

Guest Editors' Column

The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, very recently tweeted, “Asia has emerged as the new centre of global growth. This is because of its competitive manufacturing, and expanding markets” (2016). This otherwise simple act of communication is, in many ways, reflective of the broader context in which this special issue was conceived – it is a statement by an Asian leader on the impressive socioeconomic power that the continent has displayed in recent years, delivered on a medium that represents today’s digital, globalised world. In 2008, Bolton put the number of English speakers in South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia at around 812 million (7). By his own admission, it is a rather conservative estimate but the number remains astounding. We, unfortunately, do not have access to reliable sources to give an update of this total but almost ten years on, any estimate must show a significant increase, one that most likely hovers around one billion speakers. This exponential growth has no doubt led to further development in all aspects of life where English plays a role in Asia. Clearly, any research to understand the interplay between English and the historical, social, economic, political, religious and cultural parameters of this vast continental expanse is a complex undertaking. Perhaps, to simplify things somewhat, world Englishes researchers tend to name the varieties they study according to the countries in which they are spoken. While they do not always reflect the multifaceted realities of how English is used in those places, such names do provide the most convenient means of identification and connection for many of us.

The focus of this special issue is on the linguistic description of such varieties. In an effort to update, change or add to our current understanding of how English is used in contemporary Asia, we encouraged our contributors to highlight issues and/or use data from the year 2000 onwards. The seven articles in this special issue cover varieties of English from Brunei, China, India, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and the Philippines.

The first article, co-authored by David Deterding and Nur Raihan Mohamad, provides an overview of the pronunciation features of five varieties: Brunei English, Hong Kong English, Malaysian English, Singapore English and the variety spoken in China. By analysing data from a number of previous studies, they describe the pronunciation features of each variety and then assess the implications of Jenkins’ well-known Lingua Franca Core (LFC) for speakers of these varieties in terms of mutual intelligibility. The second article, by Suhaila Sulong, presents an instrumental study of Malaysian English monophthongs produced by speakers of three regional Malay dialects: Standard, Terengganu and Kelantan Malay. Using formant and Euclidean distance measurements, she evaluates how much these speakers have converged or diverged in their English

monophthong production. Peter Collins presents a diachronic corpus-based study, investigating grammatical change in several elements in the verb phrase in Philippine English and American English. Findings from the new millennium are compared with those from the 60s and the 90s. Based on the comparison, he re-assesses claims of Philippine English's endonormativity. Set in the context of the (re)emergence of English in Myanmar, Hnin Pwint Phyu and Maskanah Mohammad Lotfie explore the usage of English adjective phrases by Burmese and Rohingya bloggers. Adjective phrases from 40 blog articles are analysed in order to identify their forms and functions, as well as to determine similarities and differences between the two groups of English speakers. Chandrika Balasubramanian's corpus-based study explores the use of Indian words in Indian English registers. In the first part of the article, she identifies distinct semantic categories of these words in several different registers that are contained in a corpus compiled in 2000 and the 90s. By comparing some of the results of the first analysis with those from a smaller corpus compiled in 2016, she evaluates the extent of Indianisation in one of the registers. Rabiah Tul Adawiyah Mohamed Salleh, Satomi Kawaguchi, Caroline Jones and Bruno Di Biase report on a study of bilingualism, which they argue is central to understanding world Englishes. It traces the development of plurality in the speech of a Malay-English bilingual child living in Australia as she navigates through the different plurality marking systems of the two languages over a six-month period. Finally, Ridwan Wahid's study investigates the role of range of use in nativisation and acceptability. Using a grammaticality judgment test, he compares two groups of proficient Malaysian English speakers: those who use the variety widely and those who do not. He proposes that range of use is an important variable in determining the extent of nativisation and acceptability of non-standard grammatical features.

This is the first special issue of *Asiatic* that features linguistic studies of Asian Englishes. Although small, our hope is that this collection is the first of many future (and bigger) ones and that it contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discussion of world Englishes within and beyond Asia.

Works Cited

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