

# Research Note

## English diversification in Asia: Innovation and its implications for TEIL

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### Introduction

The Asian region<sup>1</sup> represents a complex and fascinating collage of English usage. It is a context where there is much relevance of the world Englishes (WE) paradigm (Kachru 1992), as well as the more recent paradigms of EIL (Smith 1981, McKay 2001, Sharifian 2009, Matsuda 2012) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which has seen an explosion of recent work, building on the early delineation of the field by Jenkins (2007) and Seidlhofer (2011). At the same time, Asia suffers from residual strongly-entrenched nativist attitudes towards English (Honna and Takeshita 1998, Houghton 2012), which run contrary to the rich reality of Englishes in the region. In spite of this, monolithic views towards English are gradually changing in the face of its obvious dynamism and rich variation.

This research note focuses on the impact of various local languages and cultures on English and English varieties in the region, and will consider the relevance of this variation for the teaching of English as an international language (TEIL). Much of the work that looks into 'pluralistic' or 'pluricentric' views of English mainly investigates local features of nativized English varieties, such as Singapore English, Indian English, Hong Kong English, etc., rather than looking at how these English varieties may impact more international or global use of English. Perhaps Honna's insight into the "Capacity of English" (Honna 2008: 57) is helpful here, where he views the many varieties of English as contributing to a larger more expansive 'multicultural English'. Contact linguist Mufwene also refers to the 'feature pool' of English (Mufwene 2001: 4), a large collection of lexical and morpho-syntactic items - a sort of linguistic 'gene pool' - which receives a steady stream of new inputs, some of which survive for continued use, while others disappear. As Sampson (2007: 10-11) states,

The ... possibilities of a language are like a network of paths in open grassland. There are a number of heavily used, wide and well-beaten tracks. Other less popular routes are narrower, and the variation extends smoothly down to routes used only occasionally ... but there are no fences anywhere preventing any particular route being used.

In this paper, I will look at changes seen in English in several Asian contexts plus Australia, as well as the actual/potential impact of these changes on a broader view of 'multicultural' English. The following sections will utilize Kachru's 'three concentric circle' model as an organizational tool to put some order to the large geographical area covered by Asia and Oceania.

### Inner Circle Asia

While Asia extends from Eastern Turkey right across to Japan, and from Northernmost China down to Indonesia and Oceania, the countries where English is a first language are quite limited: to Australia and New Zealand, which are here considered to be part of a larger definition of "Asia" since the 'Antipodes/Oceania' are relatively close geographically, and maintain close ties to Asia in business, education, tourism and many other fields. Due to space limitations, I will limit myself here to the Australian context, since the socio-linguistic situation in New Zealand has many parallels to Australia.

English came to Australia with the first penal colonies in 1790 (Crystal 2003), and through the 1800s the number of settlers increased, with the population reaching 4 million by 1900. The use of English dominated Aboriginal languages, but the unique flora/fauna and lifestyle of the Australian environment have provided many new words to Australian English (AusE) - which necessitated the publication of its own dictionary: the Macquarie Dictionary (Butler 1981). This helped us become more familiar with boomerang, billabong, didgeridoo, koala, kookaburra, wombats and wallabies. In addition, terms such as 'bush tucker' (dried food for the Australian bush), 'barbie' (barbeque), or the expressions 'Good-day mate' as an alternative to 'hello', or 'no worries' as an easy assurance, became widely familiar.

Australia's population boomed in the early 2000s (Ike 2016), with many new residents coming from Asia and other parts of the world, as immigration policies were loosened. This resulted in a reciprocal influence of world languages on AusE, as well as the adopting of unique features of AusE by new citizens from the Middle East, China, other parts of Asia, and Europe. Having a world-class reputation for excellence and being a convenient location for people around Asia, Australian universities also boast one of the highest global percentages of international students. This trend is actively promoted by IDP Australia, which maintains a large recruitment office in ASEAN-SEAMEO's<sup>2</sup> Regional Language Centre in Singapore (IDP 2016). According to the Times Higher Education Supplement (2016), Asia, Oceania and Europe far outpace the U.S. in attracting overseas students. Australia, as well as New Zealand, thus exhibit a good deal of multiculturalism/multilingualism in their societies at large, which impacts the English language. Examples of Asian lexical items

which are commonly seen in AusE include Pho, Yum Cha, and Dim Sum among many others.

As a result of the population influx, Australia boasts one of the world's first programs in English as an International Language (EIL) founded by Farzad Sharifian, a Persian scholar<sup>3</sup> who had trouble getting a job as an English teacher in Australia in spite of his masters in TESOL from Iran. He vowed to overcome such prejudice against Non-Native Speaker English Teachers (NNESTs), and after gaining his PhD in Australia, founded the EIL program at Monash University in which not only foreign students, but local Australians as well, learn how to use EIL: a point often made by EIL founder, Larry E. Smith (D'Angelo 2014). We can see from the vitality of the Australian context the dynamic nature of English in Australia, which in many ways serves as a microcosm for English across Asia. Insights gained from the EIL program at Monash can greatly inform the field of TEIL as well.

### Outer Circle Asia

Asia is rich in 'Outer Circle' varieties of English, since both Britain and America had colonies there, and English has remained in these countries as a language with some official status, that is used in many domains of society.

I will briefly consider India here - an important context for English. Braj Kachru, co-founder of the World Englishes paradigm with Larry E. Smith, was born in Kashmir, India, and some of his earliest publications sought to establish the legitimacy of Indian English (Kachru 1976, 1983). English is used in many domains in India, including media, entertainment, education, government and judiciary, and is a pan-Indian common language. It has its own flavor and cultural heritage. Due to the global Indian diaspora, Indians can be found in the U.K., Singapore, the United States, Europe, South Africa - virtually everywhere. One encounters Indians in the best English-medium universities in the developed world, and through the rapidly expanding Call Center and I.T. industries (Friedman 2007). Through this phenomenon, languages such as Hindi, Urdu, and many other languages of India have an effect on Indian English, and English in general.

Indian English has a huge number of lexical innovations, including words such as 'pre-pone' (to move a meeting earlier), and hybrid compounds such as 'tea wallah', the person who brings tea (Kachru 1983). In terms of grammar as well, Indians use the present progressive more frequently than Americans, so rather than saying "I like you", they say "I am liking you". This type of construction has its roots in Indian languages (Sharma 2009). There is a distinct Indian English pronunciation, which at the same time shows diversity, due to the wide range of first languages in India. This raises a common point, that while

world languages do indeed strongly effect nativized or indigenized varieties of 'New Englishes', the extent to which they influence a more monolithic common corpus of English is still debatable. In any event, it is clear that the sub-continent is one of the more influential contexts for English within Asia. From a TEIL standpoint, like other Outer Circle settings, India no longer imports NS teachers: all English teaching is done by local teachers. It is important to remember that although the depth of penetration of English varies (especially by socio-economic class) within India and many other Outer Circle contexts, for India, English is not so much a foreign language, but an additional official language that is used within the country. By default, the model is educated Indian English, and TEIL can come to mean Teaching English as an Indian (rather than 'international') Language!

Singapore is perhaps the next most important Outer Circle Asian context. It is a fascinating linguistic laboratory. With a population of only 4 million, Singapore is 76.9% Chinese, 13.9% Malay, 7.9% Indian, and 1.4% 'Others' (Lim 2010). After becoming fully independent in 1965, President Lee Kuan Yew chose to retain English for practical reasons - much as had been done in India - in spite of some resistance. In a post-colonial setting, it is often the case that segments of the local population feel that English is an unnecessary reminder of the former colonial masters, but at the same time, it is established and serves as a neutral common language, known by most of the educated population, and is 'owned' by the local population, who are in many cases, 'functionally native'.

Confident in its identity, Singapore has retained statues of her first British Governor, Sir Stamford Raffles. The phonology of English in Singapore is heavily influenced by Chinese dialects, with the most salient feature being the glottal stop for word-final consonants. So with 'Bird Park' or 'Orchard Road', it can be difficult to hear the final consonant, and takes some getting used to. Singapore English (SgE) is also more syllable-timed than native varieties (Low and Brown 2005), which is common to many Outer Circle varieties (Nigeria, Philippines, etc.) Hence, a fundamental aspect of TEIL is to provide our students with exposure to such non-native English, because NNSs will be in the majority in their future dealings (Sharifian 2009). The lexical innovation and borrowing in Singapore English come from Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Such terms as 'cheem' (difficult), the famous sentence-ending tag 'la', 'catch no ball' (not very bright), 'kiasu' (hating to lose) and many more can be found in newspapers and speech. In terms of grammar, expressions such as 'off the light' demonstrate a word shift, where 'off' functions as a verb. Articles may be dropped ('you have pen or not?'), and the difference between count/non-count nouns becomes less common as with 'luggages', 'informations', etc. (Crystal 2003). While Singapore continues to promote its rather prescriptivist 'Speak Good English' campaign, one cannot repress the vital creativity of its English, realizing there is no longer just one 'Standard English'. This also has important implications for global English teaching.

While there is not space here to go into detail, other nearby contexts: Brunei and Malaysia, exhibit similar features to SgE. Both have a higher percentage of Malays in the population, thus the influence of Bahasa Malaya is greater. Hong Kong also presents an interesting case. Due to its 1997 return to China, and the fact that unlike Singapore, parents can choose to send their children to Chinese or English-medium schools, the penetration of English into society is weaker, making it an Outer/Expanding Circle hybrid of sorts.

A final case of Outer Circle English in Asia which will be considered here is the Philippines. The Philippines is interesting, since within Asia (if we exclude Pacific settings such as Hawaii or Fiji), it is the only context that was colonized by the U.S. rather than Britain. The Philippine Islands were first colonized by Spain for over 300 years, and the American occupation began at the close of the 19th century. Very different from Spanish rule, when an elite of only 3 to 4% of Filipinos learned Spanish, the Americans brought in the Thomasite teachers, and within 20 years, over 40% of the population spoke English (D'Angelo 2012: 225). Like Singapore, the Philippines is a context where a large percent of the population speaks English. As a result, India, Singapore and the Philippines all have thriving "Call Center" sectors, where U.S. and other multinational companies outsource their help-lines to overseas operators. Thanks to the high level of English proficiency, this exposes Americans to Philippine English. This also contributes to a growing middle-class within society, thanks again to English. The call center phenomenon also has the ironic effect of pushing the local English towards a more American-like one, via 'accent reduction' and cultural familiarity requirements.

Nevertheless, Philippine English (PhE) shows great creativity and uniqueness. While the accent is close to American English, due to the influence of syllable-timed Philippine languages, PhE is also very syllable-timed. Indeed the majority of non-native Englishes are syllable-timed, which may have an impact on English in general in coming generations. Due to the culture and local languages, there is much unique flavor in PhE. Interesting lexical examples of this creativity include 'comfort room' (toilet/bathroom), 'dirty kitchen' (the kitchen where domestic help prepare the actual meals), 'bed spacer' (a poor student from the provinces who comes to Manila to rent a cheap, shared space for sleeping), and my personal favorite: 'Imeldific' (something that is overly extravagant like Imelda Marcos and her 3,000 pair of shoes!). Grammatically there are also many innovations, such as creative use of prepositions, as in: 'result to', 'cope up with', 'based from', 'proud with' and 'interested to' (D'Angelo 2015). PhE is its own vibrant variety, but it remains to be seen the extent to which these innovations may be adopted more widely by global users of English. Japanese users of English are likely to come in contact with Filipinos in their future work lives, so again, enlightened English teachers should expose their students to this variety, and help their students be more tolerant of variation in general.

## Expanding Circle Asia

With the sheer size of Asia, and the influence of groups such as ASEAN - which has adopted English as its official language for all meetings - Expanding Circle Asian countries are showing an explosion of English use. This can also be seen in social media, and by the phenomenon of transnational attraction (Schneider 2014). In East Asia, China, Japan and Korea are all important economic powerhouses, and conduct extensive foreign trade and diplomacy. With Japan's population of 130 million, even if only 10% of company staffers need English, this still may number 10 million regular users of English (Honna 2008). Korea may similarly add another 6 to 7 million. China's economic transformation is still only 10 to 15 years old, but with a population over a billion, and increased effort put into English education (Xu 2010), it may have a huge impact on English in coming years.

Japan represents a very interesting context for English. The Japanese are extremely creative linguists. Their fondness for abbreviation has resulted in development of such terms as 'pasocon' (personal computer), *resutora* (corporate restructuring), and 'free dial' for toll-free numbers. Also, Japanese words enter the wider English lexicon, such as *sushi*, *kimono*, *karate*, *bodicon*, *ninja*, and *karaoke* singing. The Japanese language is also syllable/mora timed, so Japanese English is rather flat in intonation. Due to the Japanese CVCV consonant-vowel pattern, epenthesis is common in Japanese English (JpE), where vowels are inserted into consonant clusters. Thus "McDonald's", three syllables in American English, becomes six in Japanese: "ma-ku-do-na-ru-do." English corporate slogans are also a special genre in Japan, and through Japan's advertising, these expressions are reaching a global audience (Honna 2008). Every major Japanese firm has such slogan. Examples include: 'Inspire the Next' (Hitachi), 'Leading Innovation' (Toshiba), 'Designing the Future' (KDDI telecom), and 'Exceed your Vision' (Epson).

Through recent political changes and economic transformations, other countries in Southeast Asia are also showing a rapid increase in English. Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia are putting much money into English education (Honna 2013), and their economies are also thriving. In many cases this is via interaction and trade with Japan, and English is needed as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Among Expanding Circle countries in the ASEAN plus 3 region, English is increasingly needed, and research in the field of ELF has been applied by Kirkpatrick and others in Asia (Kirkpatrick 2010). If one considers Russia also to be Asian, with Vladivostok reaching almost to the shores of Japan, then the influences of Russian, and of Russian speakers of English, must also be taken into consideration. A new volume on Russian English was just published by Cambridge U. Press, so the need for such studies is become more and more clear (Proshina and Eddy 2016).

## Conclusion

English in Asia involves a wide range of contexts, and serves varied functions within those contexts. For contexts such as Australia or India, Singapore and the Philippines, TEIL has some relevance - at least in the sense that teachers of English are mainly from that country and thus teach a local educated variety - but it is in the Expanding Circle where a new form of ELT based on TEIL is most needed. For the purposes of education, ELF forms a key paradigm that can inform TEIL practices in Asia and for all Expanding Circle contexts around the globe. Fundamentally, effective TEIL involves helping our students to flexibly negotiate meaning with interlocutors from a wide range of countries, speaking a wide range of Englishes. In addition, we must equip our students to navigate the cultural divides they will inevitably encounter. These type of skills will be much more important in our students' lives, than having native-like pronunciation, native-like grammatical accuracy and colloquial speech, or being familiar with American/British culture. TEIL professionals need to adjust their pedagogy to fit this global reality.

Various Asian languages and cultures will continue to have a great impact on English in different settings. One thing is very clear, that users of Asian and other world languages, are multilingual speakers of English - and they are in the majority of English users today. The era of the monolingual monocultural English speaker is past. These speakers of various first languages will have a powerful impact on how English is used around the world, and promoting new culturally and linguistically sensitive pedagogical methods and priorities, based on TEIL, can greatly help our students be most effective in such a world. It is hoped that this note has provided a useful survey of the types of influences which Asian languages are having on a broader, more multicultural/multilingual view of English, and help teachers to adopt such a broader view of English: a view which makes them reconsider the situations in which our students will use English, the students' 'ownership' of English, the model of English they should aim for, whom they are most likely to interact with in English, and the type of topics and issues which are most likely to be discussed and written about in English.

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#### Notes

- 1 For the purpose of this discussion, "Asia" will be extended slightly to include one close neighbor in nearby Oceania: Australia.
- 2 The Association of South-East Asian Nations Ministries of Education Organization
- 3 He was born in Iran, but refers to himself as Persian.