Just Because You Can Say It, Doesn’t Mean You Should Say It

A Discourse Analysis About the Legitimation in Arguments on Controversy Over the Usage of a Chinese Word That Sounds Like the N-Word

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the arguments in news video clips and comments on social media on whether it was right or wrong of the professor who used a Chinese filler word that sounded like the N-word. I examined the legitimation strategies of the arguments reflected in the social media report and comments on the controversy. The method chosen for this study is a discourse analysis of two video clips on YouTube. Examples from news videos and the comments section were analysed and categorised based on two of van Leeuwen's categorisations of legitimation; authority legitimation and moral legitimation. In summary, the two YouTube videos seem to show more different opinions on whether or not it was right of the professor to use “那个” as an example of a filler word in Chinese compared to the comment sections. Only one of the comments was unclear on whether the author of the comment thought it was right or wrong of him to say the Chinese filler word. In conclusion, although it is not forbidden or illegal for the professor to say it, the school made it clear that it was not right by suspending him from further teaching the communication course.

Keywords

Interlingual homophony, 那个, nà ge, nèi ge. the N-word, professor, USC, communication, education.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Communication with students, parents and colleagues is a crucial part of a teacher’s job, but it is perhaps also one of the most difficult. For example, one educator who has experienced difficulties with communication with students is a professor and communication expert named Greg Patton. In 2020, Professor Patton taught a communication course at USC Marshall School of Business and was talking about filler words, such as “like”, “you know” and “um” in English. To include the international students more, Patton used examples in other languages. One of the filler words was “那个” (nà ge/ nèi ge). This caused complaints to the university by several Afro-American students for sounding like the N-word, to which the dean responded: “It is simply unacceptable for the faculty to use words in class that can marginalise, hurt and harm the psychological safety of our students” (Allen, 2020). Professor Patton, who used to spend time in Shanghai, replaced the Chinese filler word with a Portuguese example after the complaints. After an investigation of the controversy, the professor has since been removed from the position of teaching the communication course at the university (Fadel, 2020; Samson, 2020).

To understand the complexity of interlingual homophony, which is items with similar pronunciations across languages (Lemhöfer & Dijkstra, 2004), one must look at it from a historical and linguistic perspective. Rahman (2011, p.1) refers to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, which describes the N-word as “perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English” and has been used as a racial insult since the middle 19th century. On the one hand, the term is not only unspeakable but is also regarded as one of the uttermost offensive words in English (Rahman, 2011, p.2). On the other hand, the similar-sounding Mandarin Chinese filler word “neige” does not possess any racist connotation in Mandarin Chinese (Wang, 2021, p.138). The original form “nage” is “deployed as a discourse marker in daily conversations” and it can be used to introduce topics, change subjects, occupy pauses and preserve face, according to Wang (2021, p.139). Furthermore, Wang (2021, p.148) describes:
“In Mandarin Chinese, nage, which is constituted of na ‘that’ and the general classifier ge, has been employed as a demonstrative determiner/pronoun or discourse marker in verbal communication since pre-modern periods”.

1.2. Previous Research

2.1.1. Language Ideologies

In order to examine the arguments on social media, language ideologies, specifically in relation to identity, are important. According to Woolard (2020, p.1), the terms “language ideologies”, “linguistics ideologies” and “ideologies of language” are generally used interchangeably. Language ideologies refer to morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure and use of languages in the social world and represent not only how language is but also how it ought to be (Woolard, 2020, s.2) They are not only about language but also work as a connection between language and other social phenomena, such as ethnic and racial identities.

Woolard further mentions social indexicality as a key concept in the semiotic analysis of linguistic ideology. She describes the concept in the following way:

“An index is a sign whose meaning derives from existential association with its object; it points to something in the context in which it occurs. Language users everywhere notice and associate particular linguistic forms with particular speakers or contexts in which they have occurred. [ ... ] Variationist sociolinguistics traditionally tracks the indexical relations of linguistic forms to time-honored categories of social analysis such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Once we recognize the mediating force of language ideologies, we can see myriad social identities that can be indexed by sociolinguistic variables, such as youth subculture orientation, occupational expertise,
parenthood, and more individualistic and ephemeral interactional stances and social claims.” (Woolard, 2020, p.7-8)

2.2. Language and Identity

According to Khor (2020, p.4), most research in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology indicates that ways of speaking do not simply reflect who speakers are but make them who they are. Although there is no universal definition of identity, it can be understood as performative acts, and thus “they are unstable, ever-changing, and co-constructed in, and through, some form of discourse” (Khor, 2020, p.4). One area of interest among researchers of identity is how identities are visible in and through the use of language. In the past decades, there has been significant growth in researchers’ attention on how racialised, gendered, classed, sexual, and other identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested in various educational, professional, and everyday settings (Khor, 2020, p.4). Like Woolard, Khor also brings up the concept of indexicality. Khor (2020, p.5) mentions that it relies heavily on ideological structures, because the connection between language and identity has its foundation in cultural beliefs and values.

Moreover, Joseph (2016, p.30) claims that “our identities are indexed in the languages we speak and write and in how we speak and write them”. This indexicality need not be intentional. We interpret our identities based on our language, which is done whether we want to or not. The interpretations are grounded in the ‘layers of time’ that steady linguistic evolution has produced in every language. Education revolves around managing these layers of time, through not only teaching the standard language but also expanding students’ language repertoires, which also has a direct effect on their linguistic identity and how it is interpreted. Joseph (2016, p.30) further explains that such interpretation “takes place within a broad cultural tension concerning how the structure of a language relates to the ‘genius’ of the people who speak it, as well as to what degree individual speakers partake of that genius, all of which again has a deep historical dimension”.

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1.4. Purpose and Research Questions

This study is an in-depth research on interlingual homophony, as the purpose is to examine the arguments in news video clips and comments on social media on whether it was right or wrong of the professor who used a Chinese filler word that sounded like the N-word. As far as I know, there has been no similar research on interlingual homophony that examines the argument of whether it is right or wrong to use the Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word. Most of the previous research about the Chinese filler word has been focused on semantics, although Wang (2021, p.139) mentions another example of Chinese former basketball player Yao Ming who also experienced a mix-up over the same word when he talked to his Caucasian interpreter and other players overheard the conversation and misunderstood it as the N-word. In this study, I will examine the legitimations of the arguments reflected in the social media report and comments on the controversy by answering the following research questions:

1. What arguments for and against using a Chinese filler word that sounds like an English slur are presented in the news videos about an incident where a professor used “那个” on the social media platform YouTube, and how are these arguments legitimised?

2. What arguments for and against using a Chinese filler word that sounds like an English slur are presented in the comment section of these news reports about an incident where a professor used “那个” on the social media platform YouTube, and how are these arguments legitimised?

2. Theoretical Framework

As this study will examine the arguments on whether it was right or wrong of the USC professor to use of the Chinese filler word that sounds like an English slur, different categories of van Leeuwen’s concept of legitimation will be used to categorise different arguments on whether it was right or wrong of Professor Patton to be suspended because of the controversy. According to van Leeuwen (2007, p.93), legitimation gives the answer
to “Why should we do this?” and “Why should we do this in this way?” In van Leeuwen’s (2007, p.92) article, he discusses four major types of legitimation; authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation and mythopesis. The former two are the ones that are the most relevant to this study. They can occur separately or in combination with each other. Not only can they be used to legitimise, but also to de-legitimise. Furthermore, they can be part of a specific sample of a text or a talk and also spread out in detailed “descriptive or prescriptive accounts of practices and institutions they legitimise (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.92).

2.1. Authority Legitimation

The first category of legitimation is authorisation which relates to who can exercise authority and how. There are four different forms of authority legitimation, each with its own subcategories:

![Diagram of Authority Legitimation](image)

**Figure 1. Types of authority legitimation**

2.1.1. Custom (Tradition & Conformity)

In the case of tradition, the question ‘why’ is not often asked. The rules of tradition are not enforced by specific agents but by everybody. It has been declining in many domains, however, it may still be invoked, especially through keywords like ‘tradition’, ‘practice’, ‘custom’, and ‘habit’. The direct or indirect answer to the question ‘why’ question is, not
“because it is obligatory”, but rather for example “because this is how we used to do it before” and is assumed that this will by itself carry enough weight to go unchallenged (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.96).

In the case of conformity, the answer to the question ‘why’ is not “because that is what we have always done it”, but “because that is how everybody else has done it”, or “because that is what most people do”. Therefore, the indirect message here is “everybody else is doing it, you should do it too” or “most people are doing it, and so should you”, with no further argument. However, sometimes conformity legitimation takes the form of an explicit comparison (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.96-97).

2.1.2. Authority (Personal & Impersonal)

In terms of personal authority, legitimate authority is entrusted to a person because of their status or role in a particular institution, such as parents and teachers in the case of children. Such authorities do not need to call for any justification for what they require others to do other than just “because I say so”. Nonetheless, they can certainly choose to provide reasons and arguments in reality. It is most common that personal authority legitimation takes form in a “verbal process” clause in which the authority utterance contains some kind of obligation modality (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.94).

In terms of impersonal authority of laws, rules and regulations, the answer to the unspoken question ‘why’ is then, not “because I say so” but “because the laws (the rules, the policies, the guidelines, etc.) say so”. Impersonal authorities can be the subject of verbal process clauses (i.e. “The rules state that …”; “The law says that …”), with the presence of nouns such as ‘policy’, ‘regulation’, ‘rule’, ‘law’, etc. or their cognate adjectives and adverbs, such as ‘compulsory’, ‘mandatory’, ‘obligatory’ (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.96).
2.1.3. Commendation (Expert & Role model)

In the case of expert authority, legitimacy is contributed through expertise rather than status. This expertise can be stated explicitly, by for example mentioning credentials. However, if the expert is well-known in the given context it may be taken for granted, with no need to provide arguments and evidence. It is mostly common that expert legitimation takes the form of verbal process clauses or mental process clauses, such as “Professor X believes…”, with the expert as the subject (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.94-95).

In the case of role model authority, people are following the example of role models or opinion leaders. The role models can be members of your own peer group or famous celebrities or influencers. As long as these role models adopt a certain kind of behaviour, or believe certain things, it is enough to legitimise the actions of their followers and the role model authority is especially important in advertising and lifestyle media (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.95).

2.2. Moral Legitimation

Moral evaluation legitimation is grounded on moral values and is not imposed by some kind of authority without further justification. It is mostly related to specific discourses of moral value, but these discourses are not made explicit and debatable. They are only implied with adjectives such as 'healthy', 'normal', 'natural', 'useful' etc. According to van Leeuwen (2007, p.97), these adjectives are “the tip of a submerged iceberg of moral values” and they can “trigger a moral concept, but are detached from the system of interpretation from which they derive, at least on a conscious level”. Hence, van Leeuwen further explains that it is not possible to find an explicit, linguistically motivated method for identifying moral evaluations of this kind. In discourse analysis, one can only ‘recognize’ them based on common-sense cultural knowledge. The usefulness of linguistic discourse analysis ends here and historical discourse research needs to take over. The moral status of these expressions can only be explained through a social and cultural historical perspective, by tracking them back to the moral discourses that underlie them (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.97-98). There are three essential categories of moral evaluation legitimation.
2.2.1. Evaluation

Evaluative adjectives are a central part of moral evaluation legitimation, and they convey both concrete qualities of actions or objects and commend them in terms of some domain of values. Instead of signalling that what is happening is not right or not legitimate, they suggest things are “natural”, “healthy” and “normal” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.98).

2.2.2. Abstraction

Referring to practices in abstract ways that moralise them by extracting them from a quality that links them to discourses of moral values is another way of expressing moral evaluations. One example is instead of saying “playing on the playground”, one could instead replace it with “get on with others” or “cooperate”, which legitimises the opportunities of playing with “sociability” (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.99).

2.2.3. Comparison (Positive & Negative)

Analogies are another common method to express moral evaluation, as a comparison in discourse nearly always has the function of legitimation or de-legitimation. The answer to “Why do I have to do this?” can take the form of either a positive comparison, i.e. “because it is like other activities associated with positive values” or a negative comparison, i.e. “because it is not like other activities associated with negative values (van Leeuwen, 2007, p.99)
3. Methodology

3.1. Source Materials

Two source materials are used in this study. The first one is a video clip from NowThis, and the other one is a video clip from a comedy news show The Daily Show. They were chosen based on the representation of the two minority groups that this study concerns: Black and Chinese people in the U.S. It is important that both source materials include perspectives from these two minority groups in different ways. In the first video, arguments from both Black MBA students and Chinese Alumni from USC. In the second video, a South African host (Gross, 2016) is talking to a Chinese speaking communication expert (IMDb, N/Aa).

3.1.1. NowThis

The first source material (see Appendix 1 for transcription) chosen for the study, henceforward referred to as Video 1, is a news video clip by NowThis (2020). NowThis was founded in 2012 by Huffington Post co-founder Kenneth Lerer and CEO Eric Hippeau (Ad Fontes Media, N/A). Its mission is to make news engaging and relevant for young adults by producing and distributing relevant videos on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other social platforms. Lately, it has put an emphasis on longer-form, in-depth reporting (Shorty Awards, N/A). NowThis is a part of Vox Media which has an audience of over 130 million per month and is one of the top 10 media companies by audience in the U.S. The company has a large number of followers on different social media platforms, such as Vox and Eater on YouTube, NowThis on TikTok, The Dodo on Facebook, and PopSugar and the Cut on Instagram (Vox Media, 2022).

NowThis was originally presenting news entirely on social media platforms, but launched email newsletters in 2018. Ad Fontes Media gives NowThis a reliability score of 41.4 and the news organisation scores -7.95 in terms of bias. Reliability scores range on a scale from 0 to 64. Scores above 40 are generally considered good, while a score below 24 is
considered problematic. Bias scores for articles range on a scale from -42 to +42, with higher negative scores being more left, higher positive scores being more right, and scores closer to zero being minimally biassed (Ad Fontes Media, N/A).

Although NowThis can be considered a left-wing news outlet, I believe this does not influence the result as both Afro-Americans and Asian Americans that this study concerns are considered to have a tendency to vote more for the Democratic Party (left wing). According to Pew Research Center (2016), a nonpartisan fact tank, “87% of black voters identify with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic, compared with just 7% who identify as Republican or lean Republican”. Meanwhile, “Asian registered voters identify with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic, compared with 27% who identify as Republican or lean Republican” (Pew Research Center, 2016). Therefore, neither of these two minority groups should be underrepresented based on this source being considered a left-wing news outlet.

3.1.2. The Daily Show

The second source material (see Appendix 2 for transcription) chosen for the study, henceforward referred to as Video 2, is another news video clip from The Daily Show (2020). The Daily Show (1996 - present) is a comedy news show that provides comedy and news with satirical elements. Celebrities and semi-celebrities also appear on the show, in addition to the news stories, for interviews with the host Trevor Noah (2014 - 2022). It has won 85 Primetime Emmys and 222 nominations in total (IMDb. N/A).

Since The Daily Show debuted in 1996, it has become very popular and is structured much like a traditional news broadcast with an anchor giving news updates and interviewing guests (Newman, 2010, p.5) On the one hand, critics claim that it is not appropriate for people to rely on The Daily Show for accurate information on current events, perhaps because of its satirical elements. But on the other hand, some see the show as the true watchdog in society that exposes a manipulative government and media. No matter which side of the argument is right, it is important to understand the messages that are being sent to so many people according to Newman (2010, p.5).
Furthermore, the show also can be described as a “fake news show” (Kennedy, 2021), as there also are “news packages produced by fake correspondents [...]”, (Newman, 2010, p.5). In this video, there is a correspondent named Ronny Chieng being interviewed and is described by Trevor Noah as “communication expert”. According to IMDB (N/Aa), Chieng is a Chinese comedian born in Malaysia with a dual degree in Law and Commerce from The University of Melbourne. He begun with stand-up in 2009 and caught the attention of Noah hired him for Comedy Central’s 'The Daily Show' where he's been a correspondent since 2015. Although Chieng could be considered as a fake correspondent as he has no formal education in PR or promotion, he does have sufficient knowledge in Chinese to give the perspective of the Chinese speaking community, which was the main reason the video clip was chosen together with the host’s background from South Africa.

From a political perspective, The Daily Show “moderately align with liberal, progressive, or left-wing thought and/or policy agendas”, according to AllSides Media (2024). They refer to a study by Pew Research Center from 2014, which shows that 72% of The Daily Show’s audience hold political values to the political left or left-of-centre, while only 7% of The Daily Show's audience is right or right-of-centre.

As both The Daily Show and NowThis are categorised as leaning more to the left on the political spectrum, one could argue that including sources from a right-wing news outlet could give an even more diverse findings on different arguments on whether or not it was wrong of the professor to use “那个” that sounds like the N-word as an example of a Chinese filler word in his class.

The scope of this research is limited to arguments mainly from Black and Chinese perspectives, as these are the two groups that this particular issue of interlingual homophony concerns and seem to be affected the most, aside from the professor. Therefore, this study does not seek to analyse the arguments based on different media from different political spectrum. As mentioned earlier, this should not have an effect on the finding because both Afro-Americans and Asian-Americans tend to lean more on the left side of the political spectrum.
3.2. Methodological Approach

The method chosen for this study is discourse analysis. According to Jones (2021, p.6), discourse analysts are interested in what people do with language rather than seeing language as an abstract set of rules. For example, in the case of the Chinese filler word “néi ge” there is no set of rules of who can say it or if one should even be allowed to use the word at all.

The focus in discourse analysis is also mostly on longer stretches of language, such as texts and conversations, rather than just sentences or words (Jones, 2021, p.6). This is important, especially in terms of interlingual homophones, because it is not only the word itself that is crucial but also in what context the word is used and how it is used in certain situations.

Moreover, discourse analysis concerns the relationship between language and the way societies are organised, what sorts of ideologies govern peoples’ behaviour, and what sorts of people have power and what sorts of people do not (Jones, 2021, p.6). The way that we speak is affected by the society that we are living in. This relates to language ideologies, where identity plays a big role. As mentioned earlier, language ideologies represent not only how language is but also how it ought to be. Thus, language ideology is an important part of this study, as it can influence peoples’ arguments on whether or not it was right or not of the professor to use the Chinese filler word that sounds like an English slur.

Having said that, language is perhaps one of the most important keys to understanding one another. However, speaking the same language does not always mean mutual understanding. Language can form and shape our identities, how we act, the way we think and what we say. This can create rifts between different social groups, such as age, gender and ethnicity. One example from the time the controversy with the professor happened is the highly noticed activist movement on social media called Black Lives Matter (BLM). At the same time, there has been a significant increase on violence against Asian Americans in the U.S.
One of the people raising awareness of this issue was Laura Huang, an author and professor at Harvard Business School. She wrote on X (formerly known as Twitter): “I want to see how passionately people (incl other POC) will stand up for Asians, […] Those of you who were so vocal w BLM, where are you on the 1900% increase in Asian-directed hate crimes?” (Sang, 2021).

Huang is one of the Asian people on social media who express frustration over the increasing level of anti-Asian violence and how rarely it breaks through into mainstream discourse. Instead of focusing on cases of violence toward older Asian Americans, such as the assault of a 64 year old grandmother in California, her remarks caused more trouble than it solved. Critics claim that there is “a tendency to contrast public responses to anti-Asian racism with public responses to anti-Blackness, as if to suggest people care only about anti-Blackness.” This is a form of anti-Blackness in itself, according to Huang’s critics (Sang, 2021).

Although the issue of violence against Afro-Americans and Asian Americans in the U.S is perhaps something that both groups should unite against, it is dividing them instead. The identity as Black or Asian American does not just create a rift between the issue on violence of these two groups, but it could also have an impact on perception and association of certain words, and what words should or should not be said.

In the first part of the result, a total of eight examples, four from each video clip, of different stances on whether or not it was right of the professor to use “那个” as an example of a filler word are analysed and categorised into different legitimation strategies. Examples of authority legitimation could be custom or conformity. An example of custom authority could be if it stated that “the Chinese filler word has excited longer than the N-word, therefore it is okay to say it”. Another example of conformity authority could be “many people are using the Chinese filler word, therefore it right of the professor to use it too”.

In the second part of the result section, examples from the top ten comments from each news video clip (see Appendix 3 for comments on Video 1 and Appendix 4 for comments on Video 2) have been chosen for this study, as they are the ones with the most likes and
best represent the viewers. However, they are not in the exact order from comments with the most likes on top to the comments with less likes at the bottom. The order of the comments can also change, so it is important to save the top comments and the order of them so no new comments are used in the study.

After saving the order of the comments, they will be categorised into different legitimation strategies the same as the first part of the result. Examples of moral legitimation could be evaluation and comparison. An example of evaluation could be “it is good that the professor uses examples of filler words in different languages, including the Chinese filler word, because it includes students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds”. Another example of comparison could be “the same situation could also happen with the Korean word ‘naega’, which means ‘I’ or ‘me’ being mistaken for the N-word”.

Lastly, in the discussion- and conclusion part, there is a discussion on how different types of legitimation relate to language ideologies and language identities. Furthermore, a conclusion is made based on the arguments in the findings from the results and on whether or not it was wrong of the professor to use the Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word.

4. Result

3.1. Legitimation of Arguments in the News Videos

3.1.1. Video 1

In the news video from NowThis, arguments both for and against the professor’s usage of the Chinese filler word “那个” are presented from for example the Black MBA students, school representatives and USC alumni. Three examples are given here to demonstrate the arguments and the legitimation strategies used to support and/or justify their arguments.
The first example is a letter from the black MBA students in Professor Patton’s class. They wrote:

“Our mental health has been affected. It is an uneasy feeling allowing him to have the power of our grades. We would rather not take his course than to endure the emotional exhaustion of carrying on with an instructor that disregards diversity and sensitivities and by extension creates an unwelcome environment for us Black students.” - Black MBA Candidates c/o 2022 in a letter obtained by the National Review

This quote from the letter written by the black MBA students can be categorised as moral legitimation because it is about moral values that are not necessarily imposed by any kind of authority. In the letter, the black MBA students say that the professor’s usage of the Chinese filler word has affected their mental health and makes them feel uneasy that he is in charge of their grades. Based on van Leeuwen's description of moral evaluation, this is not considered “healthy” and thus the content of the letter can be interpreted as a form of de-legitimation against Professor Patton’s use of “那个”. Furthermore, the Black MBA students uneasy feelings over the professor's power to grade them after the controversy, can perhaps do with the distrust towards official authority, such as the BLM protest against police brutality.

In the following example, Dean Geoff Garret also makes a statement about the actions of the professor:

“Professor Greg Patton repeated several times a Chinese Word that sounds very similar to a vile racial slur in English. Understandably, this caused great pain and upset among students, and for that I am deeply sorry. It is simply unacceptable for faculty to use words in class that can marginalize, hurt and harm the psychological safety of our students. We must and we will do better” - Dean Geoff
Words such as “pain”, “unacceptable”, “hurt” and “harm” also have a bad and negative connotation and does not imply that the professor’s action was healthy and therefore the statement by the dean is also categorised as moral legitimation.

As a response to the suspension of the professor after he used the Chinese filler word in his class, some USC Alumni wrote a letter to the school:

“Most of us are Chinese, some ethnically, some by nationality, and many others have spent extensive time in China. Most of us live in China. We anxiously recognize Prof Patton’s use of ‘nei ge’ as an accurate rendition of common Chinese use, and an entirely appropriate and quite effective illustration of the use of pauses. We feel Marshall should be open to diversity in all areas - not only those areas convenient for the moment. We further suggest that any attempt to degrade this matter and suggest that a Chinese word different in sound, tone, accent, context and language itself is ‘exactly like’ an offensive US term would be naive, a disgusting and intentional stretch and would further degrade important social discussion.” - USC Alumni in a letter to USC, September 1, 2020

According to this quote, most of the authors in the letter by the alumni to the school are Chinese by either ethnicity or nationality and they claim that the professor’s use of the Chinese filler word is accurate and appropriate. As most of the authors are Chinese or spent a longer period of time in China, the content of their letter can be deemed as a form of legitimation for the professor’s usage of the Chinese filler word and it can be categorised as commendation, which is a subcategory of authority legitimation.

Commendation itself can be divided into either expert authority or role model authority. In this case, the content can be categorised more as expert authority as the legitimation in
the letter by the alumni is based on expertise in the Chinese language, e.g. about the different tones and dialects, rather than the status of the former students. Despite the diversity among the students, the university has a more monolingual bias towards English which these alumni argue against.

Furthermore, a petition to re-instate Professor Patton with the following motivation:

“The context of this discussion was clearly an academic lecture on communication and Professor Greg Patton was describing a universal mistake commonly made in communication. For him to be censored simply because a Chinese word sounds like an English slur pejorative term is a mistake and is not appropriate, especially given the educational setting. It also dismisses the fact that Chinese is a real language and has its own pronunciations that have no relation to English.” - Change.org Petition ‘re-instate USC Marshall Professor Gregg Patton’

Given the context, it was not only a mistake and inappropriate for the professor to be censored just because he used a Chinese filler word that sounds like an English slur, but it also dismisses Chinese as a language of its own that does not have any connection to English. This quote can be categorised as evaluation because speaking other languages other than English is “normal” and it is “natural” that words in other languages do not relate to English words.

Moreover, the claim that the school should include all sorts of diversity and not just what is being considered convenient for the moment is perhaps a peak to the BLM movement and that the alumni suggest that it might have influenced the consequence of the professor’s actions and the school’s statement on this matter.

3.1.2, Video 2
In the second video, the host Trevor Noah asks The Daily Show’s communication expert Ronny Chieng to help answer if it was right or not for the university to remove Professor Patton from teaching his class. According to Chieng:

“[…] this whole thing has gotten out of hand, okay? There is no reason to be offended. As someone who speaks Chinese, I can tell you that word is a Chinese word.”

The explanation that “那个” is an actual Chinese word and that one should not be offended by it comes from not only a communication expert but also a Chinese person makes the quote above categorised as commendation. Chieng also gives an example of how it can be used in a sentence. After discussing the Chinese filler word Noah states:

“[…] I guess this is why people need to talk you know? ‘Cause now that we got to the bottom of it as human beings, and, I mean, now the solution is clear, you know? If - if that word ‘nèi ge’ is a word in Chinese, then, well, Chinese people just have to find another word.”

Noah sees talking as something positive and healthy, which makes this quote categorised as evaluation. Although many would perhaps agree that communication is important to solving disputes between people, he arrives at a different conclusion than Chieng. According to Noah, Chinese people should stop using the word “那个” and instead find another word to replace it with. As Noah is a comedian and not a traditional news reporter, it can be difficult to determine if he was being serious or not. He could also have been ironic, in order to create a stronger reaction among the audience and create more views. Chieng nonetheless responded:

“What? No. No, (bleep) that, Trevor. We’re not changing shit, okay? We had that word for 5000 years before racists stole it [...]
Chieng does not think that Chinese people have to change the word because they have used it long before the racists started to use the N-word. Chieng’s argument that the Chinese filler word has existed longer than the English slur word can be categorised as custom legitimation, and more specifically tradition. Saying “那个” can be seen as an old habit by Chinese people. As they are used to saying the Chinese filler word, that it is enough for itself to go undisputable, according to this type of legitimation.

After having a discussion about how to resolve the issue of whether or not to use the Chinese filler word, Noah finally makes the following conclusion:

“Oh. You know what, Ronny? I’m not gonna lie. Before we spoke, I might have been a little touchy, but I think I hear what you’re saying, man. It’s that, like, as people, we’ve got to remember there are so many things that are actually designed to offend us, they’re intended to offend us, that we’ve got to try to make sure that we don’t get offended by the things that aren’t made to offend us.”

Although Noah was sceptical of people saying the Chinese filler word in the beginning of the video, it seems that he changed his mind about it after talking about it with Chiang. According to Noah at the end of their conversation, one should rather take offence to things that are actually meant to offend rather than things that are not made to offend. From this perspective, this can be categorised as a positive comparison because it can be interpreted as saying something that is not meant to offend someone is not as bad as saying something that is meant to offend someone.

3.2. Legitimation of Arguments in the Comment Section

3.2.1. Video 1

In the comment section, people also seem to have strong reactions to the professor using the Chinese filler word. In one of the top comments, a Chinese-Canadian wrote:
As a Chinese-Canadian who's definitely all for BLM, this is simply ridiculous. I echo everyone's comments here and the letter the USC Alumni wrote. By saying he was being racist in this context is actually insidious because it pits 2 different ethnic minorities against one another essentially. BLM is important, I will not deny that and I will not say "Asian Lives Matter" too or "All Lives Matter", but what I WILL say is this - just as much as Black Lives Matter, other ethnic minorities and their lived experiences, their cultures, and heritages shouldn't be invalidated or confused in this manner. The professor used the Chinese term properly, correctly, fully in context, and in a truly educative manner not in an offensive manner at all. As others have pointed out, the pronunciation was perfect and I even have Black friends who understand that it sounds similar but that's it, it only sounds similar. If the professor had somehow used "Nei Ge" in a sentence that involved Black people or some sort of racial situation, then yes I would interpret that as a subtle way to insert his racism if he had it, but he didn't.

This long comment includes different types of legitimation strategies. Firstly, the first sentence is categorised as commendation because the author introduced himself or herself as a Chinese-Canadian who supports BLM to legitimise his opinion of the situation with the professor using the Chinese filler word is ridiculous. Although the author does not specify how fluent he or she is in Chinese, it can be assumed that the author has expertise in the language to know the meaning of the Chinese filler word, how it is used and its pronunciation. Thus, the author makes the conclusion that the professor’s usage of the Chinese filler word was used correctly and appropriately.

In the next sentence, the author states that he or she echoes “everyone's comments here and the letter the USC Alumni wrote”, which can be categorised as custom. What is suggested here by the author is that by claiming that the professor is racist for using
the Chinese filler word, it puts two different minority groups against each other. This is according to other commenters and USC alumni who wrote the letter defending the professor wrong, which the author seems to agree with. He or she uses the argument that most people think it is not wrong of the professor to use the Chinese filler word to legitimise his or her standpoint on this matter. This can be categorised as conformity with the implicit message interpreted as “just because most people think the professor is not a racist for using the Chinese filler word, so should you”. Moreover, conformity may also sometimes take the form of an explicit comparison. In this case, the author claims that both groups’ cultures, heritages and life experiences matter and are equally important.

Another commentator writes:

As a Chinese person, I feel like I have the right to be offended over people calling us racist for using that word. It’s part of our language and has existed for thousands of years. Forcing us to change it is in a way racist towards us.

The author of this comment also claims himself or herself to be Chinese and that he or she has the right to be offended for calling people using the Chinese filler word. Furthermore, the author elaborates that “那个” is part of the Chinese language and that the word has existed for thousands of years. The last part of this argument can be categorised as custom legitimation, and specifically tradition authority because it is an old practice to use “那个” by the Chinese.

While the two previous comments were written by a Chinese-Canadian person and a Chinese person, the next comment is written by a black person:

As a black man, I can absolutely say that this is the definition of REACHING.

As stated in this comment, it is written by a black man. However, it is difficult to interpret his stance on whether or not he thinks that it was right or wrong of the
professor to use the Chinese filler word because the word “reaching” that he uses is unclear. According to Urban Dictionary, “reaching” could mean either that someone’s over-exaggerating something to make it seem worse than what it was, or taking something too far (monetizd, 2021). Based on these two definitions, the author's opinion on this matter can either be that the Black MBA students and the people on their side are over-exaggerating the situation and making it seem worse than what it actually was, or the professor is taking it too far by using “那个” as an example of a Chinese filler word in his class. No matter if his opinion is the former or the latter, he legitimises it by starting with “as a black man” based on his experience as a black person. Thus, his comment can be categorised as expert authority, a subcategory of commendation legitimation.

In the last example of comments of Video 1, a person writes about the experience of his or her black wife hearing the Chinese filler word at the gym and mistaking it for the N-word:

My black wife goes to a gym with a lot of Chinese woman members. She was always complaining that the Chinese women were calling her the “n” word. Suspecting a “lost in translation” situation I called a Chinese scientist friend of mine and as I thought he explained, almost exactly the way the professor did, the translation mix up. Upon hearing what Kang told me, my wife went to the gym that night and talked with the Chinese lady’s about it and now has a new group of friends. My point is: relax and take the time to find out before jumping to conclusions that stress everyone including yourself. Live every minute you are alive. Life’s too short to manufacture stress instead of love.

In this example, the author and his or her wife had different thoughts on what “那个” meant, but neither the author nor his or her wife were sure of what the Chinese word actually meant. After the author went and asked a Chinese scientist friend and after learning the meaning of it, the wife talked to the Chinese ladies at the gym and became
friends with them. Although the author is not an expert in Chinese, this comment can still be categorised as expert authority because of the Chinese friend who explained the meaning of the Chinese filler word. The author uses this to legitimise his stance that not jump to conclusions, in this case when you do not know the meaning of a word in another language.

3.2.2. Video 2

In one of the top comments of Video 2, a Chinese person writes:

_I'm Chinese and last year my roommate told me "nei ge" sounds like the n-word and she was wondering why the Chinese were saying the n-word to each other everyday. I'm glad I explained it to her and she now understands it.... can we just talk to each other and be open-minded first before jumping to conclusions?_

This comment is similar to the last example from the top comments in Video 1 about the wife who misunderstood a group of Chinese ladies at the gym saying the Chinese filler word. The difference in this case is that a roommate thought that the Chinese people say the n-word to each other. After the author explained it to his or her roommate, she understood the meaning of it. Hence, the legitimation strategy here is also expert authority.

Another commentator, whose nationality and ethnicity are not stated, writes:

_If you've ever heard people speaking Chinese, you'll hear the word used ever so often. When I heard it myself, I asked questions, and I was educated. Communication requires context to make sense. Understand the context before making conclusions._
In this case, the author does not know the meaning of “那个”. However, he or she is still aware that it is a word that is often used by Chinese people and thus asks what it means and educates himself or herself before making any conclusion of the meaning of the word. The part stating that the Chinese use it often can be considered to be categorised as conformity authority, a subcategory of conformity authority, which is a subcategory of custom legitimation, because Chinese people often say the word it is not wrong to say it.

The commentator of the next example of top comments in Video 2 writes:


Based on van Leeuwen’s legitimation strategy, this comment can be categorised as a negative comparison because the author writes that not only was an apology from the professor to the black MBA students not enough, but he also had to be suspended and suffer economically, which is not good according to the author as this results in only new ways to hate, avoid and not tolerate you. It can be interpreted as the people who thought it was wrong of the professor to use the Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word were too easily offended. Even though if it was wrong of him to say it, his work did not have suffer because of it.

Lastly, a man of colour writes in the final example of comments on Video 2:


According to the author, people are offended too easily. As this is written by a man of colour, this comment is categorised as commendation. The author uses his “expertise” on
his experience as a man of colour to legitimise that people are too easily offended, assuming he is referring to the professor’s use of the Chinese filler word.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this last section of the study, the result is connected to previous studies on language ideologies and language identity. The result has shown that identity and moral values that are central parts of language ideologies affect the way language ought to be, and how it should be or not be used. For example, arguments from different sides by both current black MBA students and Chinese alumni with different opinions on whether or not it was right by USC to suspend Professor Patton for using the Chinese filler word “那个”. On the one hand, the professor’s use of “那个” as an example of a filler word in Chinese in his communication class was morally wrong based on black MBA students' language ideology because they think that the professor “disregards diversity and sensitivities and by extension creates an unwelcome environment for us Black students”. On the other hand, the alumni who were mostly Chinese thought that it was wrong that the professor was suspended from teaching his communication class as they thought his example was “an entirely appropriate and quite effective illustration of the use of pauses”. The different minority groups have different experiences and make different connections when they hear the Chinese filler. Therefore, their reactions to the professor using “那个” as an example of a filler word are different based on the students' different ethnic and racial identities.

Previous research on language identity has also indicated that the way we speak does not only reflect how we speak but also makes us who we are. One particular area of interest in these types of research is how identities are visible through the use of language and how they are contested in educational, professional and everyday settings. In this study, the findings from the results show that identities are clearly visible in not only the YouTube videos but also in the comment sections. Aside from the letters written by the Black MBA students and the Chinese alumni quoted in Video 1, there is also the Chinese communication expert Ronny Chieng explaining the meaning of the Chinese filler word to the show host Trevor Noah. In the beginning, Noah was sceptical of the professor using
“那个” as an example of a filler word. However, he had a better understanding of it after talking to Chieng and it seemed both agree that the word is not meant to offend anyone.

While it is revealed in the video that Chieng is Chinese, Noah’s nationality is not mentioned. However, you can see in the video that he has dark skin. Noah is a comedian born in South Africa, a country well known for its previous apartheid system. His father is white and his mother is black. When he was born in 1984, apartheid still existed and it was not legal for a black person and a white person to be in a relationship (Gross, 2016). Just as language influences your identity, so does your history. When someone is used to seeing racism as a part of their childhood, it is perhaps not so easy to forget as an adult. However, one should also not forget that Noah is a comedian, and the seriousness when he says for example “if that word ‘內個’ is a word in Chinese, then, well, Chinese people just have to find another word”.

Furthermore, identity is not only an important part of YouTube videos but also highly noticeable in the comment section, whether the comments are written by a Chinese-Canadian person, a Chinese person, a black man or a man of colour. Not only are the author’s ethnic and racial identities revealed in the comments but also the identities for example of their wife and friend in order to legitimise their arguments and stance on whether or not they think it was wrong of the professor to say the Chinese filler word in his communication course. Out of the total 8 examples of comments from both YouTube videos, it was only unclear in one of them if the author thought it was right or not for the professor to be suspended from teaching his course after saying the Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word.

To summarise the findings, the two YouTube videos seem to show more different opinions on whether or not it was right of the professor to use “那个” as an example of a filler word in Chinese compared to the comment section. Particularly in Video 1, there were references to both letters written by the black MBA students and the Chinese alumni with different opinions on this matter. However, there seems to be more of a consensus in the comment sections that it was wrong to suspend the professor for his usage of the Chinese filler word in his communication class as it appeared he used the word correctly and appropriately without meaning any harm to any of the students.
An important concept in previous research on language ideology and language identity is indexicality. Our identities are indexed in the language we speak and how we speak and we interpret our identities based on our language. These interpretations are based on “layers of time” (Joseph, 2016, p.30). The role of education is to manage these “layers of time” not only to teach the language but also to expand the student's language repertories, which also affect the student's linguistic identities. Perhaps the intention of the professor was to teach the students how to communicate more efficiently by expanding their linguistic repertoire by trying to include students with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, the outcome failed as it did not go well with the Black MBA students and the professor was suspended for it. Despite the support for the professor on social media, he was still suspended for using a Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word.

This study is that it mainly focuses on Blacks and Chinese people in the U.S and their thoughts on the controversy over the professor's usage of the Chinese filler word that sounds like the N-word based on the news coverage on social media. One limitation mentioned earlier was that both new video clips were considered left-winged on the political spectrum. If further research is done on the same topic, one could perhaps use source materials from more right-winged news outlets to see if the findings are different. Another suggestion for further research on this topic is to examine the arguments from other ethnicities and races, such as white, Hispanic or other Asian groups, for more diverse findings.

Furthermore, teachers are not only responsible for teaching the students the subject at hand. There are also the ethical and moral dilemmas that teachers have to deal with in and outside the classroom. Another aspect for this topic is how other teachers and professors see this conflict and if they think how it was handled was right or not by Professor Patton and the University of Southern California.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is people on social media do not consider the professor to have done anything wrong for using “那个” as an example of a filler word in another language than English to include students of different backgrounds,
the Black student found that insensitive of him and wrote a letter of complaint to the school and it eventually lead to his suspension continue teaching the communication course. Therefore, although it is not forbidden or illegal for the professor to say it, the school made it their monolingual bias towards English clear by suspending him from further teaching the communication course
References

Source Literature


Source Materials

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Appendix A

Transcription of Video 1

0:00 - 0:07

Text: A professor was placed on leave after saying a Chinese word that sounds like a racial slur in English.

0:07 - 00:33

Greg Patton: “Pausing can be incredibly powerful. Taking a break between ideas can help bring the audience in. If you have a lot of ‘um’ or ‘ers’ - and this is culturally specific, so based on your native language - like in China, the common word is ‘that,’ that, that, that, that. So in China, it might be 那个 [‘nei ge’], 那个 [‘nei ge’], 那个 [‘nei ge’]. So there’s different words that you’ll hear in different countries, but they’re vocal disfluencies. It’s saying, that, that, that, um, um, um, er, er, er.”

00:33 - 01:12

Text: USC business professor Greg Patton was teaching a virtual communication course on Aug 20. He used the Chinese word ‘那个,’ pronounced ‘nei ge,’ to explain the use of filler words in other languages. The commonly used Chinese word means ‘that’ and also functions as a filler word, similar to ‘um’ or ‘like’. According to National Review, a letter signed by ‘Black MBA Candidates c/o 2022’ said Patton ‘offended all Black members of our Class’ and claims he purposely mispronounced 那个 [‘nei ge’] to sound like the n-word.

01:12 - 01:24

Quote: “Our mental health has been affected. It is an uneasy feeling allowing him to have the power of our grades. We would rather not take his course than to endure the emotional exhaustion of carrying on with an instructor that disregards diversity and
sensitivities and by extension creates an unwelcome environment for us Black students.” - Black MBA Candidates c/o 2022 in a letter obtained by the National Review

01:24 - 01:34

Text: USC said Patton agreed to ‘temporarily pause’ teaching the course and the university assigned a different professor to teach the class. In an email to students, Patton apologized for saying the word.

01:35 - 01:44

Quote: “I failed to realize all the many different additional ways that a particular example may be heard across audience members based on their own lived experiences and that is my fault.” - Greg Patton in an email to USC students

01:44 - 01:50

Text: Dean Geoff Garrett issued a statement apologizing for Patton saying the Chinese word.

01:51 - 02:06

Quote: “Professor Greg Patton repeated several times a Chinese Word that sounds very similar to a vile racial slur in English. Understandably, this caused great pain and upset among students, and for that I am deeply sorry. It is simply unacceptable for faculty to use words in class that can marginalize, hurt and harm the psychological safety of our students. We must and we will do better” - Dean Geoff Garret in a university email obtained by National Review, August 24, 2020

02:06 - 02:18
A group of USC alumni sent a letter in defence of Patton. They argued that in Chinese, the most widely spoken language worldwide, should not be characterized as ‘vile’.

02:18 - 02:48

Quote: “Most of us are Chinese, some ethnically, some by nationality, and many others have spent extensive time in China. Most of us live in China. We anxiously recognize Prof Patton’s use of ‘nei ge’ as an accurate rendition of common Chinese use, and an entirely appropriate and quite effective illustration of the use of pauses. We feel Marshall should be open to diversity in all areas - not only those areas convenient for the moment. We further suggest that any attempt to degrade this matter and suggest that a Chinese word different in sound, tone, accent, context and language itself is ‘exactly like’ an offensive US term would be naive, a disgusting and intentional stretch and would further degrade important social discussion.” - USC Alumni in a letter to USC, September 1, 2020

02:49 - 02:55

Text: A Charge.org petition with 16k+ signatures demanded that Patton be reinstated.

02:55 - 03:13

Quote: “The context of this discussion was clearly an academic lecture on communication and Professor Greg Patton was describing a universal mistake commonly made in communication. For him to be censored simply because a Chinese word sounds like an English slur pejorative term is a mistake and is not appropriate, especially given the educational setting. It also dismisses the fact that Chinese is a real language and has its own pronunciations that have no relation to English.” - Change.org Petition ‘re-instate USC Marshall Professor Gregg Patton’

03:14 - 03:29
Text: Dean Garrett later said it wasn’t his intention to appear to demean Mandarin or Mandarin words. USC Provost Charles F. Zukoski added that Patton’s temporary pause was not meant to convey any type of cultural control over the language.

03:29 - 03:41

Quote: “The complaints occurred in a course in communication across cultural lines. Its purpose is to prepare students to be successful in business around the world. There is no intent to impose U.S. cultural norms on communications in other languages and cultures.” - Charles F. Zukoski, Provost, USC, in a letter obtained by National Review

03:41 - 03:53

Text: Patton is still no longer teaching the communication course, but has resumed teaching his other classes.

(NowThis, 2020)
Appendix B

Transcription of Video 2

00:00 - 00:16

Trevor Noah: College. You know, a place where you choose which career you want to abandon in your 30s. It’s also the place where people of diverse backgrounds come together to learn new things. And although the new school year is only just beginning, it might have already ended for one professor at USC.

00:16 - 00:43

News anchor from Fox News: The University of Southern California placing a professor on leave after he used a Chinese word that sounds like a racial slur. Greg Patton was giving a virtual class on how different cultures use filler words to take pauses while talking. He then used a Chinese expression that sounds like a racial slur. Some students complained saying they were offended. The university apologized. Patton insists there was “no ill intent.”

00:43 - 01:00

Greg Patton: If you have a lot of ‘um’ or ‘ers’ - and this is culturally specific, so based on your native language - like in China, the common word is ‘that,’ ‘that, that, that, that’. So in China, it might be ‘nèi ge, nèi ge, nèi ge’. So there’s different words that you’ll hear in different countries, but they’re vocal disfluencies. It’s saying ‘that, that, that, um, um, um, er, er, er.’

01:00 - 01:30

Trevor Noah: Okay, no. Hell, no. Unless you are the lead in a Quentin Tarantino movie, you have no excuse to be saying that word so many times. But yes. USC has removed this professor from his communications course for saying that word in Chinese. The
question is was that the right move? Well, here to help me answer it is our very own communication expert and actual Chinese person, Ronny Chieng.

01:31 - 02:10

Trevor Noah: “Ronny, help me out here, man. When - when you speak Chinese, does this word that sounds exactly like the N-word ever pop up? ‘Cause I’ve never heard you use it.”

Ronny Chieng: “Well, I don’t know, because I don’t speak Chinese.”

Trevor Noah: “Oh. Well, I… Well, I thought you did.”


Trevor Noah: “No, because I mean… Because, like…”

Ronny Chieng: “No. No, no, what? What about me makes you think I can speak Chinese?”

Trevor Noah: “I… No, I - I didn’t mean to offend you, Ronny. I’m - I’m sorry. I just thought maybe…”

Ronny Chieng: “No, no, no, no, no, I’m just (bleep) with you. Yeah, of course I speak Chinese. Of course I speak Chinese, man. I’m Chinese.”

Trevor Noah: “Oh, geez. Okay.”

Ronny Chieng: Ah, you should have seen your face, though.

02:10 - 02:49
Ronny Chieng: “Anyway, Trevor, this whole thing has gotten out of hand, okay? There is no reason to be offended. As someone who speaks Chinese, I can tell you that word is a Chinese word.”

Trevor Noah: “Wait, hold up. The Chinese invented the N-word?”

Ronny Chieng: “No, you idiot. Racists invented the N-word. The Chinese word, h, ‘nèi ge’ it - it’s our word for ‘that’. Uh, but when we’re using it in a sentence, sometimes we use it when we’re trying to think of what we’re saying so it’s like a filler word, like ‘um’ or ‘uh’. Uh, like if I’m trying to remember, *Hey, what’s the name of that restaurant, too many breadsticks?’ Uh, In Chinese I’d say, uh…(speaks in Chinese) ‘... with too many breadsticks?’”

02:50 - 03:45

Trevor Noah: “Okay, I’m - I’m not gonna lie. I’m trying to think of the breadsticks, but all I heard was you saying ‘nèi ge, nèi ge’ in the middle of a sentence, and I’m a little worked up right now. But - but actually, here’s my… Here’s my question for you, then Ronny. If ‘nèi ge’ is, like, just a thinking word, then isn’t it confusing for you when you listen to rap music?”

Ronny Chieng: “Uh, yeah. To be honest, Trevor, uh, sometimes, most rappers just sound like they’re really unsure of themselves. Like, uh, to me, Jay-Z and Kanye didn’t know if they were in Paris. ‘Um, in Paris, um, in Paris, uh, we’re going gorillas’. Nothing makes sense.”

Trevor Noah: “Well, you know what dude, I guess this is why people need to talk you know? ‘Cause now that we got to the bottom of it as human beings, and, I mean, now the solution is clear, you know? If - if that word ‘nèi ge’ is a word in Chinese, then, well, Chinese people just have to find another word.”

03:46 - 04:12
Ronny Chieng: “What? No. No, (bleep) that, Trevor. We’re not changing shit, okay? We had that word for 5000 years before racists stole it. Racists steal their shit from everybody. Like Hitler took the swastika from Buddhism, the KKK stole hoods from Spanish Catholics and skinheads stole their look from Vin Diesel. And now they’re stealing Chinese words? How about racists change their words?”

Trevor Noah: “Yeah, well, you know what, Ronny I - I mean, it’s not like racists have a suggestion box. What do you want me to do, ask them?”

04:12 - 04:29

Ronny Chieng: “Okay, okay. Well, then, here’s another idea, okay? If we want to teach languages and culture without anyone getting offended, okay, let’s just have a class for white kids, a class for black kids and a class for Asian kids, okay? And all the classes can be separate but equal, obviously, and that way, no one will get offended.”

04:29 - 05:12

Trevor Noah: “Uh, Ronny, I think you just invented segregation.”

Ronny Chieng: “Oh, shit, you’re right. My bad, but look, okay, you know what? I’m just trying to solve problems here, okay? Because this thing is dividing the Black and Asian communities, and it shouldn’t, because we should be working together, okay? Look at what Black people and Asian people can do when we’re united, right? Uh, Tiger Woods. Uh, Wu-Tang Clan. Uh, Rush Hour. Uh, Rush Hour 2. Uh, Rush Hour 3. Um… I think they’re making Rush Hour 4. And if you are, please call me. I would love to be in it. Um… (mumbles). Uh, the point is Black people and Asian people have more in common than we think, okay?”

05:12 - 06:05

Trevor Noah: “Yeah. You know what, Ronny? I’m not gonna lie. Before we spoke, I might have been a little touchy, but I think I hear what you’re saying, man. It’s that,
like, as people, we got to remember there are so many things that are actually designed to offend us, they’re intended to offend us, that we’ve got to try to make sure that we don’t get offended by the things that aren’t made to offend us.”

Ronny Chieng: “Thank you. Exactly. Because otherwise, there’s no limit to what can upset you.”

Trevor Noah: “Yeah.”

Ronny Chieng: “I mean, you’d be shocked to hear what your name actually means in Chinese, Trevor.”

Trevor Noah: “Wait. What do you mean, my name… What does my name mean in Chinese?”

Ronny Chieng: “Oh, yeah. I - I don’t think we want to say that word publicly. It’s, uh… It’s kind of, you know, uh… Let’s just say I - I tell my mom I work at The Daily Show with Don Lemon, okay? It’s just safer that way. Anyway, uh, look, I - I got to go, okay? So nice talking to you. Thanks a bunch.”


(The Daily Show, 2020)
Appendix C

Comments on Video 1

He’s literally just teaching a language.

As a Chinese-Canadian who’s definitely all for BLM, this is simply ridiculous. I echo everyone’s comments here and the letter the USC Alumni wrote. By saying he was being racist in this context is actually ridiculous because it pits 2 different ethnic minorities against one another essentially. BLM is important, I will not deny that and I will not say “Asian Lives Matter” too or “All Lives Matter”, but what I WILL say is this...just as much as Black Lives Matter, other ethnic minorities and their lived experiences, their cultures, and heritages shouldn’t be invalidated or confused in this manner. The professor used the Chinese term properly, correctly, fully in context, and in a truly educative manner not in an offensive manner at all. As others have...

As a Chinese person, I feel like I have the right to be offended over people calling us racist for using that word. It’s part of our language and has existed for thousands of years. Forcing us to change it is in a way racist towards us.

It wasn’t being racist people he was just talking another language.

As a black man, I can absolutely say that this is the definition of REACHING.

Just shows how incredibly self centered Americans can be. (yes I’m American). English is NOT the only language in the world!!! Smh

I’m a Chinese native speaker and have rated somewhere between B2 to C1 in English skills, all I can say is that some people are abusing political correctness.

My guess is that the students who reported him might have looked up “that” in Chinese and found 子 pronounced as “na ge”. This is correct, but in conversational context, it is usually pronounced as “ni ge” not “na ge”. You might not find it in dictionaries, but the professor’s pronunciation was contextually correct. Smh.

Context matters, America, and what...you can’t even speak Mandarin anymore without being accused of racism? This is laughable and ridiculous.

My black wife goes to a gym with a lot of Chinese woman members. She was always complaining that the Chinese women were calling her the “n” word. Suspecting a “lost in translation” situation I called a Chinese scientist friend of mine and as I thought he explained, almost exactly the way the professor did, the translation mix up. Upon hearing what Kang told me, my wife went to the gym that night and talked with the Chinese lady’s about it and now has a new group of friends. My point is: relax and take the time to find out before jumping to conclusions that stress everyone including yourself. Live every minute you are alive. Life’s too short to manufacture stress.
Appendix D

Comments on Video 2