, typographical emotions are oriented in a vertical formation, and more symbols and Roman letters are introduced into the combination. For instance, (^\_^) connotes a smile; \ (^0^)/ connotes 'hurrah'; (T\_T) expresses crying or sadness (Wenner).

<sup>16</sup> In the BBS subculture in Taiwan, typographical emotions include more symbols and linguistic sign systems such as Greek, Cyrillic, Chinese, etc. For example, 'ω' in ( ^ ω ^ ) comes from the lower case 'omega' in Greek; while 'ㄐ' in ( ' ㄐ ` ) derives from 'de' in Cyrillic. Other examples include <( ^ ~ ^ )> for a smile, or ( ㄒ ~ ㄒ ) and ( ㄒ ㄒ ㄒ ) for crying. The emotion can also be dramatised, such as ( / ` □ ) / ~ ㄗ ㄗ means table-throwing

This demonstrates a procedure of localisation in the process of bifurcation. This process therefore reflects Redfern's insight on the forms of the pun; puns 'take local variants, habitations and names' (155). In the third mode, generalisation, nuance at the level of both sound and meaning is generalised, reducing its inherent complexity. From the perspective of sound, 'naega' (I) and 'nege' (for you) are reduced in Chinese to 'na-gen' (that); while from the viewpoint of sense, the specificity of Japanese banana is diluted, requiring a new title for the song – 'That Banana' – which shares similar, if not greater, popularity to the title of 'That Japanese Banana.' In the final mode, re-routing, the route of cultural transmission is encoded in the transference of sound. As described in the previous paragraph, the Korean pronunciation of 'sorry' in English demonstrates that a cultural route can be as audible as the sound. Here 'sorry,' an English word, does not enter the Taiwanese linguistic landscape directly from the Anglophone world. Instead, it takes a detour through Korea to adopt a light accent. The 'mishearing' by the audience where the 'r' sound is dropped, therefore, accurately 'mishears' the nuance of the accent. It acknowledges not merely English but also Koreanised English. Taking Redfern's allegory that 'punners are often match-makers of shotgun-marriages' (57), the linguistic disjunctures presented in the translation process testify to an effort to constantly rearticulate sound and meaning in a local context. It reduces the nuance of the input and matches its demand by recycling local expressions to generate new senses, while at the same time recording the route of cultural transmission.

However, despite the fact that this process seems to facilitate the sound on a transnational and translingual journey, from the perspective of meaning it provides inconsistency. In the majority of cases, there is neither connection nor logic between the old and new meanings. To exacerbate this state of affairs, in most situations nonsense and rudeness are used intentionally to contradict the meaning of the original. On the way from 'Sorry Sorry' to 'That Banana,' the romantic profession of love mutates into minor swearing and the image of an exploded banana. According to Immanuel Kant, laughter is caused by 'the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing' (133); the transformation from the romantic profession of love to the image of an exploded banana provides a good example of the humorous

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with rage, and 崩 (千三干) 潰 denotes emotional breakdown ('PTT Emotions').

disenchantment that has made 'That Banana' so popular.<sup>17</sup> It may be argued that this popularity has been achieved through the humorous disillusionment discussed, as well as through the pornographic innuendo embedded in 'banana',<sup>18</sup> and a punning potential that favours anti-Korean sentiment,<sup>19</sup> which reflects the socio-political milieu in contemporary Taiwan. The linguistic disjuncture of meaning presented in the process of translation is, in this sense, connotation in exile. It is a constant bifurcating process through which the sound in the original Korean lyrics is deterritorialised, yet fails to reterritorialise, at the level of sense, into Chinese. The numerous online versions of the music video testify to the indefinite segmenting process at the level of meaning that occurs with every viewer's attempt to make sense. The meaning of a language is, in this vein, always on the run from capture: the temporal replacement of the sincerity of love with triviality refers to no subject and upholds no representation. 'That Banana' therefore resembles certain characteristics of puns, which – to paraphrase Redfern – are 'bastards, immigrants, barbarians, extra-terrestrials: they intrude, they infiltrate' (4). It explores the space between the different sounds in a translangual and inter-media context to test its manipulative extreme, where – to use Deleuze and Guattari's words – language 'stops being representative' (23) in order to 'move toward its extremities or its limits' (23). Using a major language (Chinese) from a marginalised position (youth subculture), 'That Banana' deterritorialises the meaning from its border position to reveal a linguistic landscape that is non-subjective, non-representative and constantly escaping. These features characterise what Deleuze and Guattari term 'minor literature': a minority literature constructed 'within a major language' which is 'affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization' (16) in that everything is 'political' and takes

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<sup>17</sup> Compared with 'That Banana's' 1.6 million views on *YouTube*, 'Mahjong' (2009), the second most popular mishearing version of 'Sorry Sorry,' has a comparatively moderate 0.22 million views (*Mahjong*).

<sup>18</sup> Banana carries a pornographic subtext in both Anglo-European and Taiwanese contexts. Moreover, the Taiwanese slang for penis rhymes with the word banana. A *YouTube* comment under 'That Banana,' for example, makes a pun on the sentence of 'that banana has exploded, baby' by displacing a word, creating a new sentence which is sexually suggestive: 'that penis has exploded, baby.'

<sup>19</sup> Political anti-Korean sentiments can also materialise through punning. For instance, another commenter sarcastically says 'this is one of the most powerful moments in the whole of Korean history (!)'

on 'a collective value' (17). Created in a border position of youth subculture, the principle of sound bifurcation on which 'That Banana' is based enables meanings to be continuously fragmented, allowing audiences' conflicting feelings towards Korea to be enounced: their love to be expressed through laughing, their hatred to be displayed through sneering, and their ambiguous feelings to be demonstrated through a mixture of these things.

### **Theoretical contestations: Anthropology, Literary Theory, and the Economics of Lyrical Puns**

The linguistic mechanism presented in 'That Banana' provides an excellent example through which to examine theories from anthropology, literary theory and music video studies. In the anthropological tradition, the encounter between anthropologists and the 'non-literate' often precedes an attempt on the part of the anthropologist to 'rescue' the 'others' through an act of textualisation. 'Salvage ethnography' is an early theoretical framework, developed by Franz Boas and others (Clifford 112-3), based on the assumption that lost Others can only be saved through the text. In this tradition, transcription provides the method of transforming an oral text from an unwritten language into a literary one. It is here, according to Brinkley Messick, that the process of transcription is distinctively different from translation: in transcription, the relations between the reported and reporting languages are 'revealed and even foregrounded' (180), exposing a text where movements are 'stalled or interrupted' (180); these relations are 'obscured' (180) in translation, presenting a text that has undergone 'total transformation' (180). In other words, there is an embedded lineal schedule between the concepts of transcription and translation in anthropology, so that transcription is understood to be the halfway stage leading towards translation and its interruptive quality has to be concealed to facilitate the transformation of translation. Messick analogises this process insightfully with the construction procedure of a building, so that transcription 'might be thought of analytically as *the* scaffolding for translation, which must drop away or be hidden in *the* finished product [author's emphasis]' (180).

In the case of 'That Banana,' however, there are constant semiotic disruptions among Super Junior's Chinese-speaking audiences in their every attempt to make sense. This results in a deterritorialisation of sound, where meanings are perpetually mutated, materialised, localised and generalised in the bifurcation

process. In Jenkins's conceptualisation, this is an act of poaching, which characterises 'fan culture.' Fan culture possesses the ability to create new meaning through the consumption of the mainstream. Fans are 'textual poachers,' who 'get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as the foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community' (223). 'That Banana' therefore demonstrates how 'Sorry Sorry,' as an iconic music video in Taiwanese popular culture, can be poached in the process of translation through punning, creating a sense of humour that allows 'That Banana' to be widely circulated and promoted among audiences. 'That Banana' thus becomes, in Taiwan, a semi-independent cultural landscape akin to 'Sorry Sorry.' In this sense, the linguistic activities in 'That Banana,' implode the anthropological division between transcription and translation by complicating the transcription to translation process. They point to an anarchic world where '*the scaffolding*' no longer leads to '*the finished product*' but is poached, rearranged and mutated to connote new meanings, which produces *a* finished product in its own right.

The issue of double-tonguing within one linguistic unit has been dealt with by Mikhail Bakhtin in his theory of hybridisation. Through a detailed analysis of discourse in the novel, Bakhtin argues that a language can represent another language while still retaining 'the capacity to sound simultaneously both outside it and within it' (358). For example, in a sentence in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* describing the daily routine of a rich banker (whose wealth is subsequently revealed in the novel to be built upon a fraud), Bakhtin analyses how the tone tacitly switches in the construction of the sentence from the language of ceremonial speech<sup>20</sup> to a parodic stylisation (301). This lends itself to a theory of hybridisation, which denotes 'a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance' (358). It is, in other words, different from a pun. Double-tonguing denotes the existence of double or multiple meanings within one word; double-tonguing in Bakhtin's theory signifies double-styling to indicate the presence of different authorial tropes within the boundary of a sentence.

'That Banana' pushes Bakhtin's idea of hybridisation to an extreme. As the lyrical meaning is mutated according to the principle of sound, it picks up words as the sound goes along,

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<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin further explains that ceremonial speech denotes the language used on official occasions, such as parliamentary procedures and banquets (303).

forming random and volatile styles. For example, in the first line of 'That Banana,' an implication in the formation of a descriptive trope<sup>21</sup> is disrupted by a minor swear-word, presenting a vituperative style of exclamation. In this sense, within the boundary of one lyrical line, the sentence is hybridised. However, using Bakhtin's theory – where styles transit in a sentence which retains its grammatical structure and therefore present a relatively smooth contour – the vituperative style in this lyric strips the sentence of its object, thus interrupting the fulfilment of a grammatical rule. Moreover, hybridisation in 'That Banana' is not confined to the different authorial tropes of classical literature. Here there is a significant difference between the two genres with regard to the idea of authorship. According to Wendy Wall, authorship as a concept has changed over time (86) and the birth of modern literary authority can be traced to the sixteenth century when 'Spenser and Jonson used the book format to generate the author's laureate status' (86). Through the format of the book, 'classically authorized writers' are thought to serve 'as the origin and arbiter of a literary monument' (86). By contrast, 'fan videos' are considered to be inauthentic copies, whose 'producers' are considered to be closer to poachers than to authors, and, in this vein, meanings are constantly produced to be added to the construction of the original. Therefore, in 'That Banana,' hybridisation is not merely confined to different authorial tropes but appears at the level of sound in the translanguaging process, through a form of contemporary online Taiwanese minor literature. In other words, hybridisation materialises through the demands of audiences, who force the utterances to hybridise, and actively multiply, the meaning of the lyrics by deterritorialising the sound.

The fun involved in creating mishearing 'fan videos' is highly attractive to Super Junior audiences in Taiwan. The practice of using mishearing as a means to parody dominant texts in popular culture, originated most conspicuously in 2009, following the release of 'Sorry Sorry.' The number of different mishearing versions continues to grow. As a phenomenon this practice does not begin and end with Super Junior; it extends to include music videos from other stars of the Korean Wave, creating a new landscape in the popular culture of mishearing. This trend demonstrates Redfern's insightful argument that 'wordplay is a contagious phenomenon' (52). However, mishearing as a newly

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<sup>21</sup> 'On the hand, that...' signifies 'on the hand, there is...'



emergent cultural landscape also shares the quality of unevenness with Appadurai's five landscapes in the modern world: some versions (e.g. 'That Banana') are widely known and discussed, while others remain undistinguished, obscured in the landscape of mishearing. In this sense, the creativity presented in the process of sound bifurcation transforms laughter into a form of capital, which functions to facilitate the dissemination of the fan videos as a part of audiences' social lives. This differs from commercial promotion in the dominant mediascape where money, as the main form of capital, plays an important role; audiences' promotion operates through the internet according to the logic of laughter. It is a capital of laughter that is an alternative financescape.

Indeed, kuso is now a recognised marketing strategy in Taiwan. In 2006, for example, *Kuso Frighten Horse Awards* (*Kuso* 驚馬獎),<sup>22</sup> a marketing project deploying kuso as its main marketing strategy, won the fifth e-Marketer Award in Taiwan (Wen). Proposed by a major mobile phone operator, Taiwan Mobile, this project has harnessed the internet as its main promotional medium. It recruits homemade videos with parodic themes to compete online. These are voted for by the public via mobile networks. This has resulted in more than 1,200 submissions. Official statistics state that this project has encouraged around 70,000 people – 30% of the total online participants – to read the promotional page for Taiwan Mobile's pay as you go product, resulting in a 20% increase in sales (Wen). Its success is explained by Li-Chin Chang, the customer communications manager with Taiwan Mobile, in terms of 'a focused market strategy' that 'complements television as a promotional medium'(Wen).<sup>23</sup> This success reflects what Jonathan Beller terms 'the attention theory of value' (4-8), which suggests that visual attention is now capital producing labour. The *Kuso Frighten Horse Awards* therefore demonstrate a direct link between kuso and commercialism, and between laughter and money.

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<sup>22</sup> The title of the awards is again a pun itself. *Kuso Frighten Horse Awards* (*Kuso* 驚馬獎), pronounced 'kuso-jing-ma-jiang,' is a play on words of *Golden Horse Awards* (金馬獎), pronounced 'jīn-ma-jiang,' a major film award held annually in Taiwan since 1962 ('Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee').

<sup>23</sup> Author's translation: '台灣大哥大品牌管理暨客戶溝通資深處長陳麗琴以'kuso 驚馬獎' 為例表示, 網路精準媒體的特性, 可以和電視互補, 創造更精準的行銷'.

With more than 1.6 million views on *YouTube* to date (approximately seven times more than the *Kuso Frighten Horse Awards* website), the intensive attention paid to 'That Banana' by its Chinese-speaking audiences demonstrates a latent, yet significant, commercial potential.<sup>24</sup> Going back to Vernallis's view that lyrics in music videos 'rarely take on a superordinate function' (137), it may be argued that 'That Banana' demonstrates a link between lyrics and commercialism: the fun within the wordplay popularises the 'fan video' itself, and the connection with 'Sorry Sorry' contributes to the promotion of the original version. Through the cooperation between conflicting cultural assumptions embedded in promotions at different levels and capital in different forms, 'That Banana,' as a parodic mutation deriving from 'Sorry Sorry,' feeds its popularity back to the original and, inevitably, to the economics of the music industry. Lyrics have therefore become one of the key sites where different forms of capital are generated, accumulated and exchanged.

## Conclusion

Departing from the subtitling of 'That Banana,' this article delineates the embedded linguistic mechanism in the mutation of lyrics. Based on the principle of sound bifurcation, the linguistic mechanism denotes a process of language in exile. In this process, audiences assume an important role through which different possibilities are 'entertained.' Redfern argues that puns 'are all about entertaining possibilities – a pun itself, where "entertaining" is both an adjective and transitive present participle' (179). In other words, a pun considers the possibility of creating an amusing effect. In that sense, 'That Banana' entertains the extremity of linguistic possibilities in order to entertain its audience. In a translingual and multimedia context, the *double entendre* of 'entertainment' is integrated in the fan video, which provides a touchstone to challenge contemporary theories in anthropology, literary theory and music video studies. The fan video calls the idea of authorship in the age of the internet into question, pointing out how the grey area in-between anthropological definitions of

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<sup>24</sup> This phenomenon has also been noticed by some of the fans. A *YouTube* comment under 'That Banana,' states 'I think Super Junior will feel like crying should they know the content of this video. However, they become more popular precisely because of this clip!' Author's translation: 'SJ 如果看到這個版本會想哭吧~不過也是因為這樣就更紅了啊!'

translation and transcription becomes the arena for an utterance that extends beyond the limitation of authorial tropes. It engenders an anarchic world where meanings are allowed to be poached, negotiated and transformed. The linguistic process at play in Taiwanese kuso culture creates a version of minor literature with a quirky sense of humour, which in turn feeds back to the economics of the music industry.

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