

# Lecture Report

## Trending Now: Dr. Lisa Lim<sup>1</sup>

James D'Angelo

On 24 June 2017, Singaporean scholar Dr. Lisa Lim delivered the keynote address for the 40<sup>th</sup> JAFEA (the Japan Association for Asian Englishes) National Conference<sup>2</sup>, on the occasion of the organization's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The conference was held at Chukyo University, co-sponsored by the Chukyo University Graduate major in World Englishes. Dr. Lim - born in Singapore and a graduate of National University of Singapore (NUS) - is Chair of the School of English at the University of Hong Kong, and holds a PhD from the University of Reading. She taught at NUS from 1996 to 2003, and also at the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam Centre for Language and Communication from 2004 through 2008, where she was researcher and senior lecturer. Her main areas of interest are world Englishes, language shift and endangerment, and the dynamics of contact linguistics. She is co-author with her husband, Umberto Ansaldo, of the 2016 volume *Languages in Contact* (Cambridge), and the pair are also co-editors-in-chief of the new John Benjamins journal *Language Ecology*.

The title of her keynote was "#trending now: Asian Englishes in an age of Reimagining". The hashtag at the beginning of the title indicates the importance of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in her topic: which considered linguistic phenomenon that are now 'trending' in Asian Englishes. Focusing especially on language contact dynamics, she outlined the prevalence of mixed codes, plurilingual practices, and 'translanguaging' in university classrooms, among young people on computer-mediated communication, and in business.

Lim looked at various contexts in Asia, beginning with Cantonese-dominant bilinguals in Hong Kong, an area also documented by David Graddol (Graddol 2015). Regarding communities of practice in postcolonial settings, where the majority of speakers are 'other-language-dominant', for a new variety to genuinely emerge it has to be used widely and spontaneously in society. What Lim finds however, is that whereas English has traditionally been 'compartmentalized' to more formal domains in Hong Kong, the dominance of CMC in today's globalized world has led to a situation where there is much more code-mixing in communication, and 'calquing' and glossing of Cantonese expressions directly into English. Her classic example is that of *gayau*: which literally stands for 'add oil', and is interpreted to mean 'persevere, be strong' - not unlike the Japanese expression *gambatte*. Lim high-

lighted that this new expression has now spread back to spoken domains, demonstrating that digital discourse bears keeping an eye on, for its impact on language evolution in Asia and beyond.

Lim then moved on to higher education. Within higher education, she finds that the language teaching industry is having a major impact on language evolution, with countries such as Singapore and Malaysia as the 'distributors' of the commodity of English, and traditional Kachruvian Expanding Circle<sup>3</sup> countries such as Japan and China as the 'consumers'. This is creating new 'sites of contact' among Asian Englishes. In addition to the many international students at Singaporean universities, the International Islamic University of Malaysia is also host to many Expanding Circle Asian students. Research conducted there has revealed certain common 'substrate'<sup>4</sup> features, such as rising word and sentence-ending tone, being 'horizontally transmitted' from Singapore English to other Asian varieties. She mentioned that teachers in such a setting at first use 'globalist' (standard) features, then bring in 'localist' ones. Lim did not refer to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) here, and I feel this is one place where its relevance could have been added (see D'Angelo 2017).

In the business domain, she observes some contradictory trends in Asia, related to the Call Center industry in the Philippines and India. The pressures within that industry for 'accent reduction' raise questions regarding hegemony and linguistic imperialism, but also whether or not native speakers should make more effort to understand Philippine and Indian English, as these Asian economies gather strength. Another important example of language contact is what Lim refers to as "the renewed, explicit thrust by traditional established dictionaries to ... expand the inclusion of New English - particularly Asian English - lexis." The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has employed scholars such as Philippine lexicographer Danica Salazar to identify new items to include, and they have employed 'crowdsourcing' online techniques to identify such items. (Salazar 2015) Lim mentioned that there are an increasing number of Japanese items added to the OED, such as umami, umeboshi and anime, as well as the fascinating story of the Singaporean Chinese term kiasu - which means 'afraid to lose out.' Kiasu started out as a slang term in the Singaporean military, and just 30 years later, is now in the OED!

All of these trends show a rapid increase in diversity and code-mixing, while at the same time a cross-fertilization whereby more features are shared across varieties. They also reveal that language cannot be controlled in a top-down manner, as seen by Singapore which once promoted its 'Speak Good English' campaign, but now shows more confidence in, and acceptance/appreciation of local Singlish features, having reaching its 50<sup>th</sup> year since independence. Lim concluded that in today's multilingual, multicultural world, users control a wide repertoire of features, and there is in general, a sense of "not needing to separate" these various codes.

Lim closed by reminding us that in Japan, turning 20 signifies a coming of age. She pointed out that modern gemstone to celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries is the emerald, and on the occasion of JAF AE's 40<sup>th</sup> conference, the gemstone would be the ruby. Her final slide was of a beautiful emerald and ruby encrusted peacock pin, in honor of the double anniversary. It was a delight to have Dr. Lim's lecture on this occasion, and her charisma and warmth were felt by all the members and attendees, during the conference in which she not only delivered the keynote address, but also served as discussant for the final panel on linguistic landscapes.

#### Notes

1. An earlier, more brief version of this review appeared in the JAF AE Newsletter, no. 46
2. JAF AE was founded in 1998 by Nobuyuki Honna, now Professor Emeritus of Aoyama Gakuin University, and one of the pioneers of World Englishes and English as an International Language in Asia (see Honna 2008)
3. In Braj B. Kachru's original '3 concentric circle model', the Inner Circle are the traditional 'native speaker' nations, the Outer Circle consists of former colonies of the U.K. or the U.S. (India, Nigeria, Singapore, the Philippines, etc.) and the Expanding Circle are those countries which were never colonized and were previously denoted as being 'EFL' contexts. The model helps us critically question the outdated ENL/ESL/EFL paradigm.
4. As opposed to 'superstrate' features. Usually the grammar is that of the substrate, while the superstrate perform the role of a lexifier. (see Mufwene)

#### References

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Dr. Lim acts as discussant during the final panel session