Stylizing Asian:
Nigel Ng's performance of Uncle Roger

Yifan Wu[1]
York University, Toronto, Canada

Abstract: This paper examines the linguistic and semiotic features that Nigel Ng, a Malaysian comedian, utilized in his performance as Uncle Roger, a Cantonese English speaker, and the ensuing responses. The analysis shows that a) Ng does not use all the features of Hong Kong English, and his use of the features is inconsistent; b) Ng's stylized English incorporates stereotypical linguistic features associated with several discrete ethnic varieties in East and Southeast Asia; c) Ng's performance of Uncle Roger is a conscious media strategy used to foreground an over-generalized identity and to connect with a more diasporic audience. This paper therefore argues that Ng's performance is a racial stylization of pan-Asian identity. It challenges White hegemony by constructing a proud Asian identity and criticizing the misrepresentation of Asian cultures. However, it also reproduces stigmatized stereotypes by foregrounding out-group stereotypes of pan-Asians. The performance of pan-Asianness discussed in this paper illustrates the double-edged nature of stylization.

Keywords: Stylization, Media Discourse, World English.

1   Introduction

This paper examines a recent case of media stylization in which a comedian built a stylized representation of pan-Asianness for his diasporic audience by incorporating stereotypical linguistic and cultural features associated with a number of discrete ethnic varieties.

Nigel Ng is a Malaysian-born UK-based stand-up comedian and internet celebrity who is descended from Chinese Hokkien ancestry. In his stand-up shows, Ng speaks "unmarked" English with no obvious regional accent and dresses fashionably. However, he is better known for his online persona, Uncle Roger, a middle-aged Asian man with an "exaggerated and pronounced Cantonese–like accent" ("Nigel Ng," 2023). The idea of performing a middle-aged Cantonese uncle originally came from his comedy partner, Evelyn Mok, for a sitcom script around 2019. Ng later developed the persona on various social media platforms based on father figures present in his life (LADbible TV, 2022). Uncle Roger went viral worldwide in July 2020 after the YouTube video critiquing BBC Food featuring chef Hersha Patel's egg-fried rice. When performing Uncle Roger, Ng adopts a number of linguistic features of Asian English (including l-vocalization, variable tense marking, and variable 3RD.SG.PRS verb agreement) and stereotypical semiotic features of Asian culture (including wearing a bright-coloured polo) (LADbible TV, 2022).

Ng's performance of Uncle Roger is an interesting case for contemporary sociocultural linguistics in its illustration of how social media represent Asian English speakers and shape Asian

---

[1] *Corresponding author: yifan72@yorku.ca*

stereotypes. This paper seeks to answer the primary question of what linguistic and semiotic features Nigel Ng draws upon while performing Uncle Roger for his diasporic audience and how those features foreground a stereotypical pan-Asian identity.

2   Stylized language and stylization in media

While "style" refers to the use of both linguistic and other semiotic systems to index social positioning (Eckert & Rickford, 2001), "stylization" refers to a conscious and often creative use of such features to project a stereotypical persona, identity, or genre in front of audiences who can interpret such projections (Bakhtin, 1984; Coupland, 2007; Rampton, 1995). Stylization practices are often tied to race and ethnicity. For instance, Rampton (1995) examined specific social interactions where a speaker deliberately and jokingly crossed into Stylized (South) Asian English, a variety associated with a stereotyped "babu" caricature of South Asian migrants in the UK. Stylized (South) Asian English discussed here in Rampton's (1995) work is one such language variation that is used to negotiate ideologies and construct stereotypes about race/ethnicity. Other examples are cross-over African American Vernacular English (Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011; Smitherman, 2000), Mock Spanish (Hill, 1998), Mock Asian (Chun, 2004), and Mock Filipino (Labrador, 2022).

Stylization has been described as a double-edged sword because it both confirms and challenges stereotypes (Coupland, 2007). Compared to stylization used in daily interactions, stylization in media, with its typically much larger audience and explicit performative nature, amplifies both aspects, and hence demonstrates more salient characteristics and garners more attention. The use of Mock Filipino in Hawaiian comedy is one example that racializes and stigmatizes Filipinos in Hawaii (Labrador, 2004). On the other hand, Korean American stand-up comedian Margaret Cho's revoicing of Mock Asian activates varieties of linguistic and cultural stereotypes and is viewed as a legitimate mockery that decenters Whiteness (Chun, 2004). Similarly, Asian American stand-up comedian Ali Wong's performance of ethno-specific stereotypes also challenges the dominant hegemonic discourse about Asians (Kim, 2021).

3   Nigel Ng: Linguistically and behaviorally White

Nigel Ng was born on 15 March 1991 in Kuala Lumpur to a Chinese-Malaysian family with Hokkien ancestry. He grew up surrounded by Malaysian accents that lean more towards Cantonese and Mandarin (Rice To Meet You Highlights, 2021). After finishing high school, he moved to the United States to study engineering at Northwestern University. Following several years working in the US after graduation, he relocated to London, where he currently works as a stand-up comedian and internet celebrity.

During his stand-up shows under his own name, Ng presents his English as follows: slightly accented, but most times fluent and linguistically unmarked. For instance, in one video of his stand-up performance (mrnigelng, 2020), he demonstrates a mostly unmarked American English accent, most evidently seen in pronouncing /r/ in postvocalic environments. He also incorporates British English features, such as t-glottalization in words like "Britain" [bɹɪʔən] and "Butlin" [bʌʔln]. However, since his British English features primarily revolve around British topics, such as the names of British places and people, it seems as though he consciously and deliberately incorporates these features only when the context calls for it. At the same time, his stand-up show also exhibits other features which can be associated with Malaysian English or English-in-China, such as word-final consonant cluster simplification in words like "first-world" [ˈfɚs wɚld] and l-vocalization in words like "sandal" [sændəʊ]. Given that these features are not constrained to a specific topic, it is probable that their usage is unconscious. Consequently, it is probable that Nigel Ng possesses

an American English baseline, occasionally incorporating features from other varieties associated with Asia and the performance topic.

Apart from his mostly unmarked linguistic features, Ng's performance as himself is also largely unmarked in terms of behaviour. For instance, in the performance described above, he wore a turtleneck and fashionable jeans. The audience feedback also flags the difference between his style as Nigel Ng, the stand-up comedian, and his stylized persona as Uncle Roger, the Asian uncle, as illustrated in (1) below, which lists some of the most popular comments posted on the aforementioned standup show.[2]

(1) a. Khang An Nguyen: the thumbnail looks as if uncle Roger's about to give a TED talk (3.6k likes)

b. Mark James: Uncle Roger looks like he's working for apple and about to unvail new apple technology (5.6k likes, including Uncle Roger himself)

c. Maria Lourdes Diocera: Never knew Uncle Roger was so buff, must be fried rice gains. (4.3k likes, including Uncle Roger himself)

Nigel Ng posts his stand-up shows and Uncle Roger's videos to the same YouTube channel. As seen in (1), Nigel Ng is primarily referred to as "Uncle Roger," even though this stand-up show was uploaded four months before Uncle Roger went viral in July 2020. Such feedback illustrates that the Uncle Roger persona is much more well-known than Ng's stand-up persona. Moreover, the comments not only focus on the contrast between Nigel Ng's style and that of Uncle Roger but also associate Nigel Ng's speech event with a TED talk or a Steve Jobs Apple event, implying that his presenting style is, in comparison, very official, unmarked, and even White.

4   Data

This paper primarily focuses on four of the most popular videos featuring Uncle Roger on Nigel Ng's YouTube channel. The first video, uploaded in July 2020, Uncle Roger reacted to an egg fried rice tutorial featuring Indian British celebrity Hersha Patel.[3] This 7 minute 56 second long video had 34 million views as of April 2022. This is also the video that made Uncle Roger famous. The second video, 11 minutes 4 seconds in length, was uploaded in September 2020 and had 28 million views as of April 2022. In this video, Uncle Roger reacted to a video featuring the British celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay cooking egg fried rice.[4] Published two months after the first video, this video also went viral. The third video, 9 minutes 52 seconds in length, was uploaded in August 2020 and had 23 million views as of April 2022. In this video, Uncle Roger reacted to a video featuring the British Restaurateur Jamie Oliver cooking egg fried rice.[5] The fourth video, 13 minutes 55 seconds in length, was uploaded in February 2022 and had 21 million views as of April 2022. In this video, Uncle Roger reacted to another video by Gordon Ramsay making ramen.[6]

---

[2] Data retrieved on April 13th 2022 from mrnigelng (Director). (2020, March 26). *Butlins, The WORST PART of British Culture—Nigel Ng—Standup Comedy*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpLdgsuyfKw

[3] mrnigelng (Director). (2020, July 8). *Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food)*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53me-ICi_f8

[4] mrnigelng (Director). (2020, September 20). *Uncle Roger Review GORDON RAMSAY Fried Rice*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrUfwpaNNIM

[5] mrnigelng (Director). (2020, August 30). *Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_KdbASIkB8

[6] mrnigelng (Director). (2022, February 27). *GORDON RAMSAY CALL OUT UNCLE ROGER!* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5zLvsJZAwA

The data also include Nigel Ng's interviews which support the analysis of Nigel Ng's motivation for creating Uncle Roger. In addition, audience feedback is included to show critiques of Nigel Ng's performance. Together, these data were used to answer the question of how Nigel Ng performs Uncle Roger and what consequences result from this performance.

5   How does Nigel Ng perform Uncle Roger?

5.1   Stylizing Pan-Asian with "the accent"

5.1.1   Mocking Hong Kong English

Uncle Roger's English is most widely recognized as Cantonese-accented English, achieved through the use of Hong Kong English (HKE) features. Table 1 and 2 list the linguistic features related to HKE (based on sociolinguistic research including Bolton et al., 2020; Kachru et al., 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2020), and indicates whether or not Ng used them during his Uncle Roger's performance. It is evident from Table 1 and 2 that Uncle Roger does not utilize all the features of HKE. For instance, HKE pronounces voiceless TH as [f], resulting in the pronunciation of "three" as [fɹi]. However, Uncle Roger's pronunciation of "three" is [tɹi], which does not align with typical HKE pronunciation.

Uncle Roger's use of HKE features is also inconsistent in his performance. For instance, in (2), which focuses on the phonological feature of voiced TH becoming [d], there is word-to-word and time-to-time inconsistency. Voiced TH in words like "the" and "this" is more likely to be pronounced with HKE features as [d], while TH in words like "they" and "then" is more likely to be pronounced with unmarked English features as [ð]. Furthermore, there is a lack of consistency in the pronunciation of words like "the" and "this" across this single instance of performance.

(2) Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food), 2020-07-08

What **th**e[d] hell? Uncle Roger so upset I put my leg down from chair. Why you running water through rice (cough). You ruining **th**e[d] rice. First you use colander to dry **th**e[d] rice. And **th**en[ð] you put water. **Th**en[ð] why bo**th**er[ð] drying **th**e[ð] rice? Who cook rice like **th**is[ð]? How did **th**is[ð] woman get on BBC food? **Th**ey[ð] never ask Uncle Roger. Uncle Roger teach master class on making rice. But **th**is[d] woman, colander on **th**e[d] rice, **th**en[ð] water through **th**e[d] rice. **Th**is[ð] is… ughhh. Uncle Roger sad now.

Excerpt (2) is from the time when Uncle Roger sees Hersha Patel run water through cooked rice in a colander, a step so unusual that it visibly disturbs him. It would appear that emotions affect his performance of HKE features. When Ng performs an emotionally disturbed Uncle Roger, he may become caught up in the performance of emotion and thus less focussed on performing the nuances of the Uncle Roger persona, hence his stylization becomes even more frenzied and inconsistent. In other words, the English used by Nigel Ng blends his typical language variety with the language variety(ies) employed by Uncle Roger. As discussed above, the variation between Nigel Ng's persona and the stereotypical "Uncle Roger" persona could be heightened by the fact that the character is performed as emotionally disturbed and therefore the performer is less attentive to other elements of the performance such as consistent stylization.

Table 1. Phonological Features of Hong Kong English (HKE).

Phonological Features		
Description	Examples (from Uncle Roger's speech)	Present?
Non-rhotic	pork lard /pɔrk laːd/ → [pok̚ lʌd̚]	+
L-vocalization	simple /ˈsɪmpəl/ → [simpəʊ]	+
Fewer vowel contrasts	good food /gʊd fud/ → [gud̚ fud̚]	+
Absence of vowel reduction	correct /kəˈɹekt/ → [koɹek̚]	+
Monothongization	ghost /goʊst/ → [gost]	+
/ʒ/ become [ʃ],		
/z/ and /ʃ/ become [s]		
Voiceless TH become [f]		
Voiced TH become [d]	this /ðɪs/ → [dis]	+
/v/ become [w]	video /ˈvɪdioʊ/ → [wɪd͡ʒo]	+
/v/ become [f]	stove /stoʊv/ → [stoʊf]	+
Free alternation between [l] and [n]		
In initial consonant clusters, [l] sometimes replace [ɹ]		
Word final consonant clusters simplification	correct /kəˈɹɛkt/ → [koɹek̚]	+
[t] added at the end of a word for hypercorrection		
Interpret stress and emphasis as tones	Gordon have two wok? (HLLHH)	+
Syllable-timed rhythm	pretty impressive /ˈpɹɪti ɪmˈpɹɛsɪv/ → [piti impesif]	+

Table 2. Morpho-syntactic and Lexical and Discourse Features of Hong Kong English (HKE).

Morpho-syntactic Features		
Description	Examples (from Uncle Roger's speech)	Present?
Variable subject-verb agreement for 3rd.SG.PRS	Mom **don't** want me anymore.	+
Variable past tense marking	Uncle Roger **know** how to make egg fried rice when Uncle Roger Ø three year old	+
Distinctive verb-preposition combinations		
Variable plural marking	Gordon have two **wok**?	+
Pseudo-passives, e.g., *It cannot make by this factory*		
Distinctive relative clauses, e.g., *This is the student did it*		
Use of *is it* as a universal tag question, e.g., *The people there is very poor, is it?*		
Lexical and Discourse Features		
Description	Examples (from Uncle Roger's speech)	Present?
Cantonese particles, eg, *You finished running jor mei?* *(Cantonese particles added for perfect aspect and 'yet')* Jargon included phrases such as *Can do, chop-chop*		

5.1.2   Mixing Pan-Asian linguistic features

One of Uncle Roger's symbolic catchphrases is "Haiyaa," which he describes as a sigh of disappointment. However, "Haiyaa" is not an expression from the Cantonese lexicon but a Malaysian-infused slang term.[7] Indeed, there are many linguistic features used by Uncle Roger that can be traced to linguistic varieties other than HKE. For example, Uncle Roger's pronunciation of "three" [tɹi] is associated with Malaysian English (ME), not HKE. Based on the data, it appears highly likely that Uncle Roger's English incorporates features from various varieties of Asian English.

Given Nigel Ng's own linguistic background, this paper examines five additional varieties of World English in addition to HKE. ME is included as Nigel Ng was born and raised in Malaysia. Singapore English (SE) is included due to its proximity to Malaysia, both geographically and socio-culturally, as well as its linguistic similarities (Ling, 2020). Philippine English (PE) is also included for the same reason as SE. Despite the increasing establishment of a homogenizing ME and SE accent (Hong Sim, 2019), this study is concerned with the inter-Malaysian ethnographic diversity that may influence Uncle Roger's linguistic features. Therefore, since Malaysia is predominantly composed of Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups, this paper also includes Indian English and English in China (IE and CE, respectively). Finally, some features remain unidentified (U) within the previous research of these selected Asian Englishes.

Table 3 and 4 lists the linguistic features of Uncle Roger's English and indicates whether they belong to specific varieties. The tables reveals that while several of Uncle Roger's features such as many morpho-syntactical features, are not associated with HKE, they are linked to other varieties. Some features are not affiliated with any known varieties. For example, the weakening or loss of /ɹ/ in word-initial consonant clusters is unspecified in academic research. However, according to the interviews I conducted with language consultants and according to various YouTube celebrities, this feature is recognized as an HKE feature. On the other hand, some other features, such as intervocalic /d/ becoming [d͡ʒ], are not identified either academically or from other sources and are believed to be a personal feature of Nigel Ng's creation of Uncle Roger.

According to Table 3 and 4, the mixture of language varieties is a crucial characteristic of Uncle Roger's English. Therefore, it is justifiable to view Uncle Roger's English as a form of mock language, according to the definition of "mock language" as an inauthentic use of certain language varieties that involves a mixture of multiple language varieties (Carris, 2011; Chun, 2004; Labrador, 2004). However, Table 3 and 4 indicate his English lack a clear baseline. In other words, we don't know which "certain language variety" Nigel Ng is mocking, making it improper to label his English as specific as mock HKE. Instead, we could call it a mock pan-Asian style, supporting Ng's creation of a pan-Asian appeal for his Uncle Roger character.

---

[7] Nigel Ng clarified this in the comment section of YouTube video: Dr. Jon Tam (Director). (2021, December 14). *uncle roger duped us all. Haiyaa!* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-EJT5Gs9fw

Table 3. Phonological Features of Uncle Roger's English

Phonological Features								
Description	Examples (from Uncle Roger's speech)	HKE	ME	SE	PE	IE	CE	U
Non-rhotic	pork lard /pɔrk lɑːd/ → [pok̚ lʌd̚]	+		+		+		
L-vocalization	simple /ˈsɪmpəl/ → [simpəʊ]	+		+			+	
Fewer vowel contrasts (in terms of length and tenseness)	good food /gʊd fud/ → [gud̚ fud̚]	+	+	+	+			
Absence of vowel reduction	correct /kəˈɹekt/ → [koɹek̚]	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Monothongization	ghost /goʊst/ → [gost]	+	+	+		+		
Voiced TH become [d]	this /ðɪs/ → [dis]	+	+	+	+	+	+	
/v/ become [f]	stove /stoʊv/ → [stoʊf]	+	+					
/v/ become [w]	video /ˈvɪdioʊ/ → [wɪd͡ʒo]	+					+	
/z/ become /s/	dishes /dɪʃəz/ → [diʃis], sizzle /ˈsɪzəl/ → [sisəʊ]		+					
Word final consonant clusters simplification	correct /kəˈɹekt/ → [koɹek̚]	+	+	+	+	+		
Interpret stress and emphasis as tones	Gordon have two wok? (**HLLHH**)	+						
Syllable-timed rhythm	pretty impressive /ˈpɹɪti ɪmˈpɹɛsɪv/ → [piti impesif]	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Intervocalic /d/ become [d͡ʒ]	video /ˈvɪdioʊ/ → [wɪd͡ʒio]							+
Word final plosives are not released	good food /gʊd fud/ → [gud̚ fud̚]							+
Weakening or loss of /ɹ/ in PR cluster	pretty impressive /ˈpɹɪti ɪmˈpɹɛsɪv/ → [piti impesif]							+

Table 4. Morpho-syntactic and Lexical and Discourse Features of Uncle Roger's English

Morpho-syntactic Features								
Description	Examples (from Uncle Roger's speech)	HKE	ME	SE	PE	IE	CE	U
Variable subject-verb agreement for 3rd.SG.PRS	Mom **don't** want me anymore.	+	+	+	+		+	
Variable past tense marking	Uncle Roger **know** how to make egg fried rice when Uncle Roger Ø three year old	+	+		+		+	
Variable plural marking	Gordon **have** two **wok**?	+	+		+	+	+	
Variable use of articles	Two second into Ø video and I already see Ø sauce pan.		+	+	+	+		
Zero copula	Just because I Ø Asian and my eyes Ø small, don't mean it Ø closed, okay?			+		+		
Zero auxiliary	I Ø never seen anyone drain rice; What Ø she doing?		+					
Omission of subject	Ø Go Indonesian so many time for what?		+				+	
Omission of object	Uncle Roger like **Ø**.		+			+	+	
Use of progressive forms with stative verbs	The rice Ø not **looking** good; When Uncle Roger Ø **growing** up.				+	+		
Zero genitive marking	Very few things break **Asian people heart.**							+
Lexical and Discourse Features								
Description	Examples	HKE	ME	SE	PE	IE	CE	U
Haiyaa for disaprovement and disappointed	You Ø killing me woman, **Haiyaa.**		+					
Fuiyoh for approvement and encouragement	I like how Gordon pour using feeling also, **Fuiyoh**!		+					
Refering oneself as third person	**Uncle Roger** like Ø.							+

5.2 Discursive construction of a Pan-Asian identity

Nigel Ng has stated in multiple interviews that he chose to create and perform as Uncle Roger to serve two purposes: (a) for comedic effect and (b) to perform an Asian identity. The first purpose, namely, to enhance the comedy effect, echoes previous research on media stylization which reports that it is widely accepted for comedians to stylize themselves and others to please their audience (Chun, 2004; Jaffe, 2000; Sharma, 2015; Tsiplakou & Ioannidou, 2012). In many of Nigel Ng's interviews, he explicitly acknowledges this motivation for creating Uncle Roger. The quotation showed in (3) is one example.

(3) Uncle Roger on Using the Asian Accent | Asian Not Asian, 2020-09-14
"I think the accents definitely enhance the comedy. The accent makes it a lot funnier."

With respect to the purpose of constructing Asian Identity, in an interview with the South China Morning Post, Ng explained that his character was inspired not only by his own life experiences but also by those of every Asian, as seen in the following quote (4). By embodying the persona of Uncle Roger, Ng strategically identifies himself as Asian (rather than Malaysian, Hokkienese, or some other narrower identity category), thereby forging stronger connections with a broad Asian audience.

(4) South China Morning Post, 2022-08-25
"If you grew up in Asia, you would recognize this kind of archetype. This sassy, condescending uncle who complains about everything but ultimately is funny and nice."

Therefore, to portray an archetypical and generalized (pan-)Asian identity, Nigel Ng employs various discursive strategies in his Uncle Roger videos, which are analyzed below.

5.2.1 Pronouns and category terms

Like Nigel Ng, Uncle Roger is never shy about asserting his Asian identity. The most direct means of aligning himself with his Asian identity is evident through his use of pronouns and category terms like "Asian". For example, in excerpt (5), the pronoun "we" in bold indicates that he identifies as Southeast Asian. In excerpt (6), he refers to his technique for making egg fried rice as "the Asian way" to associate himself with Asian culture. In doing so, Uncle Roger explicitly aligns himself with the Asian identity.

(5) Uncle Roger Review GORDON RAMSAY Fried Rice, 2020-9-20
This is very[w̩eri] impressive[impesif] video[wid͡ʒio]. Maybe only thing he do wrong is use fork[fɔk̚] to eat[it̚] his fried[fai] rice. Because, in Southeast[saʊsis] Asia, **we** all use spoon to eat[it̚] rice. Nobody use fork[fɔk̚].

(6) Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food), 2020-7-8
BBC good[gud̚] food[fud̚], next[nes] time you want to make egg[ɛg̚] fried[fai] rice video, ask[as] Uncle[ʌŋkəʊ] Roger. Uncle[ʌŋkəʊ] Roger teach you proper[pɒpə] technique. **The**[də] **Asian way**.

5.2.2   Pan-Asian culture

Another approach Uncle Roger employs to align himself with Asians involves positioning himself as the legitimate representative of Asian culture. In fact, his reaction to videos featuring British chefs cooking Asian cuisine often extend beyond culinary critiques to encompass evaluations of the Western portrayal of Asian culture more generally. For example, as seen in excerpt (5) above, Uncle Roger highlights that Gordon Ramsay's use of a fork to eat fried rice is contrary to Asian cultural norms. To reinforce his argument, he taps into the shared experience of being Southeast Asian, where they "all" use a spoon to eat rice. Moreover, in the same video, Uncle Roger comments that Gordon cooking outdoors agrees with the Asian cultural norms as seen in Excerpt (7). In Except (7), Uncle Roger not only uses pronouns and category terms to explicitly align himself with the Asian identity, but also introduces less well-known Asian cultural norms as reinforcement. By doing so, he establishes his own experience as the accurate representation of Asian culture and thus aligns himself with the Asian identity.

(7) Uncle Roger Review GORDON RAMSAY Fried Rice, 2020-9-20
Actually, I like that[dæt] Gordon cooking outside[aʊtsaɪd]. Many Asian people[pipəʊ], we have[hæf] two kitchen, outside[aʊtsaɪd] kitchen and we have[hæf] indoor kitchen. Indoor kitchen, useless, only to impress[impes] guests[ges]. If guests[ges] come, we go indoor kitchen, chop[tʃɒp] mango, that's it. But[bʌt] if we use outside[aʊtsaɪd] kitchen, then[dɛn] when you know real food[fud] coming.

Uncle Roger also constructs his Asian identity in more indirect ways, as seen in (8), where his critique of Jamie Oliver's oily rice is framed in the context of Mulan. Within this common reference point for Asians worldwide, Mulan's act of singing while gazing into mirrors, as portrayed in the Disney animated film, holds recognition. Here, Uncle Roger draws upon the Asian cultural figure to craft his joke and deliver the punchline, skillfully likening Jamie Oliver's overly oily rice to a mirror.

(8) Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice, 2020-8-30
This[dis] rice look[luk] so wet[wet]. Look [luk] at this[dis]. You can see your reflection inside[insaid]. **Mulan** is gonna start[stɑt] singing when she see this[dis] rice.

5.2.3   US-THEM contrast

Additionally, the archetypical Asian identity is constructed through the creation of an US-THEM contrast between Asians and Whites. This discursive strategy is framed by constructing himself and his community (Asians) in contrast to White people. This is evident in many instances throughout his videos.

As exemplified in Excerpt (9), where Uncle Roger refers to olive oil as "White people oil" which is deemed unsuitable for "Asian dishes". Here, Uncle Roger distinctly and explicitly labels the kind of oil not typically used in Asian cuisine as "White people oil," establishing a contrast specifically between the Asian culture and mainstream White culture. Similarly, Jamie Oliver's frying spring onion till it sizzles is criticized by Uncle Roger as untypical Asian way of cooking, as seen in Excerpt (10). Here, the Asian-White contrast takes on a heightened level of conflict, juxtaposed with the explicit use of contrasting pronouns (YOU-I). Furthermore, a deliberate and comedic effort is made to liken the sizzling of spring onions to the crying of Asian ancestors. This comparison, on the one hand, establishes that Jamie Oliver's way of cooking Asian cuisine is

perceived as unacceptable within the perspective of Asians. On the other hand, it subtly conveys the sense of sadness and frustration experienced by Asians when they witness the misrepresentation of their culture. By utilizing the pronoun "my" to align himself with Asian ancestors within this context, he reinforces and strengthens his identification with being Asian.

(9) Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice, 2020-8-30
Olive[ɔlif] oil[ɔiɔ] is like[laik̚] White[wait̚] people[pipəʊ] oil[ɔiɔ]. Not[nɔt̚] suitable[sutɜbəʊ] for Asian dishes like[laik̚] egg[ɛg̚] fried[fai] rice.

(10) Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice, 2020-8-30
You hear[her] sizzling[sisəliŋ]. **I** hear[her] my ancestors crying.

It's worth acknowledging that it's not that Asians don't use olive oil at all or that they don't fry spring onions until they sizzle to wilt. However, Uncle Roger deliberately labels these practices and behaviors as distinctly belonging to one community instead of to the other. By reinforcing this non-overlapping divide, a clear US-THEM contrast is effectively established. Consequently, his alliance with Asian identity is strengthened.

As seen from excerpts above, Uncle Roger established his archetypical Asian identity by associating himself with explicit category terms, Asian cultures, and an US-THEM contrast. However, he rarely identifies with a specific culture or variety. For example, in excerpts (5) to (7), he refers to his identity as Southeast Asian or Asian. In (6), he calls for a better representation of Chinese culture, indirectly aligning himself with it, but not explicitly. Despite the potential for Uncle Roger to possess a more precise identity, such as Malaysian, Cantonese, or Chinese, Nigel Ng deliberately avoids such specificity in his portrayal of the character. Instead, Uncle Roger identifies with an archetypical and generalized pan-Asian identity. This observation aligns with the analysis of his linguistic bricolage discussed in Section 5.2, which reveals that Uncle Roger's English incorporates features from not one specific language variety, but multiple language varieties across pan-Asian area. This archetypical and generalized construction of a pan-Asian identity serves as a discursive strategy on social media to engage with a wider and more diasporic audience.

6   What are the consequences?

The linguistic and text analysis conducted above indicates that Nigel Ng's performance of Uncle Roger meets the criteria for stylization. This stylization is mainly achieved by purposely emphasizing a pan-Asian identity both linguistically and semiotically, which has both positive and negative consequences, according to the feedback he receives.

6.1   Positive: Authenticating Asianness and decentering Whiteness

Many studies consider stylization as both a practice that authenticates and decenters (Carris, 2011; Chun, 2004). Similarly, Nigel Ng's stylization of pan-Asian culture serves to authenticate Asianness while decentering Whiteness in the Western mediascape. Uncle Roger, as seen in Excerpts (5) through (10), takes pride in Asian cultures that have been inaccurately depicted by Western media. His interview with LADbible TV supports this motivation, as shown in the excerpt (11) below.

(11)   How I Came Up With "Uncle Roger" Character, 2022-4-13

I view Uncle Roger as a celebration of Asianness and Asian culture, Asian things in general. Uncle Roger never puts his own race down… In Western media, Asian culture, East Asian culture is just not as visible in the UK, unfortunately.

Uncle Roger's critique of the dominance of Whiteness in media discourse, highlighting its incorrect representation of Asian cultures, has garnered him positive feedback and acclaim. Viewers have echoed his sentiments concerning the widespread media misrepresentation, as evidenced in most popular comments on YouTube exemplified in Excerpt (12).[8] Many viewers resonate with Uncle Roger's observation that the misrepresentation of Asian cuisine in mainstream media is unacceptable. Many also emphasize that this misrepresentation has persisted for a long time, and it is hard for Asians to turn the tide.

(12)   a. A.A.: Finally someone brave enough to call professional British cooks out on their Olive Oil madness. (9.9k likes)

b. 宋玉芳: I was watching this with my grandma and she actually started to cry (4.8k likes)

c. Boba: I laughed so hard that I died, but at the same time, as an Asian, my soul left my body looking at Jamie make that fried rice. (6.2k likes)

d. yoji yamamoto: As a Canadian I can confirm that this woman makes rice the same way my clueless parents does. They complain about soggy rice yet they just refuse to… use less water. (4.6k likes)

e. Alex Turner: Growing up in the UK, this is exactly how my parents cooked / ruined rice. They always wondered why the rice turned out so wet and horrible. It just never occurred to them to simply… add less water. (7k likes)

To summarize, the YouTube comments primarily focus on Uncle Roger's role in authenticating Asianness and challenging Whiteness within the mainstream media. These are the positive consequences of Nigel Ng's pan-Asian stylization when performing Uncle Roger, echoing previous scholarly perspectives on stylization (Carris, 2011; Chun, 2004).

6.2   Negative: Reproducing stereotypes and stigmatizing Asians

Like many other Asian actors and actresses who strategically chose to adopt an accent or racial stylization in the media, Nigel Ng has faced negative critiques for reproducing stereotypes. Some negative reviews criticize Ng's portrayal of Uncle Roger as stigmatizing Asians. Excerpt (13) shows a sample Reddit post from an audience member who compares Ng's performance with a minstrel show.[9]

---

[8] (12a-c) retrieved on April 13th 2023 from mrnigelng (Director). (2020, August 30). *Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_KdbASIkB8; (12d-e) retrieved on April 13th 2023 from mrnigelng (Director). (2020, July 8). *Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food).* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53me-ICi_f8

[9] Data retrieved on April 13th 2023 from sugatwist. (2020, July 24). *This guy is a walking minstrel show* [Reddit Post]. R/Aznidentity. www.reddit.com/r/aznidentity/comments/hwsuh7/this_guy_is_a_walking_minstrel_show/

(13)   This guy is a walking minstrel show (sugatwist, 2020)

> Asian "comedian" Nigel Ng creates the persona "Uncle Roger", which embodies just about every Asian stereotype and caricature, topped with the classic "Asian accent" to boot. Might as well have named his persona Uncle Chan.

> Ng also hosts a podcast on Asian culture titled "Rice to Meet You" -- really? Playing on both stereotypes AND the so-called "Asian accent"?

> Ng is a diaspora Asian and he speaks fluent English. There's no excusing his racial caricaturizing. The clip went viral on Twitter (see 200k+ likes) and was on the front page of Reddit earlier today.

> Have Asian "comedians" no sense of pride or self-respect? Almost every Asian comedian I've seen degrades or mocks their race some way or another. Internalized racism is our biggest enemy.

Negative reviews, like the one above, are centred around the fact that Uncle Roger is a fabricated persona created from widely spread stereotypes of Asians. These types of negative reviews typically come from Asians, who hold the opinion that Uncle Roger not only highlights negative stereotypes of Asians but also worsens the situation by utilizing an Asian identity, thereby further legitimizing the perpetuation of these stigmas.

It is worth noting that negative feedback like in (13) is never seen in the YouTube comment section from Uncle Roger's videos. It is rarely seen on YouTube in general. The negative feedback primarily come from website journals and online forums like Reddit, like (13).

7   Discussion

It is established from the data analysis, particularly Section 5, that Uncle Roger uses his "accent" and the discursively constructed identity to align himself with a stereotypical yet broad pan-Asian identity. The data also confirms that Uncle Roger is a deliberately and creatively fashioned persona, strategically tailored to resonate with his diaspora audience. Therefore, it becomes evident from this analysis that Nigel Ng's performance of Uncle Roger falls within the realm of racial stylization. In this context, Ng consciously and creatively use linguistic and other semiotic features to project a stereotypical pan-Asian identity via the Uncle Roger persona, primarily aimed at his diaspora audiences who can interpret and relate to such projections (Bakhtin, 1984; Coupland, 2007; Rampton, 1995).

Echoing previous research which sees stylization as a double-edged sword that simultaneously confirms and challenges the stereotypes, Nigel Ng's racial stylization via the performance of Uncle Roger also resulted in opposite reviews from his audience. The significant number of positive reviews Uncle Roger receives serve as a strong indication of how his audience relates to the content. Suggestions that he is "brave" (12a) to call out British chefs in this way might indicate the shortage, or even absence of accurate representation of Asian culture in Western media discourse. Nigel Ng, known for his sharp critiques of British chefs cooking Asian cuisine as Uncle Roger, successfully fills this void and addresses this issue. Helped by his distinctive stylization, Nigel Ng's Uncle Roger persona has gained fame for authenticating Asianness and decentering Whiteness. Performing Uncle Roger as a stereotypical and broad pan-Asian identity enables Nigel Ng to speak authoritatively on behalf of pan-Asian culture, and critique with credibility on everything from Indonesian egg fried rice to Japanese ramen.

The stereotypical and broad pan-Asian identity, which garnered him positive reviews, also leads to critiques. Here, this paper discusses two aspects of why such racial stylization leads to negative reviews. On the one hand, Nigel Ng's pan-Asian stylization present a generalizing perception of Asians, which is detrimental to Asian representation. When Asians are portrayed and perceived as homogeneous, their internal variations are disregarded or erased. This process of erasure (Irvine et al., 2009), a sociolinguistic process that elides intra-group multilingualism, variation, and overlap, can lead to important internal variation being disregarded and less societally empowered Asian voices to remain unheard. Similarly, Kim's (2021) study on Ali Wong, another Asian comedian who thrives on racial stylization, argues that, unlike broad, overgeneralized stylizations, ethno-specific stereotypes "are able to impersonate—and therefore construct—a positive identity that is based in vernacular discourses and knowledges, rather than a negative identity based in the rejection of dominant discourses" (p. 321). Thus, Nigel Ng's creation of a fabricated persona which avoids ethno-specific identification while actively promoting an out-group, over-generalized stereotype, misses this opportunity to subvert dominant discourses through specificity. Instead, his stylization erases the distinct characteristics of specific groups within the pan-Asian community, including language, culture, and even history. This erasure is often employed as a part of political agendas (Irvine et al., 2009), which can perpetuate intra-group power imbalances.

Furthermore, it is apparent that his audiences are fully aware of the fact that Uncle Roger is a fabricated persona. Such a persona, which consciously "degrades or mocks their race," as seen in Excerpt (13), is observed as catering to the preferences of White listening subjects (Rosa & Flores, 2017) and aligning itself with the prevailing Western media discourse that reinforces the systematic stigmatization of Asians. Moreover, as data shows, Nigel Ng's racial stylization through his portrayal of Uncle Roger misuses and mixes the features of pan-Asian varieties. This situation mirrors the issues brought up by what Benor (2010) terms "out-group use of a repertoire," exemplified by instances where "some non-group members use elements of the group's ethnolect" but "use or avoid certain features in this repertoire" (Benor, 2010, pp. 167-168). This racial stylization thus positions Nigel Ng as an out-group user for many of the features he employs, bring him into confrontation with members of his own self-proclaimed pan-Asian group. Nigel Ng's Asian ethnicity further exacerbates the issues. In other words, Nigel Ng is perceived as a traitor to his own race.

8   Conclusion

This paper presents a case study on the racial stylization of pan-Asianness, which is largely achieved through the performance of a linguistic bricolage and a discursively constructed identity. The stylization discussed in this paper is another illustration of its double-edged nature, for it confirms and simultaneously challenges stereotypes (Coupland, 2007). On the one hand, Nigel Ng's performance of Uncle Roger challenges White hegemony by constructing a proud Asian identity and criticizing Western media's misrepresentation of Asian cultures. On the other hand, it is not an innocent and harmless impersonating practice, for it foregrounds out-group stereotypes of Asians, reproducing systematically stigmatized stereotypes about Asians.

The analysis is limited by the understudied nature of Asian English. For example, in this research the "zero copula" feature is not attributed to HKE. However, it is not clear if it is due to the actual absence of "zero copula" in HKE or if such analysis is due the lack of research on the topic. Another limitation is the failure to consider the correlation between stylization with social class and gender. Although stylization in media often reflects race, class and gender are also

closely intertwined (Carris, 2011; Sharma, 2015). In the case of Uncle Roger's performance, the racial stylization is more apparent and direct than the gender or class stylization. However, Nigel Ng's creative portrayal of a middle-aged Asian man also incorporates aspects of gender, age, and class, which would be worthy of consideration in future work.

Acknowledgements

References

Asian Not Asian Podcast (Director). (2020, September 14). *Uncle Roger on Using the Asian Accent | Asian Not Asian*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bY-RhGZ-OM

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics.* University of Minnesota Press.

Benor, S. B. (2010). Ethnolinguistic repertoire: Shifting the analytic focus in language and ethnicity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 14*(2), 159–183.

Bolton, K., Botha, W., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2020). *The handbook of Asian Englishes*. Wiley Blackwell.

Britt, E. (2016). Stylizing the preacher: Preaching, performance, and the comedy of Richard Pryor. *Language in Society*, *45*(5), 685–708.

Bucholtz, M. (2022). Styles and stereotypes: The linguistic negotiation of identity among Laotian American youth. *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, 127–147.

Bucholtz, M., & Lopez, Q. (2011). Performing blackness, forming whiteness: Linguistic minstrelsy in Hollywood film. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *15*(5), 680–706.

Carris, L. M. (2011). La voz gringa: Latino stylization of linguistic (in) authenticity as social critique. *Discourse & Society*, *22*(4), 474–490.

Chun, E. W. (2004). Ideologies of legitimate mockery: Margaret Cho's revoicings of mock Asian. *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, 263–289.

Coupland, N. (Ed.). (2007). High performance and identity stylisation. In *Style: Language Variation and Identity* (pp. 146–176). Cambridge University Press.

Dr. Jon Tam (Director). (2021, December 14). *uncle roger duped us all. Haiyaa!* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-EJT5Gs9fw

Eckert, P., & Rickford, J. R. (2001). *Style and sociolinguistic variation*. Cambridge University Press.

Hill, J. H. (1998). Language, Race, and White Public Space. *American Anthropologist*, *100*(3), 680–689.

Hong Sim, J. (2019). "But you don't sound Malay!": Language dominance and variation in the accents of English-Malay bilinguals in Singapore. *English World-Wide. A Journal of Varieties of English*, *40*(1), 82–112.

Irvine, J. T., Gal, S., & Kroskrity, P. V. (2009). *Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader,* 1, 402–434.

Jaffe, A. (2022). Comic performance and the articulation of hybrid identity. *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, 39–59.

Kachru, B. B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. L. (2006). *The handbook of world Englishes*. Blackwell Pub.

Kidd, J. (2020, August 25). Malaysian comedian behind viral Uncle Roger video on YouTube 'super grateful' people love his work. *South China Morning Post*. https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/entertainment/article/3098603/malaysian-comedian-behind-viral-uncle-roger-video-youtube

Kim, E. (2021). "An Impression of Asian People": Asian American Comedy, Rhetoric, and Identity in Ali Wong's Standup Comedy. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, *24*(1–2), 307–332.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2020). *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*. Taylor and Francis.

Labrador, R. N. (2004). "We can laugh at ourselves": Hawai'i ethnic humor, local identity and the myth of multiculturalism. *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, 291–316.

LADbible TV (Director). (2022, April 13). *How I Came Up With "Uncle Roger" Character | Minutes With | @LADbible*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHKqcE59AnE

Ling, L. E. (2020). English in Singapore and Malaysia: Differences and similarities. In *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

mrnigelng (Director). (2020, July 8). *Uncle Roger DISGUSTED by this Egg Fried Rice Video (BBC Food)*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53me-ICi_f8

mrnigelng (Director). (2020, September 20). *Uncle Roger Review GORDON RAMSAY Fried Rice*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrUfwpaNNIM

mrnigelng (Director). (2020, August 30). *Uncle Roger HATE Jamie Oliver Egg Fried Rice*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_KdbASIkB8

mrnigelng (Director). (2022, February 27). *GORDON RAMSAY CALL OUT UNCLE ROGER!* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5zLvsJZAwA

Nigel Ng. (2023). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nigel_Ng&oldid=1149009330

Rampton, B. (1995). Language crossing and the problematisation of ethnicity and socialisation. *Pragmatics*, *5*(4), 485–513.

Roberliza. (2022, August 10). Who is Uncle Roger? All about the comedy sensation Nigel Ng. *Gafencu*. https://www.igafencu.com/r/celebrity-entertainment-uncle-roger-nigel-ng-youtube-comedy-sensation/

sugatwist. (2020, July 24). *This guy is a walking minstrel show* [Reddit Post]. R/Aznidentity. www.reddit.com/r/aznidentity/comments/hwsuh7/this_guy_is_a_walking_minstrel_show/

Sharma, B. K. (2015). Stylizing dialects and restructuring the nation of Nepal in stand-up comedy. *Multilingua*, *34*(2), 237–264.

Tsiplakou, S., & Ioannidou, E. (2012). Stylizing stylization: The case of Aigia Fuxia. *Multilingua*, *31*(2–3), 277–299.