

# The Translatability of Multilingualism in Taiwanese Literature

## The case of Wu Ming-yi's *The Stolen Bicycle*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the issue of language use in literature, examining the techniques employed in multilingual literary works and the possibilities of translating such works. The subject of analysis is Taiwanese author Wu Ming-yi's 2015 novel, *The Stolen Bicycle* [單車失竊記]. While the novel is primarily written in Mandarin Chinese, it incorporates written representations of over a dozen languages. The study begins with the question of how these languages were blended and integrated into a cohesive work. Through analysis, it became clear that, aside from Mandarin, only four languages—Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou, Japanese, and English—appear frequently in the text. Other languages make only a single appearance. Among these four, Taiwanese Hokkien appears most frequently, represented in Chinese characters, with romanized pronunciations thoughtfully appended to certain words. In contrast, Tsou in romanized letters, Japanese in kana, and English in the Latin alphabet are translated into or paraphrased in Mandarin, primarily through third-party translations or indirect speech, and are limited to proper nouns and proverbs. By relegating languages other than Taiwanese Hokkien to the background, the novel effectively reveals its multilingual nature, despite being structurally composed of only two dominant languages—Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien. After analyzing the original text, the study then compares it with the English translation by Darryl Sterk. One of the most noteworthy findings is that in the English translation, Japanese replaced Taiwanese Hokkien as the primary element representing the novel's multilingualism. Not only were sections originally written in Japanese retained, but even parts originally written in Chinese characters were rendered in Japanese reading. A similar approach was applied to Tsou. Conversely, Taiwanese Hokkien, which played a central role in the original, was significantly reduced in the English translation, with only a few distinctive words or expressions retained.

Additionally, the mixing of Mandarin Chinese and English, discernible in the original text, became harder to identify in the translation. These observations reveal that the language structure of the English translation differs significantly from the original, and the visibility of the text's multilingualism is diminished. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that the methods of expressing multilingualism in a literary work are influenced by the characteristics of the dominant writing systems and the distances between the languages involved. Similarly, the translation of such works is inevitably subject to these constraints.

**KEYWORDS:** multilingualism, translation, Taiwan, Wu Ming-yi, *The Stolen Bicycle*

**要旨：**本稿は文学の言語使用問題に注目し、多言語を使用した文学作品の方法とそれに対する翻訳の可能性を考察するためのものである。対象として、台湾人作家呉明益 (Wu, Ming-yi) が2015年に発表した『單車失竊記 (The Stolen Bicycle)』を取り上げた。同作品は主に中国語で書かれているが、十数種類に及ぶ言語の文字表記を使用している。それらの言語をいかに混在させ、一つのまとまった作品として成り立たせたのかという問題意識が本稿の出発点であった。分析を通して、中国語以外で頻繁に出現する言語は台湾語、鄒語、日本語、英語の4言語のみで、ほかの言語はほぼ一回しか出現しないことが明らかになった。また、使用頻度の高い4言語のうち、台湾語は漢字表記という形で最も多く挿入されており、単語によっては発音を示すローマ字表記が丁寧に付け加えられている。これに対し、鄒語のローマ字表記と日本語の仮名と英語のアルファベットは、第三者の翻訳または間接話法を通して中国語に置き換えられているため、固有の呼称やことわざを中心にちりばめられる程度にとどまる。このように、台湾語以外の言語を後景化させることにより、実質的には中国語と台湾語の2言語による構成にもかかわらず、多言語性を上手に開示することができた。原作の方法を確認したあと、次の作業としてステルク・ダリル (Sterk Darryl) による英訳との比較対照に取り組んだ。得た結論の中で最も特筆すべき点は、英訳の中で日本語が台湾語に取って代わって作品の多言語性を表す最も重要な要素になったことである。元々日本語で表記された部分はもちろんだが、漢字で表記された部分も日本語読みを当てて訳されている。同じことは、鄒語についてもいえる。一方、原作の中で重要な位置を占めていた台湾語は逆に大幅に省略され、一部の特徴的な単語や言い回ししか訳されていない。そして英語は、原作では判別できた中国語との混用現象も分かりづらくなっている。これらのことから、英訳では原作と比べ言語構成が変わり、多言語が混在していることの視認性も低くなった。これを踏まえ、多言語を使用した作品の表現方法自体は主要使用文字の特性と言語間の距離によって異なるのと同様に、それに対する翻訳もそれらの制約を受けざるを得ない側面があると結論付けた。

**キーワード：**多言語、翻訳、台湾、呉明益、自転車泥棒

## 1. Introduction

When based on Western understanding, literature can be described as the figurative expression of language. It generally takes two major forms: the spoken word and the written text, though the latter is often emphasized, given that the Latin root *littera* means “letter.” A literary work is typically composed using the script of a single language. This understanding is the most common and practical, as evidenced by current library classification systems, which prioritize language as a primary criterion. Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson pointed out in *Imagined Communities* (1983), the influence of “print capitalism” (Anderson, 1997) has historically limited literature to languages that have attained political and cultural hegemony. Under capitalism, books that can be produced uniformly, reproduced repeatedly, and distributed on a large scale are sought as commodities. Before dialects, vernaculars, or minority languages with small speaker populations could establish orthographies and enter the publishing market, linguistic exclusivity had already become a feature of this industry.

In other words, from both a conceptual and formal perspective, literature appears fundamentally incompatible with so-called “multilingualism” or “plurilingualism.” However, recent changes in the linguistic environment have begun to challenge this assumption. First, globalization has accelerated the growth of multilingual speakers. Simultaneously, language revitalization movements have fostered respect for the uniqueness of oral expressions. Moreover, innovations in information technology have shifted publishing from print to digital media, enabling the distribution and reception of books to transcend the boundaries of linguistic communities. As multilingual environments become more prominent, the number of multilingual speakers rises, and multilingual awareness grows, the methods for literary creation are expanding. Writers are increasingly moving away from the principle of using only one language, with more works employing the original scripts of various languages to indicate different speech acts. As a result, multilingualism within individual works is becoming increasingly visible.

These shifts in literary practices pose new challenges for translation. Among the three types of translation identified by Roman Jakobson, interlingual translation (Jakobson, 2015)—the conversion from a source language to a target language—was already challenging, and the existence of multiple source languages further complicates the process. Questions

arise as to how the insertion of different scripts alongside the primary script can be reproduced in translation, and how the author's intent to reveal multilingualism at the expense of aesthetic simplicity can be reflected. With these questions at its core, this paper focuses on literary works characterized by multilingualism. The methodology involves examining the orthographic practices of each language in the original text and conducting a comparative analysis with its translation. Through this approach, the aim is to explore both the possibilities and challenges of translating multilingual literary works.

## 2. Orthographic Methods by Language in the Original Work

Wu Ming-yi's *The Stolen Bicycle* (2015)<sup>1</sup> is a novel that uses multiple scripts to create a multilingual narrative. To briefly summarize the plot: the protagonist, "I" (surname Cheng), comes from a family that has experienced three incidents of bicycle theft, and about 20 years ago, the family's head, his father, disappeared while riding a bicycle. Although his father remains missing, the bicycle is eventually found after passing through the hands of various people. Through the journey of this single bicycle, the novel portrays over half a century of Taiwanese history, beginning from the Japanese colonial period. While the main language is Mandarin Chinese, the narrative incorporates or references multiple languages. This reflects the phenomenon of linguistic blending shaped by successive waves of colonization and seeks to liberate indigenous languages long repressed (Lee, 2020).

The main narrative of the work is primarily written in Mandarin Chinese, but some sections, including dialogue and letters, incorporate other languages. The languages used, listed in order of their frequency in the novel, are Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou, Japanese, English, and other languages.<sup>2</sup> Below are examples illustrating the orthographic methods used for each language.

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1 The title 單車失竊記 [The Stolen Bicycle] is the same as the one used when Vittorio De Sica's 1948 Italian film *Ladri di Biciclette* was released in Taiwan. One chapter of the novel, titled "單車竊賊" [Bicycle Thieves], borrows from the film's English title, *The Bicycle Thief*, and the film is explicitly referenced within the text (Wu, 2017, p. 173). These elements suggest that the novel was written with a strong awareness of De Sica's film. Although the work was first published in 2015, this paper cites the 2016 revised edition as its source text.

2 As will be discussed later in this paper, the speech of a particular character is set up so that Tsou and Japanese are mixed together and indistinguishable from one another, making it difficult to grasp the difference in occurrence frequency. Here, I have listed Tsou first, given that it is a native language of Taiwan.

## 2.1 Taiwanese Hokkien

A-1	<b>Taiwanese Hokkien</b>	初夏的陽光已經升起，城仔內開始要鬧熱起來。(Wu, 2016, p. 16) <sup>3</sup>
	<b>Literal translation</b>	The early summer sun had risen, and the <i>siànn-á-lāi</i> (in town) was beginning to <i>lāu-jiāt</i> (buzz). <sup>4</sup>
A-2	<b>Taiwanese Hokkien</b>	我媽說我八歲以前「真正歹飼」：吐奶揀 (king) 食、出珠 (長水痘)、生蛇 (正式的名稱應該說是帶狀皰疹)、定定跋倒 (pua'h-tó, 常跌倒)；但八歲以後卻健壯如「鳥屎仔樹」(一種鄉下野地到處都有的雀榕)(Wu, 2016, p. 20)
	<b>Literal translation</b>	My mom said that before I was eight years old, I was “ <i>tsin-tsiànn pháinn-tshī</i> (really hard to feed)”: <i>thòo-ling</i> (spit up milk), <i>king</i> ( <i>king</i> )- <i>tsiah</i> (picky eating), <i>tshut-tsu</i> (get chickenpox), <i>senn-tsuâ</i> (The official name is shingles), <i>tiànn-tiànn pua'h-tó</i> ( <i>pua'h-tó</i> , always fall down); but after the age of eight, I grew strong and tall as a “ <i>tsiáu-sái-á-tshiu</i> ” (a kind of banyan that can be found everywhere in the countryside).
A-3	<b>Taiwanese Hokkien</b>	「嗯。阿公以前田很大？」 「一甲多呢。小時候我們會被派去到稻田裡，做稻草人。」 「扎稻草人？」 「毋是，我講的是做 (tsuè) 稻草人。」二舅國語講得不順，轉換成台語。「彼時囡仔年紀猶傷細，無法度鬥相共 (tàu-sann-kāng, 互相幫忙)，但是佇稻仔結子到收割進前，阮會予大人派去『驚粟鳥仔』。就是跔 (khù) 佇田底，伸手共 (kā) 稻草人搨 (lak, 抓) 牢咧，輕輕仔搖。」(Wu, 2016, p. 339)

3 Underlining is applied by the author to indicate text written in languages other than Mandarin Chinese. Unless otherwise noted, the language type is that discussed in the same section. However, for Taiwanese Hokkien, only the portions that differ from Mandarin Chinese are highlighted. The romanization in parentheses is as in the original text. The same approach is applied throughout the following examples.

4 The English translation is by the author of this paper. In order to reproduce the appearance of the original text as much as possible, a literal translation method has been adopted, and the underlined parts are written in italics with the original language. The romanization in round brackets is as in the original text, and where there is a supplementary explanation in Chinese, only that portion has been translated into English. However, underlining has been omitted because the romanization overlaps with the immediately preceding words. (Minimal annotations are given in square brackets, but please refer to the English translation cited in Section 3 of the main text for the entire contents.

	<b>Literal translation</b>	<p>“Oh? Did <u>A-kong</u> (Grandpa) have a big field?”</p> <p>“Around a hectare. When we were kids, we’d be sent to the rice paddies to make scarecrows.”</p> <p>“To bundle scarecrows?”</p> <p>“<u>M̄sī, guá kóng--ê sī tsuè</u> (tsuè) <u>tiū-tsháu-lân</u> (No, I’m talking about being a scarecrow).” My uncle’s Mandarin wasn’t too good, and he switched to Taiwanese. “<u>Hit-sì gín-á nî-kí iáu siunn sè</u> (We kids were too small back then), <u>bô-huat-tôo</u> (unable) <u>tàu-sann-kāng</u> (help each other), <u>tān-sī tī tiū-á ki-at-tsi kàu siu-kuah tsin-tsing</u> (but before the rice ripens and is about to be harvested), <u>guán ē hōo tuā-lâng phài-khì</u> ‘kiann tshik-tsiáu-á’ (We were sent out by the adults to scare off the sparrows). <u>Tō sī khú</u> (khù) <u>tī tshân-té</u> (That is hiding out in the field), <u>tshun-tshiu kā</u> (kā) <u>tiū-tsháu-lân lak</u> (lak, grip) <u>tiâu-leh</u> (grip the scarecrows tight), <u>khin-khin-á iò</u> (shake it gently).”</p>
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The Taiwanese Hokkien is derived from the language spoken in southern Fujian, China. Despite being spoken by an overwhelming 70% of Taiwan’s population, it was marginalized during the Japanese colonial period as “*Hontōgo*” [本島語; island language in Japanese],<sup>5</sup> and, after WWII under the Kuomintang regime, was relegated to a peripheral status as a subordinate dialect to Mandarin Chinese which is called “*Guo-yu*” [國語, national language].<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, the movement to find a writing system has become more active with the rise of nationalism, and in 2006, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan announced the Taiwanese Romanization Scheme “*Tâi-uân Bàn-lâm-gí Lô-má-jī Phing-im Hong-àn*” [台灣閩南語羅馬字拼音方案; abbreviated as TL] and recommended the use of both Chinese characters and romanized letters.<sup>7</sup> As shown in the underlined sections of the examples above, the novel employs Chinese characters to represent Taiwanese Hokkien,

5 In this article, Japanese romanization will follow the Hepburn system, in line with the English translation.

6 For certain ethnic groups, native languages differ. The language commonly referred to as “Taiwanese” originally stems from Minnan (Hokkien), also known as *Holo*. It became the colloquial term due to its widespread use, though other languages, such as Hakka and various Indigenous languages, are also spoken.

7 It is based on the “Taiwan Language Phonetic Alphabet” (TLPA), developed since the 1990s, and combines “Peh-ōe-jī” [白話字] and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). In 2024, it was officially renamed the “*Tâi-uân Tâi-gí Lô-má-jī Phing-im Hong-àn*” [台灣台語羅馬字拼音方案]. However, there are still calls to use only romanization, and unification has not yet been achieved. In this article, the romanization of Taiwanese Hokkien will follow the dictionary compiled based on the above scheme, as in the original work.

supplementing certain words with annotations depending on the context. Specifically, words with sounds or meanings close to Chinese characters are either left as they are (A-1 & A-2 & A-3) or emphasized with quotation marks (A-2). On the other hand, for words that do not have this proximity, either the pronunciation in Roman letters, the meaning in Mandarin Chinese, or both are added in parentheses (A-2 & A-3). The narrator, “I,” evokes the author himself—someone born around the 1970s who grew up receiving schooling in Mandarin Chinese. However, the older generation, like his mother and uncle, born before the war, are not fluent in Mandarin Chinese and use Taiwanese Hokkien in their daily lives. It is likely that the author has deliberately and extensively incorporated Taiwanese Hokkien to highlight the reality of linguistic disconnection and code-switching between generations.<sup>8</sup>

2.2 Tsou

B-1	Tsou	<p>我漸漸發現，巴蘇亞的日語往往被用在敘事裡，而鄒族語則會在表達感情與景色的描述時出現。我本想把這兩種語言的段落特別標註出來，但想想或許不用。因為這兩種語言在講述者身上已經合而為一，鄒族的聲腔與日語的聲腔，就像山壁和風、樹以及生長其上的寄生植物，再也難以分解開了。</p> <p>這份筆記裡的文字確實經過我潤飾，但我沒有擅自增刪。而為了方便不同身分的讀者閱讀這份筆記，我多事地在一些詞語的後頭用括號加了註解。</p> <p>二十歲那年冬天快來的時候，我離開故鄉登上日軍運兵船前往海南島（略）。</p> <p>我們族人是楓葉的後代，新高山的子民。<i>ak'i</i>（祖父）說，在遙遠的時代，<i>Hamo</i>（天神哈莫）搖動楓樹，飄落的楓葉遂成為鄒族的祖先。後來發生了大洪水，人和動物為了躲避大洪水，就逃到 <i>patunkuon</i>（玉山），洪水退去了以後，族人才開始尋找新的家園。（Wu, 2017, pp. 142-143)<sup>9</sup></p>
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8 See Yang (2021) for Wu’s intention to write Taiwanese Hokkien. On the question of whether the purpose of writing Taiwanese Hokkien is to preserve and restore the real daily life and spoken scene, Wu replied: “There are at least two levels of writing language skills, one is what the author can speak and the other is what the author can write. I can speak better than I can write, which is not good. But sometimes, in order to write, I want the reader to feel it.”

9 The font follows that of the original text. The same applies throughout.

B-1	Literal translation	<p>I have come to realize that the Japanese language of Pasuya is often used in narration, while the Tsou language appears in the descriptions of feelings and scenery. I would have liked to have marked the passages in these two languages but thought it might not be necessary to do so. It is because the two languages have become one in the speaker, and the Tsou voice and the Japanese voice, like the mountain walls and the wind, or the trees and the parasitic plants that grow on them and can no longer be separated.</p> <p>The text in this note has indeed been polished by me, but I have not taken the liberty of adding or deleting anything. For the convenience of readers with different identities, I have taken the liberty of annotating some of the words with brackets at the end.</p> <p><b>When I was twenty years old and winter was approaching, I left my hometown and boarded a Japanese troop ship to Hainan Island . . . Our people are the descendants of the maple leaf, the people of <i>Niitakayama</i> (former name of Mount Yu in Japanese). According to <i>Aki</i> (Grandfather), in the distant past, <i>Hamo</i> (the god Hamo) shook the maple trees and the falling maple leaves became the ancestors of the Tsou. Later, a great flood occurred. People and animals fled to <i>Patunkuonu</i> (Mount Yu) to escape the flood, and it was only after the flood had receded that the Tsou began to look for a new home.</b></p>
B-2	Tsou	<p>那個月是我們族人說的<i>Cofkoyacifeohu</i>。<i>feohu</i>是月亮的意思，族人把時間上的一個月稱為「一個月亮」，一年的最後一個月亮是兩個月的時間，因為那是回復之月。<i>Cofkoyacifeohu</i>從字的表面上看是「乾淨的月亮」的意思（略）。</p> <p>我跟藤井少尉說，這是一個「乾淨的月」，可以做戰祭，也可以蓋房子。我不知道為什麼，把<i>getsu</i>唸成<i>tsuki</i>，因此藤井接話說：「對呀，這裡的月亮真是乾淨美麗。我的故鄉的月亮也美麗，不過是另外一種美。我們的部隊騎著銀輪（<i>ぎんりん</i>），抬頭也可以看見另一個<i>ぎんりん</i>。」</p> <p>（略）後來他們教我騎自轉車，那是我第一次騎自轉車。我很快地學會了怎麼用身體控制、感覺它。（Wu, 2017, pp. 145-146）<sup>10</sup></p>

10 As with the latter part of the above quote, these notes are transcribed from tapes recorded by a person of Tsou heritage, and thus different fonts will be used to mirror the original text. The same applies below.



<p>B-2</p>	<p>Literal translation</p>	<p>That month is what our people call <i>Cofkoyacifeohu</i>. <i>Feohu</i> means moon, and the people call one month in time “one moon”, and the last moon of the year is a two-month period because it is the month of restoration. <i>Cofkoyacifeohu</i> means “clean moon” from the surface of the word . . .</p> <p>I told Lieutenant <i>Fujii</i> (Japanese surname) that it was a “clean month” for making war sacrifices and building houses. I don’t know why, but I pronounced <i>getsu</i> (month in Japanese) as <i>tsuki</i> (moon in Japanese), so <i>Fujii</i> said, “Yes, the moon here is really clean and beautiful. The moon in my hometown is also beautiful, but in a different way. Our troops ride the silver wheels (<i>ginrin</i>; silver wheels in Japanese), and when we look up, we can see another <i>ginrin</i>.”</p> <p>. . . Later they taught me to ride a <i>jitensha</i> (bicycle in Japanese), which was my first time riding a <i>jitensha</i>. I quickly learned how to control and feel it with my body.</p>
<p>B-3</p>	<p>Tsou</p>	<p>比奈也佩服我身上關於另一座山的知識。我跟他說，我們族人有句話說：「<i>na’no mani’e isi pa’mam’za no yosku</i>（水中被吃的青苔可看出溪魚的多寡），<i>mamtanu’e pa’mam’za no yoska’aulu</i>（從青苔上的痕跡可看出魚的大小）。」我們都是那種懂得觀察青苔的人。（Wu, 2017, p. 224）</p>
	<p>Literal translation</p>	<p>K’nyaw also admired my knowledge of the other mountain. I told him that there is a saying among our people: “<i>Na’no mani’e isi pa’mam’za no yosku</i> (The moss eaten in the water shows the abundance of fish in the stream), <i>Mamtanu’e pa’mam’za no yoska’aulu</i> (The size of the fish can be seen from the marks on the moss).” We are the kind of people who know how to observe the moss.</p>

Tsou is one of the languages of the Indigenous people of Taiwan and linguistically belongs to the Austronesian language family.<sup>11</sup> Like Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou was prohibited from use in public for a long time before WWII, and only recently has a formal writing system been established under the mother tongue preservation movement. Since it lacks its own script, a romanized orthography was adopted in the “Writing Systems of the Formosan Languages,” published in 2005.<sup>12</sup> The main Tsou native speaker in

11 As of July 2024, 16 Indigenous groups are officially recognized in Taiwan. According to statistics from the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous population totals 603,605, with the Tsou people ranking 10th at 6,837 individuals. During the same period, Taiwan’s total population stood at 23,406,608. The proportion of native speakers for any Indigenous language remains low, placing these languages at risk of extinction.

12 It was constructed using the alphabet supplemented with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)

this work is the father—Pasuya—of a friend from the narrator’s generation. Having served as a soldier in the Japanese army during the Pacific War, he left behind tapes recording his experiences, mixing Tsou and Japanese. The transcriptions of these recordings, written in Mandarin Chinese through a third-party translation, are printed in a different font from the surrounding narrative text (B-1). This typographical distinction resembles the treatment of letters.<sup>13</sup> It raises an interesting question: why present these as notes? One possible reason is that the recordings may be long, making it necessary to clarify that the text has already been integrated and cannot be disassembled further into its original languages. Nevertheless, to evoke the original medium of speech, Tsou and Japanese appear throughout the text, primarily in names, place names, and proverbs. Regarding Tsou specifically, there are two methods used: (1) adding the meaning or Mandarin Chinese equivalent in parentheses after the romanized word (B-1 & B-3), and (2) providing explanations within the narrative (B-1 & B-2).<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3 Japanese

<b>C-1</b>	<b>Japanese</b>	可是自轉車這麼高大，對她而言就像是一匹鐵馬。（略）她將一隻腳從上桿與下桿間伸了過去，這樣就可以踩到右邊的踏板了。這是被孩子稱為「三角乗り」的騎車法。（Wu, 2017, pp. 8-9）
	<b>Literal translation</b>	But the <i>jitensha</i> (bicycle) was so tall, it was like a <i>thih-bé</i> (bicycle in Taiwanese Hokkien) to her . . . She put her foot between the top bar and the bottom bar so that she could step on the right pedal. This is the method of riding that the children called “ <i>sankakunori</i> (triangle riding)”.

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symbols. Notably, during the Japanese colonial period, there were attempts to use kana and romanization, while after the war, efforts were made to adopt the Mandarin phonetic symbols, Bopomofo (Zhu-yin Fu-hao).

- 13 In the story, six emails and one letter appear, all written in a different font from the main text. Additionally, notes about bicycles are inserted between chapters, with the paper color being noticeably darker than that of the main text.
- 14 Words that appear multiple times are written in romanization only from the second occurrence onward.

C-2	Japanese	那是一套從他學徒時代留下來的修車工具組，包括 <span>両口スパナ</span> （開口扳手）、 <span>スポークレンチ</span> （幅條調整器）、 <span>Torxレンチ</span> （梅花扳手）、 <span>ペダルスパナ</span> （踏板扳手）、 <span>チェーン切り</span> （打鏈器）．．．．．這些工具跟著老師傅幾十年了，傷痕累累卻帶著獨特的光澤。（Wu, 2017, p. 41）
	Literal translation	It's a car repair kit from his apprenticeship: <i>ryōguchi supana</i> (double-ended spanner), <i>supōku renchi</i> (spoke wrench), <i>Torx renchi</i> (Torx wrench), <i>pedaru supana</i> (pedal spanner), <i>chēn kiri</i> (chain cutter) .....These tools have been with the master for decades, scarred but with a unique luster.
C-3	Japanese	幾個月後，我上了運輸船，同為戰俘的日本士兵，還有尚在等待遣返的人都到門口來送別，用「 <span>これから生きていくよ</span> 」（希望你活得長久哪！）做為告別語。（Wu, 2017, p. 231）
	Literal translation	A few months later, when I boarded the transport ship, Japanese soldiers who were also POWs and those who were still waiting to be repatriated came to the gate to say goodbye with the words, “ <i>Korekara mo ikite iku yo</i> ” (Hope you live a long life!) as a farewell message.

During the Japanese colonial period, Japanese was the official language. According to statistics, in 1944, there were approximately 880,000 children enrolled in elementary school, with an enrollment rate of about 71% (Zhong, 1993). This indicates that Japanese was somewhat familiar to much of the prewar generation. Due to their influence, some Japanese words became ingrained in Taiwanese society, and many of these are still used across generations today. Examples include names of items introduced from Japan, such as bicycles and the tools to repair them. Common everyday expressions like “*ringo*” [りんご, apple] are also widely used.<sup>15</sup> The use of Japanese in the novel seems to highlight this postcolonial linguistic blending. This differs significantly from Taiwanese Hokkien and Tsou, which appear to assert language rights. For the most part, Japanese is written in kanji and kana, except in cases like B-2, where romanization is used to emphasize differences in pronunciation. Japanese appears either with or without parentheses (C-1 & C-2) and may also be explained through narration (C-1) or accompanied by Mandarin Chinese annotations providing names or meanings (C-2 & C-3).<sup>16</sup>

15 Other expressions such as “*ohayō*” [おはよう, good morning] and “-chan” [～ちゃん; a term of endearment] can also be found. For more details, refer to the chapter “*勅使大道*” [State Boulevard], which recounts memories from the Japanese colonial period.

## 2.4 English

D-1	<b>English</b>	漸漸地他習慣在早晨吃完豆漿油條準備入睡，用那台 REALISTIC LAB-59唱機放僅有的幾張唱片。他說他會的英文字大概就是這幾張唱片的名字的總合，它們分別是 Frank Sinatra和Nancy Sinatra的《Something Stupid》，Patti Page的《With My Eyes Wide Open I'm Dreaming》，以及徹爾尼鋼琴練習曲一百首。 阿布說著英語，然後自己便笑了出來，可能是覺得自己的發音怪怪的吧。他的笑帶著尷尬，卻讓我覺得他是一個單純的人，兩個人的距離一下子就拉近了。(Wu, 2017, p. 30)
	<b>Literal translation</b>	Gradually, he got used to playing the only records he had on the <i>REALISTIC LAB-59</i> turntable in the morning before he drank a soybean milk and ate a deep-fried dough stick and went to sleep. He said the only words he knew in English were probably the names of the records, which were <i>Frank</i> and <i>Nancy Sinatra's</i> "Something Stupid", <i>Patti Page's</i> "With My Eyes Wide Open I'm Dreaming", and <i>Chè-èr-ní</i> One Hundred Piano Pieces [Czerny's <i>Practical Method for Beginners on the Piano-forte Op.599</i> ]. A-pu spoke in English and then laughed out loud, probably because his English pronunciation was funny. His laugh was awkward, but it made me feel that he was a simple person, and the distance between the two of us was instantly narrowed.
D-2	<b>English</b>	「當時我可是喝了將近一年的咖啡，才得到她的信任的。」小夏給了我Annie的電話號碼，和她的mail信箱。(Wu, 2017, p. 65)
	<b>Literal translation</b>	"I had to drink coffee for almost a year to gain her trust." Little Hsia gave me <i>Annie's</i> phone number and her e-mail address.
D-3	<b>English</b>	男人用不甚流利卻有自信的英文告訴我，這棵樹會「捕捉正在升往天堂的靈魂」（大概是這樣的意思）。(Wu, 2017, p. 372) <sup>17</sup>
	<b>Literal translation</b>	The man told me, in not-so-fluent but confident English, that the tree would "catch the souls that are ascending to heaven" (something like that).

16 In the chapter “銀輪之月” [The Silver Moon], references are made to “高見順” [Takami Jun] and his poem “われは草なり” [Ware wa kusa nari, I Am Grass]. However, only parentheses are used, with no annotations or explanations provided. For more details, see Wu (2016, p. 140).

17 As this is a portion of a letter addressed to the protagonist by a friend, different fonts will be used to match the original text.

The relatively low usage of English in Taiwan is evident from the results of international English proficiency tests.<sup>18</sup> Since 2000, English education has been introduced earlier, moving from middle school to elementary school to enhance international competitiveness. However, the system still faces challenges, as it remains heavily focused on exam preparation.<sup>19</sup> That said, during the Cold War, Taiwan, as part of the capitalist bloc, was heavily influenced by American popular culture, including music. In daily life, many people use English names for personal or business reasons, and the trend of using foreign words and abbreviations is also prominent on the Internet and social media, etc. The alphabetic representations in the above examples (D-1 & D-2) appear to reflect this intriguing phenomenon. Notably, many of these instances involve proper nouns, such as brand names, personal names, and tool names, without any accompanying annotations. Additionally, as with Tsou and Japanese, there are instances where the text explains these terms in the narrative, effectively substituting them with Mandarin Chinese (D-1 & D-3).

2.5 Other languages

E-1	<p><b>Other languages</b></p>	<p>有時候，我想自己真正著迷的不是騎腳踏車這回事，而是那個一開始被米肖父子 (<u>Michaux père et fils</u>) 稱為「有踏板的快速的腳」 (<u>vélocipède à pédales</u>)，後來<u>Pierre Lallement</u>再改造成「<u>bicycle</u>」(混合拉丁文的「雙」 [<u>bi</u>] 與希臘文的「圓」 [<u>kyklos</u>]) 的詞，以及它所指涉的相關物事。</p> <p>不知道從什麼時候開始，當我遇到不同語族的人的時候，都會試著請他們唸出「腳踏車」：<u>Bike</u>、<u>vélo</u>、<u>cykel</u>、<u>자전거</u>、<u>велосипед</u>、<u>jizdni kolo</u>、<u>دراجة</u> . . . . . 所以我雖然只會兩種語言，關於腳踏車這個詞我卻懂得三十六種，我是腳踏車的多語者。</p>
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18 Li (2012) pointed out that the English proficiency of Taiwanese people, as reflected in the 2010 TOEFL results, tends to be lower compared to neighboring countries such as South Korea and China.

19 In recent years, the starting age for English learning in Taiwan has decreased further, with many children beginning their studies before compulsory education. According to Hirai (2019), the development of English education in Taiwan shares similarities with Japan, as it has been skewed toward reading and writing, with delayed integration of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

		<p>而在我的成長環境裡，腳踏車這個詞是有地域性的，如果你聽一個人說自轉車那麼他就是受日本教育的人，如果說鐵馬或孔明車那麼他就是台語的母語使用者，如果說單車或自行車那麼他很可能是來自中國南方的人。不過，現在這些用詞都混淆了，沒有辨識性了。(Wu, 2017, p. 11)</p>
	<p><b>Literal translation</b></p>	<p>Sometimes I think what I'm really fascinated by isn't so much riding a bicycle, but the word that Michaux and Son (<i>Michaux père et fils</i>) first called "fast feet with pedals" (<i>vélocipède à pédales</i>), and then <i>Pierre Lallement</i> adapted it to "<i>bicycle</i>" (a mixture of the Latin word "two" [<i>bi</i>] and the Greek word "circle" (<i>kyklos</i>), and other related things it refers to.</p> <p>I don't know when I started asking people of different languages to pronounce the word "<i>chiao-t'á-chê</i>" when I meet them: <i>bike</i>, <i>vélo</i>, <i>cykel</i>, <i>자전거</i>, <i>велосипед</i>, <i>jizdni kolo</i>, <i>جرابج</i>..... So even though I only speak two languages, I know 36 words about bicycles. I'm a polyglot for bicycles.</p> <p>And in the context where I grew up, how the word "bicycle" was said indicated their background. If you heard someone say <i>jitensha</i> then they were Japanese educated, if they said <i>thih-bé</i> or <i>khóng-bing-tshia</i> then they were native speakers of Taiwanese, and if they said <i>tan-chê</i> or <i>tzu-hsing-chê</i> then they were probably from southern China. However, these terms are now mixed up and unrecognizable.</p>
E-2	<p><b>Other languages</b></p>	<p>他甩了甩頭，終於從一片光亮的盲視狀態裡恢復，他將全身的氣力貫注到眼睛上，用他鄒族獵人血統的直覺搜索，赫然發現十公尺外，一頭馬來人稱<u>哈利馬奧</u>（馬來虎）的大貓正穿過樹叢。(Wu, 2017, p. 189)</p>
	<p><b>Literal translation</b></p>	<p>He shook his head, finally recovering from the blindness of the light, he put all his energy into his eyes, searched with the intuition of his Tsou hunter blood, and discovered that ten meters away, a big cat, which the Malays call <i>hā-li-mā-ào</i> (Malay Tiger; the official spelling in Malay is <i>harimau</i>), was walking through the bushes.</p>
E-3	<p><b>Other languages</b></p>	<p>部隊進入城市時，許多緬甸人民夾道歡迎，高喊著：「獨巴馬！獨巴馬！」獨巴馬的意思是「緬甸人的緬甸」，我們也會高聲用「獨巴馬！獨巴馬！」喊回去，那種情境讓人不明所以地激動。(Wu, 2017, p. 214)</p>
	<p><b>Literal translation</b></p>	<p>As the troops entered the city, many Burmese people greeted them with chants of "<i>Dú-bā- mā! Dú-bā-mā!</i>" (The official spelling in Myanmar is <i>dobama</i>) The word "<i>Dú-bā-mā</i>" means "Burma for the Burmese," and we also chanted, "<i>Dú-bā-mā! Dú-bā-mā!</i>" and it was an unexplainably exciting scene.</p>

E-4	<b>Other languages</b>	在象群中，有幾頭象特別聰明，分別是象群的女長老 <u>Ah mong</u> ，成熟的母象 <u>Ah pei</u> ，以及一頭最年輕的小公象 <u>Ah mei</u> 。(Wu, 2017, p. 220)
	<b>Literal translation</b>	Among the elephants in the herd, there are a few that are particularly smart: <u>Ah mong</u> , the herd matriarch, <u>Ah pei</u> , a mature female elephant, and <u>Ah mei</u> , the youngest calf.
E-5	<b>Other languages</b>	特莉莎的語言能力很好，英語、日語都很流利，還會一點俄語。當然她本科的西班牙語是絕對沒問題的，這給了我的工作很大的幫助。(略)她用西班牙語講笑話給我聽，我雖然聽不懂但是還是配合她笑了。(Wu, 2017, pp. 247-248)
	<b>Literal translation</b>	Teresa has excellent language skills, fluent in English, Japanese and a little Russian. Of course, her Spanish, which she learned in college, is good, and it helps me a lot in my work . . . She told me jokes in Spanish, and I laughed along with her even though I couldn't understand them.

The keyword that runs through the work as its title, “bicycle,” is introduced by the author at the beginning in French, English, and Danish—or possibly Swedish.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the author presented the word in seven different scripts, including Korean, Russian, Czech, and Arabic, as well as listing six variations of the name in Chinese characters as used in Japanese, Taiwanese Hokkien, and Southern Chinese dialects<sup>21</sup> commonly mixed in Taiwan (E-1). As the story progresses, mentions of Malay, Burmese, Karenic languages, and Spanish appear once each.<sup>22</sup> For the specific notation method, the first two use Chinese characters to represent pronunciation, with meanings added in parentheses or through narrative explanation (E-2 & E-3). In contrast, the name given to an elephant by a handler of Karen origin is written in Roman letters (E-4). Finally, the Spanish spoken by the narrator’s ex-lover is treated as incomprehensible, with both its content and transcription omitted (E-5).

As described above, this work references a total of 16 languages within the main text, including Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou, Japanese, English, French, Danish—or possibly Swedish—Korean, Russian, Czech,

20 The term “*cykle*” is used in both languages.

21 For example, languages such as Shanghainese and Cantonese.

22 Excludes place names. Additionally, many place names on the Malay Peninsula are written in Mandarin Chinese and English, such as Songkhla and Pattani.

Arabic, Southern Chinese dialects, Malay, Burmese, Karen, and Spanish.<sup>23</sup> In terms of scripts, the work utilizes seven types: Chinese characters, Roman letters, kana, Latin alphabet, Hangeul, Cyrillic, and Arabic script. Despite the inclusion of such a diverse range of elements, the author successfully draws readers—accustomed to linguistically uniform texts—into the world of the story according to his own design.<sup>24</sup> The book garnered praise at numerous book fairs and achieved sales of 30,000 copies in Taiwan, a country facing the same trend of “declining print readership” as seen worldwide. What strategies and techniques contributed to this success?<sup>25</sup> Through the analysis so far, it has become clear that most languages are used only once. Among the four languages that appear repeatedly, Tsou, Japanese, and English convey meaning indirectly through translations or narration, with their written usage limited to the word level (see Table 1). Only Taiwanese Hokkien stands out with overwhelming presence—not only in conversations between native speakers but also interspersed throughout narrative passages written in Mandarin Chinese. From this, it can be said that the work is essentially structured around two languages: Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Hokkien. Another noteworthy point is the approach to representing Taiwanese Hokkien. As mentioned earlier, Taiwanese Hokkien is primarily rendered using Chinese characters in the work. This choice creates visual consistency by blending with Chinese characters on the page, while also highlighting the presence of Tsou in romanized letters, Japanese in kana, and English in the Latin alphabet. Additionally, the careful addition of romanized transcription alongside these characters helps instill the unique phonetic nuance of Taiwanese Hokkien, distinct from Mandarin Chinese. This method of simultaneously leveraging both visual and auditory elements to reveal multilingualism is a technique made possible through the use of logographic Chinese characters. In the next section, I will explore how the coexistence of multiple languages is visually represented when translated into phonographic scripts, and how the sounds of Taiwanese Hokkien are handled in the English translation.

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23 Including the Latin and Greek mentioned in the parentheses, the total becomes 18 languages. However, Lee (2020) focused only on the eight languages with explicitly specified utterances.

24 For the author’s intent in using multiple languages, refer to Wu’s (2016) postscript, “後記：無法好好哀悼的年代” [Postscript: Time Beyond Mourning].

25 According to Wu (2018) [translated by Amano], the work sold an exceptional 30,000 copies in Taiwan as a literary work between its first edition in 2015 and the publication of the Japanese translation in October 2018. For more details, see Wu (2018, p. 429).



**Table 1: Language-specific representation methods**

Languages	Characters	Without annotation		With annotation (With parentheses)			Substituted for Mandarin Chinese though narrative
		W/o parentheses	W/ parentheses	Romanized letters	Meaning	Both	
Taiwanese Hokkien	Chinese characters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tsou	Romanized letters	Only when reappeared			✓		✓
Japanese	Kanji and kana	✓	✓	Only 2 words (B-2)	✓		✓
English	Alphabet	✓					✓

### 3. Language-Specific Translation Methods in the English Version

The English translation, published in 2017, adopted the original work’s English title, *The Stolen Bicycle*. The following year, it gained attention when it was nominated as a finalist for the prestigious International Booker Prize. The translator, Darryl Sterk, reflected on his approach to the translation process as follows.<sup>26</sup>

There is a lot of Taiwanese in the novel, especially in the representation of the hero’s mother’s speech. The author represents Taiwanese in two ways: in graphic characters and alphabetically, using romanisation. To demonstrate his respect for languages he does not speak, Wu also includes quite a few words of the indigenous language Tsou, again in roman characters. But in both cases, with the Taiwanese and the Tsou, he wishes to remind us of what the original language sounded like. The romanisations serve the same

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26 In addition to the afterword of the translated version mentioned here, similar reflections were shared during interviews with media and researchers. For more details, see Central News Agency (2018) and Wong (2023).

purpose in English. There is a lot of Japanese in the novel, but it is rendered almost exclusively in Chinese, as is most of the Tsou. To the extent that the Mandarin Chinese used to represent Japanese and Tsou thought and speech is distinctive, I have tried to make the English distinctive. But for the most part I have simply tried to have the characters think and speak “in character.” (Wu, 2017, pp. 373-374)<sup>27</sup>

In short, the challenge was how to effectively render the many languages interwoven in the original work—particularly the intriguing utterances and thoughts in Tsou and Japanese, which had been rewritten in Chinese. The approach Sterk devised was to render the text “in character,” but aside from adopting the Wade-Giles system for Chinese names and place names to suit the historical setting of the story, what other methods did he use?<sup>28</sup> Let us look at it in light of the examples cited in the previous section.

### 3.1 Taiwanese Hokkien

A-1	The early summer sun had risen, and the city was coming to life. (Wu, 2017, p. 13) <sup>29</sup>
A-2	My ma said that before I turned eight I was truly hard work. I spat up milk, was a picky eater and got the chickenpox and the <u>snakes</u> (our word for shingles). I was always falling down. But after the age of eight I grew strong and tall as a <u>birdcrap banyan</u> . (Wu, 2017, p. 18)
A-3	“Oh? Did Grandpa have a lot of land?” “Around a hectare. When we were kids we’d get sent into the fields to shake the straw men.” “The straw men?” My uncle’s Mandarin wasn’t too good, and he switched to Taiwanese. “Us kids were too small back then to help with the heavy work, but when the rice was ripe, going on harvest time, we’d get sent out to scare off the grain birds. We’d hide out in the field and grip them old scarecrows tight, give them a good shake.” (Wu, 2017, p. 327)

27 The page numbers are from Wu (2017) [translated by Sterk].

28 For the rationale behind adopting the Wade-Giles system, refer to the same preface (Wu, 2017, p. 375). Note that in the previous section of this article, the English translations added also follow the Wade-Giles system for personal and place names.

29 The page number is the same as the aforementioned preface. The fonts and symbols in the following quote match the original text; however, underlining has been added by the author to indicate text in languages other than English or literal translations.

In the original work, Taiwanese Hokkien is used most frequently, and its representation is a mixture of Mandarin Chinese characters, Taiwanese Hokkien characters, and romanization. How to selectively handle these elements greatly influences the direction of the translation. First, in example A-1, the expressions “城仔內” [sîng-á-lāi] and “鬧熱” [lāu-jiat] are genuine Taiwanese Hokkien, meaning “in town” and “lively,” respectively. From the translation, it becomes clear that these were treated as full synonyms of the Mandarin Chinese terms “城里” [cheng-li] and “熱鬧” [rè-nào]. Example A-2, the direct speech format in the original—where the mother’s speech is quoted using a colon (“:”)—was changed to indirect speech in the English translation. As a result, Taiwanese Hokkien expressions related to illness or symptoms largely disappeared, leaving only a few striking terms, like “生蛇” [senn-tsuâ] and “鳥屎仔樹” [tsiáu-sái-á-tshiū], which were retained in literal translations as “snakes” and “birdcrap banyan.” Looking at example A-3, in the original, the uncle’s final utterance is written in Taiwanese Hokkien to reflect his inability to speak Mandarin Chinese fluently, unlike the preceding three sentences. However, in the English version, only a narrative explanation mentions that the language switches to Taiwanese Hokkien, without incorporating any linguistic features to distinguish the uncle’s speech as such. To sum it up, although some effort was made at the beginning of translated text to emphasize keywords in parentheses, such as “運命” [fate] and “先生” [doctor], by providing their Taiwanese Hokkien readings “ün-miä” (Wu, 2017, p. 7) and “sian-sinn” (Wu, 2017, p. 21),<sup>30</sup> the presence of Taiwanese Hokkien is overall diminished compared to the original.

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30 Regarding the translation of “運命,” it first appears as “運命” [ün-miä], putting luck in front of life, but in subsequent occurrences, it is used simply as “ün-miä.” On the other hand, “先生” is translated as “to see a real sian-sinn, a real doctor.” For more details, refer to the prologue, 我家族所失竊的鐵馬們 [My Family History of Stolen Bicycles]. Additionally, Liu (2021) discusses the uniqueness of the translation of Taiwanese Hokkien.

## 3.2 Tsou

B-1	<p>I noticed that Pasuya would use Japanese to tell the story and switch to Tsou to express emotion or describe scenery. I initially planned to mark each paragraph indicating the language he'd used, but decided there was no need. The two languages had become one, united in the person of the storyteller. Pasuya's Tsou and his Japanese were like host and parasite, a tree covered in creeper, impossible to separate.</p> <p>I have tidied up the translation a little, but I have not taken the liberty of omission or addition. To make it easier for readers of different backgrounds to understand, though, I have meddlesomely added some bracketed notes.</p> <p>The year I turned twenty, when winter was approaching, I left my homeland and got on a Japanese troop transport ship bound for the port of San'a, on <u>Kainan</u> (Hai-nan) Island...</p> <p>My people are the descendants of maple leaves, the progeny of new mountains. Ak'i (Grandfather) said that long, long ago, <u>Hamo</u> (the sky god) shook a maple tree, and the fallen leaves became the ancestors of the Tsou. Later there was a great flood. To escape the flood, the people and the animals ran up Mount <u>Patunkuon</u> (Mount Yul). Then the floodwaters receded and the people started looking for a new homeland. (Wu, 2017, pp. 140-141)</p>
B-2	<p>It was the month my people call <u>Cofkoyacifeohu</u>. <u>Feohu</u> means moon. A month is also called <u>feohu</u>, but the last <u>feohu</u> of the year lasts two months, because it is the moon of recuperation. The literal meaning of <u>Cofkoyacifeohu</u> is "clean moon" . . .</p> <p>I told Lieutenant Fujii that it was <u>Cofkoyacifeohu</u>, a time for war rituals, and a time for building houses. I don't know why, but instead of <u>getsu</u> (the Japanese word for month), I said <u>tsuki</u> (the Japanese word for <u>moon</u>) by mistake. Fujii said, "You're right—the moon here is really clean and beautiful. The moon in my country is also beautiful, but it is a different kind of beauty. Each member of our unit rides a pair of <u>ginrin</u> (silver wheels), and when you look up you can see another <u>ginrin</u> in the night sky . . ."</p> <p>Later on they taught me how to ride a <u>jiten-sha</u>. I very quickly learned how to use my body to steer it and feel it. (Wu, 2017, p. 144)</p>
B-3	<p>K'nyaw admired me for my knowledge of another mountain forest. I told him that my people have two sayings: <u>Na'no mani'e isi pa'mam'za no yosku</u>, which means you can tell the number of fish in a stream by how much moss has been eaten, and <u>Mamtanu'e pa'mam'za no yoska'auku</u> which means you can tell the size of the fish from the bite marks on the moss. We Tsou are observers of moss. (Wu, 2017, p. 217)</p>

Since Tsou is represented using romanization in the original text, it is incorporated into the English translation without significant changes in

form. The main difference is that while the original uses italics for emphasis, the English translation primarily uses regular block letters without such emphasis.<sup>31</sup> As shown in example B-3, the format of annotations in the original text is replaced by relative clauses in the translation, a minor change. However, there is one aspect that cannot be overlooked: the translator tried to make the Tsou language stand out as a translation strategy. Specifically, the number of Tsou expressions in example B-2 differs between the original and the translation, as indicated by the underlined sections. Of the three additional instances in the English translation, two correspond to the original terms “一個月亮” [one moon] and “月亮” [one moon], while the other is used as the translation for “乾淨的月” [clean moon].

In another instance:

這是一次保密的訓練，騎乘剛好就是部落人稱為 himeucicumu（濁水溪），轉進陳有蘭溪，涉溪，登上望鄉山，再從山另一側的斜面下來，在台地集結。

[It was a confidential training ride on what the tribesmen call the himeucicumu (Cho-shui River), and turned into the Chen-you-lan River, wades through the river, ascends Mount Wang-hsiang, and then descends the sloping face of the other side of the mountain to regroup on the terrace] (Wu, 2016, p. 147)

The translation of Sterk to this is:

**With those top-secret instructions, we rode along the river my people call Himeucicumu [the Cho-shui] and turned along the Ch'an-you-lan. We crossed the river and climbed Yuafeofeo ta apihana (Mount Wang-hsiang), went down the far slope and gathered on the plateau there.** (Wu, 2017, p. 146)

For the place name that the author originally wrote only in Chinese as “望鄉山”，the translation prominently features the romanized Tsou language as “Yuafeofeo ta apihana” (Mount Wang-hsiang), with the Chinese pronunciation added as a note. According to the translator’s own explanation, this approach

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31 Incidentally, while the original text uses block letters for the romanization of Taiwanese Hokkien, the English translation presents Taiwanese Hokkien terms in italics.

reflects the intention to revive the Tsou language, which had been buried and unheard beneath Chinese.<sup>32</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the significant erasure of Taiwanese Hokkien in the English translation, making it a particularly intriguing aspect.

### 3.3 Japanese

C-1	The bicycle is so big and tall it seems like an iron horse... she sticks a leg through the bicycle frame so that she can reach the left pedal. It's a way of riding a bicycle the children call <i>sankakunori</i> —triangle-riding. (Wu, 2017, p. 5)
C-2	The toolkit on the table, which he'd had since he was an apprentice, included a double-headed spanner, a spoke wrench, a set of Torx-type hex wrenches, a pedal spanner and a chain tool, though the master had always referred to them in Japanese: <i>ryōguchi supana</i> , <i>supōku renchi</i> , <i>Torx renchi</i> , <i>pedaru supana</i> , <i>chēn kiri</i> . These tools had been with him for decades. Eash was pitted and scarred, and had a distinctive gleam. (Wu, 2017, p. 41)
C-3	<b>Several months later, when I left to get on a freighter, fellow Japanese POWs came to the gate to send me off with the valediction “<i>Korekara mo ikite iku yo</i>” (May you live a long time).</b> (Wu, 2017, p. 223)

Since Japanese shares Chinese characters with Chinese, certain terms may go unnoticed in the original text. However, in the English translation, the romanized Japanese terms risk blending into the surrounding alphabetic text. In the English translations, Japanese romanizations, except for names of people and proper names, are italicized and added definitions for each. A comparison with the original reveals an increase in the number of such instances. For example, terms like “*sankakunori*” in C-1, “*ryōguchi supana*” in C-2, and “*Korekara mo ikite iku yo*” in C-3 were all translated to correspond with the original Japanese. However, among the previously mentioned quotes concerning the Tsou language, there are some terms that do not follow this pattern. One example is “Kainan” in B-1, a Japanese reading of the Chinese place name “海南島” [Hai-nan Island].<sup>33</sup> The other two are “Fujii”, for the Japanese name “藤井”, and the romanized term “*jiten-sha*” for the Japanese

32 According to an interview with Sterk in Central News Agency (2018), Wu left him to translate the text and did not give him any instructions.

33 The commonly known Chinese reading, “Hai-nan,” is relegated to a footnote.

word “自轉車” meaning “bicycle” in B-2.<sup>34</sup> Since the former term is in Chinese and the latter uses Chinese-character compounds similar to Chinese terms, the overall meaning of the text can be understood without making specific adjustments. Nevertheless, the translator carefully assigned Japanese pronunciations to these terms, taking into account the speaker’s background and the historical context. To give another example not included in the above quote:

到我有印象的時候，部落的族人不少都是「國語解者」（懂日語的人），大家有時候講日語有時候講族語。學校老師說我的日語還不錯，不過父親要我不能讓族語離開，因為那樣人會變成空心的樹。（略）有一位椎名老師在私底下偷偷地說自己屬於「文道」而非「武道」，徵召他這樣的人上戰場是沒有用的，只有去送死而已。

[As far back as I can remember, many of the tribesmen were “kokugo-kaisha” (people who knew Japanese), and they spoke Japanese and sometimes spoke their own language. My school teachers said that my Japanese was not bad, but my father told me not to let go of the language because it would turn people into hollow trees . . . One of the Shiina teacher secretly said that he belonged to the “way of study” rather than the “way of Martial”, and that it would be useless to enlist people like him in battle, only to send them to their deaths!] (Wu, 2016, p. 144)

And that translated by Sterk is:

**By the time I was old enough to understand, I realized a lot of people in the village were *kokugo kaisha* (Japanese speakers; literally “speakers of the national language”). People sometimes spoke *kokugo*, sometimes Tsou. My teacher said I spoke *kokugo* pretty good, but my father said I could not let our ancestral language go, for if it left us, people would turn into hollow trees . . . But there was one teacher, Shiina-sensei, who**

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34 The Hepburn romanization of the word “自轉車” in Japanese is written as “自転車” and pronounced as “*jitensha*”. However, it appears as “*jiten-sha*” in the English translation, likely because the translator aimed to emphasize the structure, interpreting “自轉 [self-turn]” as a modifier of “車” [vehicle] in contrast with other Chinese terms. It is worth noting that “自轉車” is not consistently translated as “*jiten-sha*” throughout. In the opening sentence of C-1, for example, it is rendered as “bicycle,” possibly to underscore the later use of “鐵馬” as “iron horse”. This literal translation lacks annotation, presumably because the term “bicycle” was already explained in the introduction, as evidenced by Example E-1.

said in private that he followed the *bundo* (the civil tradition or “way”), not the *budo* (the martial way). To conscript that kind of man and force him onto the battlefield was pointless; it was to send him to his death. (Wu, 2017, pp. 142-143)

Terms written in Chinese characters, such as “日語” [Japanese] are deliberately rendered with Japanese readings as “*kokugo*”, “椎名老師” [Mr. Shiina] as “*Shiina-sensei*”, “文道” [way of study] as “*bundo*”, and “武道” [way of martial] as “*budo*”, with added annotations.<sup>35</sup> This approach is frequently seen in passages about the generation that experienced the Japanese colonial era. Even though the translator may have overlooked the term “新高山” in the B-1 citation, which refers to the highest peak “玉山” (Mount Yu) in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period so it should be translated as “Nitakayama” rather than “new mountains.” By actively revealing these terms in a manner similar to the treatment of Tsou language, Japanese is given a more pronounced presence in the English translation compared to the original text.

### 3.4 English

D-1	Over time, he got accustomed to coming home, eating his breakfast of soya milk and deep-fried doughstick and playing the few records he owned on the player, a <i>Realistic LAB-59</i> , while getting ready to go to sleep. He told me that all the English words he knew more or less added up to the sum of the titles of the songs on those records: ‘ <i>Somethin’ Stupid</i> ’ by <i>Frank Sinatra</i> and his daughter <i>Nancy</i> , <i>Patti Page</i> ’s ‘ <i>With My Eyes Wide Open, I’m Dreaming</i> ’, and <i>One Hundred Practical Exercises for Piano</i> by Czerny. He laughed, but awkwardly, maybe because he thought he sounded weird or something, speaking in English, and gave me a sheepish grin. It made him seem easygoing, just a regular guy, and brought us a little closer. (Wu, 2017, p. 29)
D-2	‘It took me a year of drinking coffee there before I won her trust,’ Little Hsia said, and gave me <i>Annie</i> ’s telephone number and <i>email</i> address. (Wu, 2017, p. 68)
D-3	<b>In his halting but somehow confident English, the man told me the banyan would ‘catch spirits rising towards heaven.’ (That’s probably what he meant.)</b> (Wu, 2017, p. 357)

35 The romanization follows the original text. In Hepburn romanization, the correct forms are “*bundō*” and “*budō*”.



Since English is the target language of the translation, it is naturally inserted in its original form. The only additions are the relationship between a singing duo and the English title of a piano instruction book in Example D-1.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, modifications include the record player name in D-1, which changed from all uppercase to standard capitalization, the song titles in a more conversational style, and the formal term for email in D-2. These adjustments seem to follow English formatting conventions. Notably, while Example D-3 explicitly references the mode of speech, in D-1 and D-2, the unique language blending present in the original text becomes indistinguishable in translation.

### 3.5 Other languages

E-1	<p>Sometimes I think what fascinates me isn't bicycles per se but the names people have called them by, and all those names imply. <u>Monsieur Pierre Michaux et fils</u>, the guys who invented the machine, called them 'fast feet with pedals', <u>vélocipèdes à pédales</u>. Another Frenchman, <u>Pierre Lallement</u>, modified the design, producing the modern 'bicycle', meaning 'two circles' (a bilingual compound, from the Latin <u>bi</u> and the Greek <u>kyklos</u>).</p> <p>For as long as I can remember, I've asked everyone I meet who speaks a different language how they say bicycle: <u>bike</u>, <u>vélo</u>, <u>cykel</u>, <u>자전거</u>, <u>велосипед</u>, <u>jizdni kolo</u>, <u>براجة</u> ... I can only speak two languages, <u>Taiwanese</u> and <u>Mandarin</u>, but I can say bicycle in thirty-six. When it comes to bicycles, I'm a polyglot.</p> <p>In the world I grew up in, the word a person used for 'bicycle' told you a lot about them. <u>Jiten-sha</u> ('self-turn vehicle') indicated a person had received a Japanese education. <u>Thih-bé</u> ('iron horse') meant he was a native speaker of Taiwanese, as did <u>Khóng-bing-tshia</u> ('Kung-ming vehicle'), named for an ancient Chinese inventor. <u>Tan-ché</u> ('solo vehicle'), <u>chiao-tà-ch'é</u> ('foot-pedalled vehicle') or <u>tsuhsing-ché</u> ('auto-mobile vehicle') told you they were from the south of China. But everyone uses these terms now, so they're no longer a reliable way to tell how old someone is or where they come from. (Wu, 2017, p. 8)</p>
E-2	<p>He shook his head then—having finally recovered from his sun blindness, the energy in his body on his eyes and using his Tsou hunter's intuition to scan the forest—discovered to his shock, only ten metres away, a Malayan tiger, a beast known locally as <u>harimau</u>. (Wu, 2017, p. 186)</p>

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36 The English title of the piano instruction book appears to be a direct translation from its Chinese name. Its official title is *Practical Method for Beginners on the Pianoforte Op. 599*.

E-3	When we entered a city, people welcomed us on both sides of the street, shouting: ‘ <b>Dobama! Dobama!</b> ’ That meant ‘Burma for the Burmese!’ We would shout back ‘ <b>Dobama! Dobama!</b> ’ as well. Their mood was somehow contagious. (Wu, 2017, p. 209)
E-4	Among the elephants, a few were exceptionally smart: the matriarch <b>Ah Mong</b> , Auntie <b>Ah Pei</b> and Baby <b>Ah Mei</b> , a young bull. (Wu, 2017, p. 214)
E-5	She was good at languages, speaking English and Japanese very fluently, and a bit of Russian. Of course her Spanish was no problem. She was a big help to me in my job... Teresa told me a joke in <u>Spanish</u> . Of course I didn’t understand, but I laughed along with her. (Wu, 2017, pp. 236-237)

Translations of other languages are either essentially unchanged from the original text (E-1, E-4, and E-5)<sup>37</sup> or converted into romanized forms of the original language (E-1, E-2, and E-3). But there are several interesting points in the examples given in E-1. Looking at them in order of appearance, first, the word “bicycle,” originally found in the annotations, has been moved into the main text and its etymology is given as “two circles.” Next, additional information is provided regarding the statement “I can only speak two languages,” specifying that the two languages are Taiwanese Hokkien and Mandarin Chinese. Lastly, the translation of the six different Chinese characters representing “bicycle” includes both pronunciation and literal translation. The fact that such detailed translation work is done right from the beginning of the text is not just because the bicycle is the most important keyword. It can also be seen as an effort to actively convey the underlying message of the original work. This is because, in the original work, there is a tendency to differentiate the names of bicycles depending on the era and the characteristics of the speakers (Lee, 2020). In the English translation, this approach seems to have been adopted as well, with “*jiten-sha*” used for Japanese speakers and “*thih-bé*” or “iron horse” for Taiwanese Hokkien speakers. This suggests that the translator has taken care not to generalize everything under “bicycle,” instead making a deliberate effort to recreate the original work’s intended multilingualism. The main representation methods for other languages in the original Chinese work and their rendering in the English translation can be summarized in Table 2. As far as the examples given in this paper are concerned, the notation methods for each language

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37 In Example E-4, the elephant’s name is italicized in the original text but appears in block letters in the

are indicated by checkmarks in the tables. As can be seen by comparing it to Table 1 at the end of Section 2, the presence of each language has changed significantly. The most pronounced change is in Taiwanese Hokkien, which has largely decreased as it was translated into Mandarin Chinese or ignored. Both Tsou and Japanese have increased, but while Tsou closely corresponds to the original text, Japanese appears more frequently due to its conversion from Chinese characters to romanized readings. Finally, English—naturally—blends into the English translation, with most instances either becoming indistinguishable or being omitted entirely.

**Table 2: Language-specific notation methods in the original work**

Languages	Characters	Emphasis		With annotation (with parentheses)		Translated as Mandarin Chinese or omitted	Word count (compared with original)
		Italic	Parentheses and so on	Original script	Meaning		
Taiwanese Hokkien	Romanized letters	✓	When translated directly (E-1)	Only 1 word [運命]	✓	✓	Significant decrease
Tsou	Romanized letters	✓			✓		Slight increase
Japanese	Romanized letters	✓	Same as the original		✓		Modest increase
English	Alphabet	Only 1 case (D-1)				✓	Slight decrease

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translation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the translation issues of a work that employs multilingualism, a phenomenon increasing against the backdrop of the formation of multilingual societies and the rising awareness of language diversity. Specifically, I have examined Taiwanese author Wu Ming-yi's "單車失竊記" and the English translation *The Stolen Bicycle*. The changing names used for the bicycle in the title symbolize that Taiwan, where the story is set, is undeniably a multilingual society. Taiwan is an island where people from various ethnic groups have gathered, having endured the upheavals of history, including migration, colonial rule, and war. As such, languages of different ethnic groups coexist, causing significant generational and regional divides. Through the friction of these divides, people attempt to understand each other and overcome barriers. To capture this, the author has created an unprecedented narrative that weaves together Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou, Japanese, and English. The goal of this paper is to consider how much of the author's intent and methodology can be translated.

The approach taken was, first, to organize the different language representations used in the original text. Aside from Mandarin Chinese, four other main languages are used: Taiwanese Hokkien, Tsou, Japanese, and English. By providing three typical examples for each language and analyzing them, the following results were obtained. First, regarding Taiwanese Hokkien, it is not only used in dialogue between characters but also frequently in the narrative itself. The vocabulary used is extensive, and all words are written in Chinese characters. Furthermore, annotations about pronunciation and meaning are carefully provided for words that are likely to be difficult to read, indicating that Taiwanese Hokkien is the language emphasized second only to Mandarin Chinese. On the other hand, speech in Tsou and Japanese is of high significance in content but, since it is not comprehensible to the narrator, it is rendered into Mandarin Chinese through translation by third parties. As a result, its appearance is significantly limited and is mostly confined to proper names and proverbs. The same can be said for English. Aside from certain names, song titles, and lyrics, English dialogue is often omitted in content reproduction. However, within pages filled with Chinese and Taiwanese characters, the occasional presence of romanized Tsou, mixed kanji-kana Japanese text, and English alphabet stands out visually, playing a significant role in making the multilingual aspect of the

work visible.

Next, a comparison was made regarding how the same examples were translated into English. The most notable finding is the shift in the language composition. Taiwanese Hokkien, which occupied an important position in the original text, has been significantly downplayed in the English translation. With the exception of characteristic words and phrases, most of the content originally narrated or spoken in Taiwanese Hokkien does not reflect its distinctive features, giving the impression that it is no different from the parts rendered in Mandarin Chinese. In contrast, Tsou and Japanese appear more frequently in the English translation than in the original text. Not only were the parts that originally included the native-language text retained, but even those written in Chinese characters have been assigned romanized versions that reflect the speaker's background and age. Notably, due to the historical context, names of people, places, and things derived from Japanese are the most common, with careful additions of Japanese readings and English translations, giving them a presence comparable to Taiwanese Hokkien in the original. However, in the English translation, aside from the rare instances where the native text was preserved, most languages are rendered in romanized form. Therefore, unless highlighted by italics or font changes, they are difficult to distinguish visually. Moreover, there is no way to understand the phenomenon of using English mixed with Mandarin. In this regard, it must be said that the difficulty of visually representing multilingualism in the English translation is higher compared to the original.

To summarize, while the original text introduces Tsou, Japanese, English, and other languages in glimpses while placing the emphasis on Taiwanese Hokkien, the English translation adopts a contrasting approach, foregrounding Japanese more prominently, thereby diluting the emphasis on Taiwanese Hokkien. Although the multilingual nature, which is the original's most distinctive feature, is successfully revealed, the composition of languages differs. There may be two underlying factors. The first factor relates to the characteristics of the main writing systems used. The Chinese characters used in the original have strong visual characteristics, so the differences between languages do not hinder comprehension, even if they are slight. This allows Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese Hokkien, and Japanese to be presented simultaneously without compromising an overall sense of uniformity, while the insertion of different scripts like romanized letters or the kana helps visualize the multilingualism. However, writing that uses

the alphabet mainly conveys auditory information. Mixing different types of information can lead to confusion, making it challenging to handle the subtle differences between Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Hokkien one by one. The second factor is related to the power dynamics between languages. Japanese, as one of the so-called major languages, gained recognition in the publishing market earlier than Taiwanese Hokkien, and it also carries much more cultural capital than Mandarin Chinese. It is hard to deny that Japanese culture and literature, while belonging to the same non-Western, foreign framework, has a greater “culture hegemony” over the rest of East Asia. And asymmetrical and unbalanced power relations between these languages, like what Lawrence Venuti (2022) calls “the scandals of translation,” have determined the composition of language in English translations.<sup>38</sup> In other words, Wu’s multilingual *écriture* emphasizes weaker languages that were slower to enter the publishing market due to lacking political initiative. However, in translation, these languages may end up supporting and reinforcing the dominance of major languages rather than challenging the institutions shaped by their divisions and practices.

Finally, to reiterate the conclusion drawn from this paper, just as the method of multilingual works themselves largely depends on the characteristics of the language scripts used, the translation method is similarly constrained or expanded by the target language, even also driven by power and politics. As a future topic, I would like to focus on the translation of Wu’s novel into Japanese, a language that shares many Chinese characters with the original. Japanese uses three types of characters: Kanji, Hiragana, and Katakana. Moreover, it has the convenient feature of *furigana*, which indicates pronunciation, offering a method of representing sound that is unmatched in its variety. A continuation of this study might examine how the multilingual nature of the original work can be revealed.

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38 This author appreciates the reviewer’s comment on this point.

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