Zhong Lin, Feifei Wang, Yifei Mao and Feng Wang*

Understanding micro-blogging users' translanguaging in Chinese language play: a qualitative phenomenological approach

Abstract: Whilst existing studies have investigated ludic translanguaging practices in diverse contexts, little knowledge is available on dad jokes, a common language play phenomenon in Chinese online contexts. To fill this gap, focusing on dad jokes on the Weibo platform, this paper investigates how and why translanguaging practices operate in the Chinese language play by micro-blogging users. Drawing upon a theoretical framework of translanguaging and a qualitative phenomenological approach, four types of boundary-transcending language play: interlingual, image-based, trans-semiotic, and intercultural translanguaging play are identified in the current study. Results from semi-structured online interviews with voluntary participants revealed that such creative translanguaging further facilitated the ludic effects of dad jokes and ultimately constructed a humorous translanguaging space for viewers as a source of enjoyment. The findings enrich research literature on ludic translanguaging by demonstrating that the Weibo platform with multimodal semiotic resources provides new sociolinguistic affordances for inclusive, digital literacy practices in language play.

Keywords: translanguaging; language play; dad jokes; digital media platforms

1 Introduction

Chinese, being one of the oldest continually used writing systems, encompasses various traditional genres of language play, including spring couplets, riddles, and two-part enigmatic similes (Li and Lee 2021). With the advancements in technology and the influence of global cultural exchange, new opportunities emerge for Chinese language play that go beyond conventional practices. Researchers have taken a

*Corresponding author: Feng Wang, Xidian University, No. 266, Xifeng Road, Chang'an District, 710071 Xi'an, Shaanxi, China, E-mail: wangfeng367@163.com. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3956-6290
Zhong Lin and Feifei Wang, Chang'an University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China
Yifei Mao, Jinan University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

particular interest in ludic translanguaging practices such as tranßcripting, Biaoqing, and self-praise (Li and Zhu 2019; Lu and Blommaert 2020; Ren et al. 2022). Surprisingly, dad jokes, which represent a form of creative language play that deviates from conventional patterns, have gained significant popularity in Chinese online contexts but remain relatively unexplored in academic discourse. Hence, we adopt a translanguaging perspective that redefines languages and other semiotic signs as integral components of "a whole communicative repertoire" (Ai et al. 2022, p. 4). This approach aims to uncover valuable insights into the creative expressions exhibited by language users within this language play phenomenon, particularly those involving novel modes, scripts, and semiotic signs.

Since its inception in August 2009, Sina Weibo has experienced rapid growth and now stands as the largest micro-blogging platform in China. Weibo offers users the ability to instantly share and engage with information through various modalities, including text, pictures, videos, and other media, making it essentially a multimodal platform (Liu et al. 2019). Furthermore, influenced by the cultural dynamics of the Internet, microblogs have increasingly become a source of amusement, both in terms of content and communication style (People 2017). As mentioned earlier, the distinctive features of microblogs provide an ideal environment for the creation and evolution of language play, allowing users to challenge conventional language norms and engage in dynamic language play during information sharing and communicative interactions with others.

In order to provide a contextualized analysis and expand the research scope of translanguaging play, this study specifically examines the under-explored area of translanguaging play within dad jokes on the Weibo platform due to their widespread popularity within Chinese online contexts. The term "dad joke," as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, refers to wholesome jokes with punchlines that typically rely on predictable puns or wordplay, often perceived as endearingly corny or unfunny (Merriam-Webster 2019). Given their reliance on predictable puns and wordplay, dad jokes serve as a prime example of language play. Within this study, we concentrate on boundary-transcending dad jokes found on the Weibo platform, with particular attention to how and why microbloggers manipulate language and other semiotic resources to engage in critical and creative translanguaging play within the comment section. The findings of this study highlight that digital platforms provide users with the impetus and new opportunities to engage in translanguaging language play through trans-lingual and trans-semiotic mediation.

2 Literature review

2.1 Translanguaging: a theoretical lens for language play

Translanguaging, originally a pedagogical practice encouraging students to utilize multiple languages for both input and output (Baker 2001), has been redefined as a practical theory of language that captures the fluid and dynamic nature of language practices that extend beyond "socially constructed language systems and structures" (Li 2018a, p. 27). In contrast to code-switching, translanguaging involves the use of an individual's complete linguistic repertoire (García and Li 2014; Lee and Li 2020; Otheguy et al. 2015), without strict adherence to well-defined language boundaries. Consequently, linguistic signs, traditionally limited to writing and speech, become part of a broader repertoire that individuals employ for everyday communication (Li 2018b). This perspective underscores the significance of recognizing the "multilingual, multi-semiotic, multimodal, and multisensory properties for meaning construction" (Li 2018a, p. 22), allowing scholars to gain insights into the creative engagement of micro-blogging users within playful language practices.

The broadened interpretation of translanguaging and its impact on individuals' cognition and the reconceptualization of related concepts, such as language and bilingualism, have prompted scholars to shift their focus from solely relying on one primary resource to acknowledging the significance of other multimodal semiotic means and integrated repertoires of language users. As noted by Lee (2022, p. 2), "the translanguaging perspective has played a crucial role in enabling researchers to explore the practices of unexpectedly resourceful individuals who have been marginalized by predetermined labels like codes in sociolinguistic contexts". As mentioned earlier, the expansion of cultural globalization and the emergence of new media platforms have provided Chinese language play with a creative space, enabling the utilization of different languages, orthographic elements, as well as other semiotic signs such as memes and emojis, as highlighted by Li and Lee (2021). Consequently, we adopt the translanguaging framework to analyze how Chinese micro-blogging users intentionally select and integrate various linguistic features and multiple semiotic resources to create and share meaning within the realm of language play.

2.2 Translanguaging on Chinese social media

The development of digital media and information technologies has ushered in an era where computer-mediated digital platforms offer a conducive space for

translanguaging practices. These platforms serve as what Li (2011, p. 1223) refers to as translanguaging spaces, where language users can seamlessly "integrate various aspects of their personal history, experiences, environment, attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, cognitive abilities, and physical capacities into a coordinated and meaningful performance, resulting in a lived experience".

A growing body of literature has highlighted the affordances provided by new communication media for the transfer and transformation of various linguistic features and semiotic resources (e.g., Albawardi 2018; Nightingale and Safont 2019; Ren and Guo 2022; Zhang and Ren 2020). For example, Li and Zhu (2019) investigated tranßcripting, a new script that incorporates elements from different scriptal and semiotic systems generated through digital writing. They argued that tranßcripting goes beyond the mere manipulation of language and at times represents a playful subversion of the uniscriptal language ideology in China. Other scholars have also examined the subversive nature of translanguaging practices on social media platforms. Li et al. (2020) explored how different writing systems were combined with emoticons and visual signs to express political motivations and social critique in Konglish Daily. Zhang and Ren (2020) studied creative digital literacy practices in Chinese computer-mediated communication (CMC), highlighting the inventive and discursive literacy practices of Chinese micro-blogging users related to the popular online expression "skr." In addition to internet slang, Ren and Guo (2022) investigated translanguaging in the context of self-praise, a specific speech act on Chinese social media. Their study identified three major categories of translanguaging strategies in self-praise in micro-blogs, each with various sub-strategies. Furthermore, they discussed several motivating factors that drive Chinese netizens to employ translanguaging practices for self-praise.

As demonstrated above, creative translanguaging practices are not limited to multilingual countries or regions but are also prevalent in online spaces, such as the Internet. Within China, various digital media platforms provide language users with numerous opportunities to engage with diverse linguistic features and multimodal semiotic resources. This allows them to blend different languages, semiotic modes, and cultural resources for the purpose of creating meaning and sense-making in online communication.

2.3 Language play

Language play involves the playful manipulation of the linguistic properties of a language for enjoyment, rather than using language solely for the purpose of transmitting information (Luk 2013). Language play can encompass any aspect of linguistic properties, as highlighted by Crystal (1998). For instance, two types of

language play—play with sounds and play with units of meaning—were divided by Cook (2000). Language play, which encompasses the manipulation of sounds and meaning, encompasses a wide range of creative expressions, including jokes, riddles, word games, puns, and rhymes (Li and Lee 2021; Luk 2013).

The ludic function of language, which has historically been marginalized and considered trivial in linguistic studies, is receiving increasing attention in recent years. Scholars are gaining a deeper understanding of language and recognizing the ingenious creativity demonstrated by language users in language play. For example, Zhang (2015) reported on the creative practices of multilingual language play on the official microblog account Shanghai Release, while Luk (2013) analyzed ten examples of bilingual play collected from the linguistic and mediascape in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the affordances of online platforms, with their multimodal input systems and multiple semiotic signs, have facilitated the emergence of a novel language play phenomenon that transcends linguistic and sociocultural boundaries. Li and Zhu (2019) described this phenomenon as tranßcripting, while Lu and Blommaert (2020) examined Chinese memes as examples of novel language play. Li and Lee (2021) even proposed the term "translanguaging language play" to understand the dynamic manipulation of different linguistic features and semiotic signs facilitated by digital social media platforms. In addition to memes and multilingual texts, Zhang and Ren (2022) investigated the strategic deployment of Chinese dialects by online users for language play.

In light of the aforementioned discussions, it is evident that studies on language play not only focus on specific speech acts but also highlight the affordances of social media platforms in fostering the creativity of language play. Considering the widespread popularity of dad jokes on Chinese social media and the under-researched nature of this language play phenomenon, our attention is now turned to explore. The inquiry is guided by two research questions: 1) How do Chinese micro-blogging users engage in language play by breaking the boundaries between languages and between languages and other semiotic resources in order to construct translanguaging language play? 2) What is the purpose behind their construction of such inventive translanguaging play?

3 Methodology

We utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach, characterized as "seeing with fresh eyes" (Finlay 2008, 2012), in order to investigate how Chinese micro-blogging users engage in boundary-transcending language play by integrating different resources. This approach was selected because it offers an effective means of providing a holistic and accurate description of the complex phenomenon while

maintaining adherence to factual information. Following the guidelines of the phenomenological approach, we provide a brief account in the subsequent section of how we orchestrated the research site and participant selection, conducted data collection and analysis, and considered ethical considerations.

3.1 Locating the research site and participants

For the research site, we specifically selected the multimodal Sina Weibo platform. This decision was based on several factors: Firstly, Sina Weibo is the most widely used microblogging platform in China, with a reported 573 million monthly active users as of January 2022 (Statista 2022). Secondly, the multimodal input system on Weibo provides users with the flexibility to engage in different modes of expression, making it an ideal choice for studying boundary-transcending language play. Furthermore, Sina Weibo has seen the widespread popularity of dad jokes. This can be observed through various dad joke-related topics that appear on the platform, such as dad joke contests, celebrities sharing dad jokes, and even bloggers who adopt dad jokes as their online persona (see Figure 1).

Based on the research purpose, we selected a specific Weibo post[1] from a blogger (Figure 2) to investigate the dynamic language play of Chinese micro-blogging users. This particular post was chosen because it sparked an interactive topic focused on dad jokes. In the screenshot provided, the contributor humorously connects the concept of "冷笑话" (dad jokes) with "玄学降温" (metaphysical cooling), playfully attempting to create a cooling effect through the use of dry humor. Furthermore, the comment section with 15,700 comments has a higher traffic of comments, larger numbers of discrete massage commenters, as well as more between-member interactions afforded by the public nature of this Weibo posting. Prior to proceeding with data collection and analysis, it is important to provide a clear explanation of the interaction between the blogger and their followers. The primary form of interaction observed is that the blogger initiates an interactive topic every day at 22:00. Followers then actively participate by leaving relevant comments, showcasing their own agency in engaging with the topic.

To address Research Question 2, two participants were purposefully selected for the study based on their commenting popularity. From the background information provided, it was discovered that one participant frequently used Weibo and spent over an hour per day on the platform. While, the other participant did not

---

1 The original Weibo posting. Retrieved from https://weibo.com/1713926427/Lz5VWdAVk?from=page_
1005051713926427_profile&wvr=6&mod=weibotime&type=comment#_rnd1665300461294.

| 🔍 冷笑话 | ⊗ | Cancel |

🕐 #魔法降温冷笑话大赛#

🕐 #冷笑话#

🔍 冷笑话合集

🔍 冷笑话周也没有工作室

🔍 十万个冷笑话

冷笑话精选 👑
粉丝: 2351万

我们爱讲冷笑话 👑
粉丝: 881.2万

艾莉的冷笑话时间 👑
粉丝: 332.9万

🔍 许凯冷笑话

🔍 我真的很喜欢这种冷笑话

🔍 黄明昊讲冷笑话养生

🔍 程潇秒猜迪丽热巴冷笑话谐音梗   热搜

🔍 消防员三伏天讲冷笑话为网友降温   热搜

🔍 被马天宇的冷笑话冷到了

🔍 孟鹤堂的笔记叫冷笑话大全

Figure 1: A screenshot of various dad joke-related topics according to the keyword "冷笑话", screen shot on July 6, 2023.

Figure 2: The Weibo posting about dad jokes, screen shot on July 13, 2022.

browse Weibo as often. However, both participants followed the blogger who posted the selected blog and occasionally participated in her interactive topics. Furthermore, both participants shared a common understanding of dad jokes. They considered dad jokes to be a prevalent phenomenon and acknowledged their use in offline social situations to alleviate unfamiliarity or awkward silence. This shared understanding provides a valuable perspective for investigating the language play exhibited by Chinese micro-blogging users in relation to dad jokes.

3.2 Locating the research site and participants

Figure 1 displays that there were a total of 15,700 comments left in the comment section until the day of data extraction. As the Weibo posting allows ongoing comments from online users, the number of comments may have continued to increase. However, it was observed that the peak of user comments on the dad jokes topic occurred on June 23, 2022. Over time, many comments started to deviate from the theme of dad jokes. Considering the relevance of the research topic, we deliberately selected the comments and relevant replies that were published on June 23, 2022. To collect the data, we utilized the Bazhuayu data collector[2] to collect 171 comments and their corresponding replies from the comment section on June 23. These comments were then transcribed into a tabular format, including information such as commenters, time, likes, and content. Furthermore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' motivations for engaging in such creative and critical language play, we conducted semi-structured online interviews with the two selected participants using the chat function of Weibo. Each interview lasted approximately 0.5 h.

Engaging in the analysis process involves closely examining and dwelling with the collected data, gradually deepening our understanding as meanings emerge (Finlay 2012). In order to provide a grounded description and interpretation of the collected data, we followed Groenewald's analytical steps (2004) to make the translanguaging practices of Chinese online users visible as they constructed comments in the blog post's comment section. Following these analytical steps, we temporarily set aside structural or systemic approaches and "the presupposition of personal views and experiences" (Finlay 2012, p. 176), and immersed ourselves in the comments of the participants for research purposes. The 171 collected comments were uploaded into NVivo 12, and open coding was conducted to identify which comments reflected the nature of translanguaging. Next, codes that reflected similar types of translanguaging practices were grouped together into more abstract themes. For example, dad jokes that manipulated multiple languages were grouped under the theme of interlingual translanguaging play. This process allowed us to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. Additionally, hermeneutic interpretation was employed to analyze the interview data, where we closely examined the participants' purposes behind their translanguaging play. By following these analytical steps, we aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of

2 八爪鱼采集器 [Bazhuayu data collector], a Chinese data collection tool that integrates web data collection, mobile internet data and API interface services (including data crawler, data optimization, data storage, etc.).

the translanguaging practices of Chinese online users, grounded in the data collected from comments and interviews.

3.3 Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical research, we informed the blogger of our main purpose of investigating the interactive topic concerning dad jokes, as well as the procedures used to protect confidentiality via the chat function of Weibo, and ultimately obtained her consent. Besides, according to the voluntary nature of research participation, we selected two voluntary participants to conduct online semi-structural interviews. With the intention of avoiding the issues of potential risk and privacy, the nicknames of Weibo users in the current paper were kept confidential, either in an omitted or blurry way.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Language users' creative and critical engagement

After analyzing the collected comments, it is evident that Chinese micro-blogging users have deviated from adhering to language boundaries in their comments. Instead, they employ various multimodal semiotic resources, along with different languages and language varieties, in a process known as "transformative resemiotization" (Li and Ho 2018, p. 38). This enables them to engage in translanguaging language play. In the forthcoming sections, we will provide comprehensive descriptions of how Chinese online users merge distinct elements from linguistic features and other semiotic means to create innovative dad jokes using the affordances offered by the Weibo platform.

4.1.1 Interlingual translanguaging play

Jokes that manipulate word boundaries (Crystal 1998) can be regarded as a prime example of language play. This emphasis on surpassing language boundaries aligns with the essence of translanguaging. Our findings indicate that Chinese online users possess the ability to deliberately choose and give priority to suitable communicative resources from various named languages and other semiotic systems. This facilitates the creation of clever language play intended to produce ludic effects.

Among the 171 extracted comments, it is worth highlighting that commenters not only create monolingual homophonic jokes but also experiment with the

boundaries of different named languages to form mixed homophonic jokes. Table 1 presents an example of such a joke. The most popular comment reads as follows: "只有25个英文字母了因为Q被拴起来了". This joke originates from the internet buzzword "拴Q" (shuān Q), which is equivalent to "thank you" in English. The term "拴Q" gained popularity after an English teacher blogger named Teacher Liu used it on the Douyin platform. He was recorded saying, "People say that the Guilin scenery is the best in the world. Welcome to Guilin, welcome to Yangshuo, thank you." Due to his non-standard pronunciation, the phrase "thank you" sounded very similar to "拴Q" in Mandarin, prompting Chinese netizens to playfully imitate it (People's Media Convergence 2022). In this language play, the commenter combines "拴Q" with the number of English letters, utilizing the literal meaning of "拴Q" (where "拴" is a verb denoting the action of tying and "Q" is a noun) rather than its connotative meaning. This creative use gives rise to the translanguaging play concerning the English alphabet. It is evident that the original phrase "拴Q" engages in wordplay based on pronunciation across languages and has evolved to encompass various meanings. Building upon this, the mixed homophonic joke presented in Table 1 manipulates the literal meaning of the original phrase "拴Q".

It is intriguing to observe that such translanguaging play elicits critical and creative responses from other readers, as demonstrated in Table 2. On one hand, one reader intentionally utilizes an emoji ❄ (symbolizing 'snow') instead of named languages to evaluate the dry humor of "拴Q". On the other hand, readers who engage with the translanguaging play employ expressions like "welcome to 桂林 (Guilin), welcome to 阳朔 (Yangshuo), 酸Q (suān Q)" to echo this mixed homophonic joke. This indicates that a large majority of Chinese online users are familiar with the sociocultural knowledge associated with "拴Q", enabling them to respond creatively by utilizing linguistic and semiotic resources. Moreover, other readers offer critical responses by commenting on a 26-English-letter joke. The first reply in Table 2 states: "只有 24 个了， 因为b被你装了 (There are only 24 now, because you '装逼' zhuāng bī, meaning 'show off' in Mandarin); 只有 23 个了， 因为p是你放的 (There are only 23 now, because you '放屁' fàng pì, meaning 'bullshit' in Mandarin); 只有 22 个了， 因为i是会消失的 (There are only 22 now because '爱' ài, meaning 'love', will fade away)". This reply connects the English letters "b, p, i" to the near-homophone

Table 1: The most popular comment.

Commenters	Time	Likes	Contents
圆**	22/6/23	9,174	只有 25 个英文字母了因为Q被拴起来了 [There are only 25 English letters left because the Q is tied up]

Table 2: Five replies for 栓Q comment sorted by hot degree.

Commenters	Time	Likes	Contents
一**	22/6/23	1,272	只有 24 个了，因为B被你装了 只有 23 个了，因为p是 你放的 只有 22 个了，因为i是会消失的 …… [There are only 24 English letters because b is installed by you; There are only 23, because you fart the p; There are only 22, because i will fade away]
微**	22/6/23	307	栓Q啦❀ [thank you la ❀]
巷**	22/6/23	42	welcome to 桂林 [Welcome to Guilin]
有**	22/6/23	36	漏漏漏油包头嘴里头动的是ju～ [Phonetic similarity with "row row row your boat gently down the stream"]
小**	22/6/23	27	welcome to 阳朔，酸Q [Welcome to Yangshuo, suān Q]

Chinese characters "逼 (bī, meaning 'show off' in Mandarin), 屁 (pì, meaning 'bull-shit' in Mandarin), 爱 (ài, meaning 'love' in Mandarin)". The language user then cleverly employs verb phrases expressing an action or state to indicate a decrease in the number of English letters, resulting in the creation of a novel homophonic joke about the English alphabet. This showcases the ingenuity and agency of the language user in orchestrating such linguistic play.

The translanguaging play orchestrated by the micro-blogging users demonstrates that they are capable of playing with the writing system of language to create a novel phrase, i.e., utilizing a similar-sound Chinese word to replace parts of the phrase in English. And according to the number of likes, these mixed homophonic jokes are highly enjoyed by the rest of the audience, which further contributes to the critical 'imitation' by other commenters in their replies. Furthermore, the process of interpreting such 'bilingual' homophonic language play also prompts readers to engage in the translanguaging process.

4.1.2 Image-based translanguaging play

Human communication has always been multimodal, with individuals drawing upon various resources such as images, layout, and other modes to construct meaning rather than relying solely on isolated text (García and Li 2014; Li 2018a). This multimodal use of language is also evident in social media, where online users have the ability to incorporate multiple languages, emojis, images, and videos through the affordances of multimodal input systems (Zhang and Ren 2020). Building upon this understanding, the following section provides a comprehensive description of the

creative language play exhibited by Chinese online users on the multimodal Weibo platform. The focus is on the exploration of novel modes of communication.

Within the comment section, it becomes apparent that some instances of language play extend beyond conventional methods of relying solely on isolated text. Instead, they manifest as creative language utilization utilizing multimodal signs. As depicted in Figure 3, a commenter incorporates an image with ambiguous meanings to fulfill their communicative needs and evoke joyful laughter. It is worth noting that the image can be identified as a form of dad jokes, as per our afore-mentioned definition, as it plays on the semantic meaning of the Chinese character "拉(lā)". The character "拉(lā)" has multiple interpretations as a verb, including dragging, shitting, and helping others, among others. In the picture, "拉(lā)" is displayed on a pink door, conveying the action of pulling the door. However, the figure within the image misinterprets the meaning of "拉(lā)", mistakenly assuming that it signifies permission to defecate in front of the door. Amusingly, his misinterpretation and subsequent actions result in his arrest by the police.

Figure 3: An isolated image: the figure in the picture took a dump in front of the door with "拉(lā)" character, then being arrested by the police.

4.1.3 Trans-semiotic translanguaging play

Pennycook (2017) has proposed that research on translanguaging should encompass a broad spectrum of semiotic possibilities rather than solely focusing on language codes. As such, translanguaging encompasses "multimodal social semiotics" (Li and Ho 2018: 38), emphasizing not only the utilization of integrated linguistic repertoires but also the dynamic combination of integrated semiotic repertoires for meaning-making. The advent of digital technology further expands the array of available semiotic repertoires for language users (Zhao and Flewitt 2019), enabling them to draw upon multiple semiotic resources in online communication. In the subsequent section, it becomes evident that much of language play operates in a wider range of semiotic possibilities via the affordances of the Weibo platform.

In the comment section, Chinese online users combine languages with multiple semiotic resources such as emojis and punctuation marks to construct trans-languaging language play. Examples are provided in Table 3. The first comment in the table is 小鱼问大鱼："大～鱼～你～喜～欢～吃～什～么～鱼～啊？"大鱼说："我喜欢吃说话慢的鱼"，小鱼："哦酱我造了". The commenter engages in the process of creative language play by manipulating the punctuation mark in the writing system, as well as regional accent, visually presenting the witty reaction of the small fish to avoid being eaten. There is a great distinction between the two sentences expressed by the small fish. In the previous sentence, the commenter adds a tilde mark that indicates an extension of the tone after each character to show the slower-speaking characteristics of the small fish. In the latter, the commenter

Table 3: Three comments with multiple semiotic resources sorted by hot degree.

Commenters	Time	Likes	Contents
酸**	22/6/ 23	2,287	小鱼问大鱼："大～鱼～你～喜～欢～吃～什～么～鱼～啊？"大鱼说："我喜欢吃说话慢的鱼"，小鱼："哦酱我造了"😺 [A small fish asks a big one, "what ~ kind ~ of ~ fish ~ do ~ you ~ like?" The big fish replies, "I like eating those that speak slowly." The small fish says, "ok, got it." 😺]
张**	22/6/ 23	70	"小白➕小白等于什么？""小白兔（two）"😺 [What is xiǎobái plus xiǎobái? "xiǎobáitù (two)" 😺]
那**	22/6/ 23	54	从前有只与众不同的鹌鹑，别的鹌鹑都是在白天下蛋，只有它很喜欢在晚上下蛋，于是它的？们有了一个特殊的新名字叫做：晚鹌鹑? [Once upon a time, there was a unique quail. All the other quails laid their eggs in the daytime, but only the unique one liked laying its eggs at night. So, its ? had a special new name: wǎn ān chǔn? (Good night, idiot)]

deliberately removes the tilde "~" and converts the accent from Mandarin to Taiwanese "哦酱我造了 ('ok, got it' in Mandarin)". Since "ok, got it" takes fewer words in Taiwanese than in Mandarin, so that the small fish can speed up the entire sentence.

In the following translanguaging play, the phonetic similarities between different named languages and the meaning of certain words are explicitly manipulated. As depicted in the second instance (refer to Table 3), the commenter begins by combining a specific symbol and languages to pose the question "小白➕小白等于什么？ (What is xiǎobái plus xiǎobái?)". In this question, the original Chinese character "加 ('plus' in Mandarin)" is replaced by "➕", resulting in the visual nature of translanguaging. Subsequently, in the response, the commenter utilizes a combination of English and emojis to provide a creative answer. Since the number of xiǎobái is 2, it is translated as "two" in English so the answer becomes xiǎobái (two). Remarkably, Xiǎobái (two) bears a similar pronunciation to the Chinese phrase "小白兔 (xiǎobáitù, 'little white rabbit' in Mandarin)", thereby transforming the final answer into "little white rabbit".

In addition to the creative use of specific symbols, commenters also utilize the visual language of emojis to convey meaning, as evident in the last comment in Table 3: "从前有只与众不同的鹌鹑， 别的鹌鹑都是在白天下蛋， 只有它很喜欢在晚上下?， 于是它的?们有了一个特殊的新名字叫做： 晚鹌鹑?". In this example, the commenter replaces the original Chinese character "蛋(egg)" with an egg emoji in the last two sentences. This substitution contributes to the defamiliarization of the joke and creates a lighthearted effect. On one hand, the novel expression helps to capture the attention of some readers. On the other hand, this unfamiliar expression may lead to confusion and incomprehension among others.

4.1.4 Intercultural translanguaging play

In relation to intercultural communication, which aims to address cultural or linguistic differences in order to achieve communication goals (Zhu 2019), dad jokes that go against the cooperative principle of conversational communication (Hye-Knudsen 2021) may rely on linguistic or cultural differences to evoke humorous effects. These jokes are amusing not only because they violate linguistic conventions but also because the violation is connected to specific cultural factors. This allows speakers or listeners to better comprehend the humorous effect produced by these jokes. In other words, through these dad jokes, the solemn perception of traditional culture is subtly diluted, enabling people to further experience the joyous effect of challenging tradition in a gentle manner.

As demonstrated in Table 4, the content of this joke is based on the renowned novel *Journey to the West*. The joke revolves around three main characters: Sun

Table 4: The comment playing with Traditional Chinese culture sorted by hot degree.

Commenters	Time	Likes	Contents
这**	22/6/23	1,447	过年了，牛魔王犯错了，铁扇公主不停的批评他，孙悟空看不下去了对铁扇公主说"嫂嫂，还批牛爷？"铁扇公主愣了一下，说"谢谢谢谢"
			[New Year's Eve, Bull Demon King made a mistake, his wife kept criticizing him, Sun Wukong could not stand it and said to her "sister-in-law, haí pī niúyé?" Sister-in-law froze for a moment and said, "Thank you, thank you."]

Wukong, Bull Demon King, and Princess Iron Fan. Within the novel, Bull Demon King and Princess Iron Fan have a distinct relationship, with Bull Demon King epitomizing the fear of his wife. The first half of the joke accurately portrays their relationship as depicted in the original story. However, the joke creator mischievously establishes a false background discourse to set the stage for Sun Wukong's words. In other words, the first sentence, "过年了 (New Year's Eve)," serves as a humorous introduction laid down by the joke maker. This logically leads to the sentence "嫂嫂，还批牛爷？ (Sister-in-law, still criticizing your husband?)." The phrase "还批牛爷 (haí pī niúyé)" sounds similar to "happy new year," which simultaneously reflects Sun Wukong's reaction to Princess Iron Fan's continued criticism of her husband and responds to the false background discourse of "New Year's Eve." Furthermore, Princess Iron Fan's response, "谢谢谢谢 (thank you, thank you)," not only clarifies the linguistic manipulation but also presents a slightly foolish image of Princess Iron Fan that deviates from the traditional characterization. Ultimately, this further enhances the humorous atmosphere. It is evident that humor in translanguaging play stems not only from dynamic linguistic practices that manipulate language rules but also from the playful manipulation of images inherent in traditional culture. Thus, creative translanguaging play encompasses more than just linguistic structures, as it is both personal and cultural, as asserted by Schreiber (2015).

Collectively, these findings indicate that commenters, through the process of language play, have the ability to manipulate various aspects of linguistic properties. This includes the writing systems, pronunciation systems, and meanings of words in different languages, as well as the interplay of linguistic features with traditional culture. It is worth noting that the Weibo platform, with its multimodal input systems, provides Chinese online users with semiotic resources that enable them to engage in creative translanguaging play, something that conventional users may not typically do.

4.2 The motivation of language users' translanguaging play

"To fully understand language play, it is essential to consider not only the strategies employed by language users, but also the intentions behind their use of language" (Li and Lee 2021, p. 126). In order to explore the reasons behind the emergence of creative language play among netizens in the comment section, we conducted semi-structured online interviews with two individuals who willingly participated in the study.

4.2.1 Translanguaging as joke facilitation

According to Hye-Knudsen (2021), dad jokes are often described as bad, unfunny, and lacking humor, and telling such jokes may require the teller to endure potential embarrassment and public judgement. However, similar to the use of translanguaging strategies in self-praise to avoid possible offense in social interactions (Ren and Guo 2022), the utilization of translanguaging practices in dad jokes can, to a certain extent, alleviate the potential embarrassment associated with telling a bad joke and allow the speakers to save face. Moreover, the fluid and dynamic nature of manipulating well-defined language structures, different languages, and multiple semiotic modes further enhances the creativity of language play and extends the playful effect of anti-humorous dad jokes.

The following semi-structured online interviews provide evidence of the creativity and playfulness of translanguaging practices. According to Excerpt 1, when asked to elaborate on what made the joke funny, Participant A simply responded with "funny" and briefly explained that "栓Q is closely related to our buzzwords in China today." This indicates that Participant A is aware of the sociocultural context in which the language play originated, as well as the relevant cyberculture. In other words, the commenter intends to use "栓Q" to establish a connection with other netizens who are familiar with the buzzword and the relevant cyberculture, ultimately fostering a shared identity among those who traverse the online space. In Excerpt 2, Participant B also expressed that the joke "矮(ǎi) love 游(yóu)" (which phonetically resembles "I love you" in Mandarin) was much more enjoyable compared to others. Through transcending fixed linguistic structures and systems, these translanguaging practices not only enhance the humor and fun of language play but also capture the attention of readers or viewers. They serve to draw people in by utilizing playful language elements that go beyond conventional linguistic boundaries.

Excerpt 1   Researcher: 你前面说到，觉得它有意思，能具体说一下吗？ [Can you specifically explain what kind of fun it is?]

Participant A: 就感觉挺有意思的，而且栓 q 嘛，也和现在我们网络用语联系挺大的 [It's interesting. 栓Q also has a close relation to the buzzwords on social media.]

Excerpt 2 Researcher: 你的评论是原创还是在哪里看到的呢？ [Did you create this joke?]
Participant B: 不是原创，在小红书上看到的 [No, I saw it from another app.]
Researcher: 那为什么会评论这句话呢？ [Why did you comment on this one?]
Participant B: 也没什么特别的吧，就是感觉众多笑话里这个比较好笑 [Nothing special. I just thought this one was more fun.]

4.2.2 Translanguaging play as a source of enjoyment

Throughout history, language play has been driven by various pragmatic purposes. It serves not only as a means of personal and public enjoyment but also as a way to express disagreement, discontent with living conditions, and the desire for social change (Li and Lee 2021; Luk 2013). However, when it comes to translanguaging language play in the context of dad jokes, the aim is to achieve nonsensical cooling effects, as per the contributor's requirements. Users engage in language play solely for the purpose of entertainment, either for themselves or for the amusement of others. In this sense, the emphasis on enjoyment (Ren and Guo 2022; Zhang and Ren 2022) is a distinctive characteristic of boundary-transcending translanguaging practices observed in dad jokes in this particular study.

Excerpt 1 Researcher: 你评论完后，有没有再看榜姐的微博呢？ 看了的话有什么感受吗？ [How do you feel when reading the whole comments about dad jokes?]
Participant A: 就是很好笑啊啊啊哈哈哈。感觉现在网友很多梗，上网冲浪能缓解一下现生里出现的不开心，挺好的。 [I think online users are very talented and humorous. It's very funny and surfing the internet can relax me from the stressful real world.]

Excerpt 2 Researcher: 会经常看榜姐的互动话题吗？ 对这一期冷笑话的互动话题有什么看法？ [Do you often browse the interactive topics? What do you think of the interactive topic of this issue?]

Participant B: 不经常看， 刷到才会看。 我觉得很好， 可以从中找
到乐趣， 并且摸鱼的时候可以打发时间 [Not often. I think it's good
since I can enjoy playful fun when loafing on the job.]

The semi-structured online interviews shed further light on the ingenious nature of
this language play in achieving enjoyment and mental pleasure. For example,
Participant B expressed her positive attitude towards the interactive topic, stating
that it was a means for her to experience enjoyment and pass the time at work.
Similarly, Participant A explained that surfing the internet could provide relaxation
from the stress of the real world. Therefore, the translanguaging play observed in the
comment section not only challenges traditional patterns of language play but also
offers new opportunities for participants to escape the pressures and monotony of
everyday life by engaging with and commenting on these amusing jokes.

Indeed, it is important to recognize that the enjoyment derived from the
translanguaging language play in dad jokes stems not only from the breaking
of language rules and the innovation of language play at linguistic and semiotic
levels but also from the creative rebellion against traditional Chinese culture, as
exemplified by the case of *Journey to the West* discussed earlier. The joke creator and
viewer derive additional pleasure from challenging and nudging the conventional
aspects of traditional culture. This act of rebellion can be understood as a form of
playful subversion, a concept previously explored by scholars (Li and Zhu 2019;
Li et al. 2020). On one hand, participants experience the pleasure of playing with
language rules and subverting long-held conventions within the alternative reality
created by playful subversion. On the other hand, these linguistic practices that mock
conventions and authorities, as they continue to evolve, will eventually transform
into a new type of cultural form and become the target of future subversions. To
some extent, this cycle contributes to the continuous vitality of language and culture,
as they adapt and thrive through playful subversion and creative rebellion against
established norms.

5 Conclusion

The results revealed that the boundaries of languages seem porous for Chinese
micro-blogging users, and their language play concerning dad jokes demonstrated
tremendous translanguaging nature linguistically and semiotically. Regarding the
motivation of the participants to play translanguaging practices, it was found that the
playful jokes with translanguaging practices were more appealing to readers or
viewers because the combination between diverse languages and multiple semiotic
resources rendered jokes funnier. Moreover, such digital-platform-mediated

language play not only challenges the traditional patterns of language play regarding the Chinese writing system, but at times produces playful effects through creative manipulation of the linguistic and semiotic features.

By emphasizing the dynamic nature of languaging practices, translanguaging offers new perspectives on language play. Language in translanguaging play is no longer seen as a static and isolated system bound by well-defined boundaries between language and other semiotic signs. Moreover, language play also highlights the "open-ended" (Baynham and Lee 2019, p. 189) and playful nature of translanguaging, emphasizing that all communicative resources hold significance and meaning within translanguaging practices. This suggests that the boundaries between different resources become blurred, and various resources can be utilized creatively in the process of language play. Overall, the study sheds light on the dynamic and multifaceted nature of translanguaging practices and expands our understanding of how language play operates within this framework.

This study focused solely on exploring the translanguaging play of microblogging users, specifically within the context of Chinese dad jokes. The sample size of participants in the study was relatively small, suggesting the need for future studies to enlarge the sample size to obtain more generalizable results. The investigation reveals that language norms and practices are not fixed but evolve through multiple, fluid, and constant negotiation, aligning with the notion of translanguaging. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to continue capturing the creative language play of language users in the Chinese digital space or other specific speech acts, as well as its impacts on language structures and norms of language use.

References

Ai, Bin, Mingjunbao Hao & Xiaomei Qiao. 2022. Unpacking translanguaging practices in multilingual business communication in China: A qualitative phenomenological approach. *Applied Linguistics* 43(6). 1184–1206.

Albawardi, Areej. 2018. The translingual digital practices of Saudi females on WhatsApp. *Discourse, Context & Media* 25. 68–77.

Baker, Colin. 2001. *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*, 3rd edn. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Baynham, Mike & Tong King Lee. 2019. *Translation and translanguaging*. London: Routledge.

Crystal, David. 1998. *Language play*. London: Penguin.

Cook, Guy. 2000. *Language play, language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Finlay, Linda. 2008. A dance between the reduction and reflexivity: Explicating the "phenomenological psychological attitude". *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 39. 1–32.

Finlay, Linda. 2012. Unfolding the phenomenological research process iterative stages of "Seeing Afresh". *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53(2). 172–201.

García, Ofelia & Wei Li. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Groenewald, Thomas. 2004. A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3(1). 42–55.

Hye-Knudsen, Marc. 2021. Dad Jokes and the deep roots of fatherly teasing. *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 5(2). 83–98.

Lee, Jerry Won. 2022. Translanguaging research methodologies. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* 1(1). 100004.

Lee, Tong King & Wei Li. 2020. Translanguaging and momentarity in social interaction. In Anna De Fina & Alexandra Georgakopoulou (eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of discourse studies*, 394–416. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Li, Wei. 2011. Moment analysis and translanguaging space: Discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43(5). 1222–1235.

Li, Wei. 2018a. Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics* 39(1). 9–30.

Li, Wei. 2018b. Translanguaging and code-switching: What's the difference? Retrieved June 25, 2022, from OUPblog | Oxford University Press's Academic Insights for the Thinking World.

Li, Wei, Alfred Tsang, Nick Wong & Pedro Lok. 2020. Kongish Daily: Researching translanguaging creativity and subversiveness. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 17(3). 309–335.

Li, Wei & Hua Zhu. 2019. Tranßcripting: Playful subversion with Chinese characters. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 16(2). 145–161.

Li, Wei & Tong King Lee. 2021. Language play in and with Chinese: Traditional genres and contemporary developments. *Global Chinese* 7(2). 125–142.

Li, Wei & Wing Yee (Jenifer) Ho. 2018. Language learning sans frontiers: A translanguaging view. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 38. 33–59.

Liu, Maofu, Weili Guan, Jie Yan & Huijun Hu. 2019. Correlation identification in multimodal Weibo via back propagation neural network with genetic algorithm. *Journal of Visual Communication and Image Representation* 60. 312–318.

Luk, Jasmine. 2013. Bilingual language play and local creativity in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 10(3). 236–250.

Merriam-Webster. 2019. "Dad Joke" *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dad%20joke (accessed 11 August 2022).

Nightingale, Richard & Pilar Safont. 2019. Pragmatic translanguaging: Multilingual practice in adolescent online discourse. In Patricia Salazar-Campillo & Victòria Codina-Espurz (eds.), *Investigating the learning of pragmatics across ages and contexts*, 167–195. Leiden: Brill.

Otheguy, Ricardo, Ofelia García & Wallis Reid. 2015. Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review* 6(3). 281–307.

Pennycook, Alastair. 2017. Translanguaging and semiotic assemblages. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 14(2). 1–14.

People. 2017. 微博泛娱乐化倾向的影响及对策 [The impact of the tendency of abused amusement on Weibo and its countermeasures]. http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0830/c414067-29504931.html (accessed 30 August 2022).

People's Media Convergence. 2022. 栓q什么意思？我真的栓q什么梗？我真的会谢出自哪里？ [What does "栓q" mean?]. https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1736255397250160468&wfr=spider&for=pc (accessed 21 July 2022).

Ren, Wei & Yaping Guo. 2024. Translanguaging in self-praise on Chinese social media. *Applied Linguistics Review* 15. 355–376.

Ren, Wei, Yaping Guo & Wei Li. 2022. Chinese young people's attitudes towards translanguaging in self-praise on social media. *Journal of Pragmatics* 198(3). 93–103.

Schreiber, Brooke Ricker. 2015. "I am what I am": Multilingual identity and digital translanguaging. *Language Learning & Technology* 19(3). 69–87.

Statista. 2022. *Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022, ranked by number of monthly active users*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networksranked-by number-of-users/ (accessed 21 August 2022).

Ying, Lu & Jan Blommaert. 2020. Understanding memes on Chinese social media: Biaoqing. *Chinese Language and Discourse* 11(2). 226–260.

Zhang, Wei. 2015. Multilingual creativity on China's Internet. *World Englishes* 34(2). 231–246.

Zhang, Yi & Wei Ren. 2020. 'This is so skrrrr' – creative translanguaging by Chinese micro-blogging users. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 19(3). 289–304.

Zhang, Yi & Wei Ren. 2022. From hǎo to hǒu – stylising online communication with Chinese dialects. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2022.2061981.

Zhao, Sumin & Rosie Flewitt. 2019. Young Chinese immigrant children's language and literacy practices on social media: A translanguaging perspective. *Language and Education* 34(3). 267–285.

Zhu, Hua. 2019. *Exploring intercultural communication: Language in action*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.