



Book Review: *World Englishes in Asian Contexts*

Fan Fang (Corresponding author)

English Language Center

Shantou University

243 Daxue Road, Shantou 515063 Guangdong, China

E-mail: ffang@stu.edu.cn

Abstract

With the spread and development of English around the world and the trend of globalization, the English language, as the most widely used language around the world, has spread across many different Asian countries and become the key language in Asia. Today, the English language is regarded as a second language (ESL) and has developed its own characteristics in many Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and India. This paper reviews a book named *World English in Asian Contexts* and focuses on the theory of World Englishes and varieties of English in Asian countries. It is hoped that readers can get a big picture of the use of English in Asia and understand the language profile in these Asian countries.

Keywords: World Englishes, Asian Englishes, English language teaching

1. Introduction

The English language has developed and spread worldwide, especially in recent decades. As an international or global language (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; McKay, 2002), English has gained such an unprecedented status in Asia. With the high status English has gained in this part of the world, it is not surprising to hear that “English is an Asian language” (McArthur, 2003). Therefore, the issue of English varieties in Asian countries has been gradually paid more attention and discussed by professionals and scholars (Bolton, 2003; Kachru, 2005).

2. Asian Englishes

Yamuna Kachru and Cecil L. Nelson, in their book, *World Englishes in Asian Contexts*, provide readers with comprehensive background, information and implications concerning theoretical, methodological, educational and cultural aspects of Asian Englishes in the framework of World Englishes. These aspects are discussed because “the dynamics of Englishes are changing so fast that they are affecting the profile of world Englishes” (p. xx).

Part One, *Theory, Method and Contexts*, along with the introduction, first discusses the diffusion and variation of the English language, as well as describing B. Kachru’s theory of *The Three Circles* (Kachru, 1985, 1992). According to the theory, countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A belong to the Inner Circle, where English is regarded as the first language, or mother tongue; countries such as India, Singapore, and Nigeria belong to the Outer Circle, where English is regarded as the second language (ESL), while English in countries such as China, Japan, and Korea is regarded as a foreign language (EFL), and these countries belong to the Expanding Circle. As English develops, nativization (Note 1) and acculturation (Note 2) of different varieties of English in Asian countries belonging to the Outer Circle drive the bilingual creativity of their English users. Moreover, the topic of speakers’ identities and the concern of intelligibility when using English to communicate worldwide are also included as chapters in Part One.

Part Two, *Acquisition, Creativity, Standards and Testing*, presents different perspectives on World Englishes profiles. After introducing the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), as well as issues such as proficiency, communicative competence, nativization and Englishization, Kachru and Nelson then talk about the acquisition of English in the Outer and Expanding Circles (pp. 89-91) and state the importance between the perspectives of World Englishes and SLA theory. In the framework of World Englishes, the discussion of Standard English also demands attention. Concerning the topic of “Standard English”, Kachru and Nelson also state that “ELT (English Language Teaching) professionals need to be well-informed about the various positions and come to some conclusions about their own practices in their own contexts” (p. 106). It is apparent that language creativity is one of the characteristics of varieties of English. Chapter Eight provides a discussion of creativity and innovation in contact literature and multilingual language use, while Chapters Nine and Ten are both related to teaching and testing World Englishes and

English literatures.

From this part, we learn that the development of “World Englishes” gives ELT new challenges, while teacher-trainers and classroom ESL teachers should learn to develop new ideas not just in cultural aspects but also in professional practices (p. 134).

Part Three, *Profiles Across Cultures*, describes various varieties of English in the Outer Circle in detail – from South Asian Englishes, East Asian Englishes, and Southeast Asian Englishes to African Englishes and African-American vernacular English. In this part, readers learn the historical background, development and characteristics of these varieties of English, as well as unique features of some Asian varieties in the Expanding Circle such as Chinese English and Japanese English.

The next part, *Applied Theory and World Englishes*, focuses more on theory of language acquisition, cultural aspects, and ideology in the framework of World Englishes. Varieties of English such as Philippine English, Singapore English and Indian English are discussed based on grammar, lexicon, and code-mixing and code-switching, as well as culture and conventions of writing and speaking.

In the conclusion, Kachru and Nelson summarize their discussion in this book and raise eight questions for further direction. Although the questions concerning the history of the spread of English, English pedagogy, or World Englishes are not easy to answer, these questions catch our eyes to explore the spread, development and current status of this mysterious language around the world.

3. Conclusion

We cannot ignore the important status of the English language in Asia. *World Englishes in Asian Contexts* is a useful source for those who work with the English language in the up-to-date framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and will especially help students, researchers and scholars in this field to understand English in Asia. It is true that as the spread and diffusion of English in Asia, bilingual speakers can use English to demonstrate their identity and language creativity. It is indisputable that “social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language” (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982: 7). I believe that the newly-developed concerns and arguments in this book will serve as a future reference in the domain of World Englishes and ELT.

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Notes

Note 1. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*, “nativization” means “the adaptation a language may undergo when it is used in a different cultural and social situation. English in India, for example, is said to have undergone nativization because changes have occurred in aspects of its phonology, vocabulary, grammar, etc. so that it is now recognized as a distinct variety of English – Indian English.

Note 2. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*, “acculturation” means “a process in which changes in the language, culture, and system of values of a group happen through interaction with another group with a different language, culture, and system of values.