

# [Mock] language ideologies: text-based memes reveal and reinforce linguistic stereotypes

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**Keywords:** mock language, language ideologies, iconization, sociolinguistic diffusion, digital discourse

Mock language is a linguistic system in which elements of one language are deliberately imitated and incorporated into another, often in a distorted or exaggerated form. It has been examined in relation to linguistic stereotyping and ideologies, particularly in the context of *Mock Spanish* in the United States (Hill 1995, 2014; Callahan 2010; Barrett 2006). While prior research has explored how mock language sustains and reinforces ideological constructs (Schwartz 2008; Kroskrity 2019), comparatively little attention has been paid to orthographic depictions (such as logographic vs. alphabetic systems), and implications of the digital. Drawing from text-based internet memes as examples of linguistic and cultural innovation (see Fig. 1–4), this study examines cases of Mock Chinese and their role in constructing, disseminating, and reinforcing ideologies in digital spaces.

Applying Irvine & Gal's (2000) framework of iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure, I analyze Mock Chinese as a tool for linguistic and cultural mockery via both morphophonological and orthographic examples. I present the anglicized romanization 'Bing Chilling' from the Mandarin Chinese '冰淇淋' (Hanyu pinyin: *bīngqílín*), originating from a viral internet meme of American celebrity John Cena—in mocked transcription, John 'Xina'—speaking Mandarin (Fig. 4). Additionally, logographic representations (e.g., Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) often exaggerate perceived linguistic difference through fabricated or nonsensical Chinese characters, while others rely on real characters depicting gibberish or otherwise ungrammatical Chinese text (e.g., Fig. 3) to frame the language as a recognizable, albeit unfamiliar, exoticized aesthetic. This iconization transforms written Chinese into an opaque and foreign object, perpetuating broader discourses of discrimination.

Findings indicate that Mock Chinese contributes significantly to fractal recursivity, whereby linguistic difference is amplified through distortion and exaggeration. It also raises issues of erasure, reducing the diversity of Sinitic languages to a monolithic idea and homogenizing linguistic and cultural identities. This process reflects and reinforces digital language hierarchies, wherein dominant linguistic communities online perpetuate linguistic marginalization under the guise of humor or slang. By situating Mock Chinese within the broader framework of ideologies revealed through digital discourse, this study contributes to discussions on sociolinguistic innovations, discrimination and stereotyping. Ultimately, it underscores how linguistic internet memes serve as critical outlets for ideological production, negotiation, and reinforcement.

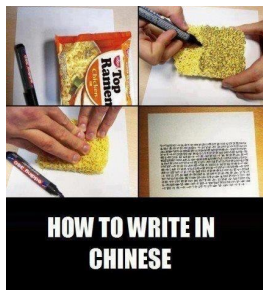


Figure 1. ‘HOW TO WRITE IN CHINESE’ depicts Japanese noodles’ (homogenizing Asian cultures) imprint ‘equivalent’ to Chinese script. *u/k*

A wise chinese man  
once said:



Figure 2. ‘A wise chinese man once said:’ exemplifies nonsensical, incomprehensible writing to imitate Chinese script. *ifunny.co*



Figure 3. ‘隨便寫寫什麼’ *randomly writing*; ‘只是任何東西’ *just anything [sic]*; ‘我不懂中文’ *I don’t understand Chinese* (MDBG n.d.). The phrases are meaningful in literal English translation; nonequiv. semantic fluency in Mandarin.



Figure 4. John Cena is depicted with the hairstyle and uniform of Chairman Mao, with transcribed anglicization, ‘Bing Chilling’ (bīng qílín /from ‘冰淇淋’/ *ice cream*).

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