

Is English an Asian Language?

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Two Anecdotes

1 Swiss Hotel Balcony

2 Thai Temple

Brief personal biography

Kachru

- Is English in Asia and *of* Asia?

He lists 5 functions of Eng in Asia (1992:102-3)

- as a vehicle of linguistic communication across distinct linguistic and cultural groups;
- as a nativised medium for articulating local identities within and across Asia;
- as one of the Pan-Asian languages of creativity;
- as a language that has developed its own subvarieties indicating penetration at various levels;
- as a language the continues to elicit a unique love-hate relationship that, nevertheless, has not seriously impeded its spread, function and prestige

Hobson Jobson (Yule and Burnell 1886)

The name of the glossary derives from the distorted, anglicized version of the mourning cries of 'Ya Hassan! Ya Hosain!' at the Shia festival of Muharram' (Teltscher 2013; xi)

Under C:

'cashmere, catamaran, char, cheroot, cheetah, chintz, chit, chokey (gaol), chutney, cot, cummerbund, curry'

Flora:

While having **tiffin** on the **veranda** of my **bungalow** I spilled **kedgeree** on my **dungarees** and had to go to the **gymkhana** in my **pyjamas** looking like a **coolie**.

Nirad:

I was buying **chutney** in the **bazaar** when a **thug** who had escaped from the **chokey** ran **amok** and killed a **box-wallah** for his **loot**, creating a **hullabaloo** and landing himself in the **mulligatawny**

(Tom Stoppard's 1995 play 'Indian Ink')

Gayspeak in Filipino English (Casabal 2008:100)

Gayspeak	Translation
...couldn't do anything else but to sit down and Crayola Khomeini...	...couldn't do anything else but to sit down and cry...
How I wish I could Robina Gokongwei-Pe to the party.	How I wish I could go to the party.
To Chaka's amazement, his shabby outfit Optimus Prime into a golden barong tagalog.	To Chaka's amazement, his shabby outfit transformed into a golden barong tagalog.

Consider all the literature written in English by Asian-based writers

Sidhwa – a Pakistani novelist – captures the mood:

‘English...is no longer a monopoly of the British. We the ex-colonised have subjugated the language, beaten it on its head and made it ours’
(Kirkpatrick 2007)

But not everyone felt this way. The Sri Lankan poet, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha said:

‘I have come to realise that I am writing the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth: I have now wish to extend its life and range, enrich its totality. To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason. I propose to do this by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive’ (Kirkpatrick 2007)

The Cobra

Your great hood was like a flag
hung up there
in the village

Endlessly the people came to Weragoda
watched you (your eyes like braziers)
standing somewhat afar

They stood before you in obeisance. Death,
The powers of the paramitas, took you to
heaven

However

The sky, vertical, is where you are
now

shadowing the sun, curling round
and round my mind

They whisper death stories
but it was only my woman
Dunkiriniya,
the very lamp of my heart
that died.

While it is undeniable that the English language is a legacy of British conquest and colonialism, and English is often regarded in Asian societies as a language of commerce and technology, Asian literature in English shows the critical and creative potential of the language beyond such instrumental uses... these writers... use English within their own terms to recollect histories, remember journeys, and represent conflicts within and between the communities and nation-states situated in the vast expanse of Asia' (Lim et al. forthcoming)

We have been looking at Asian varieties of English and how these have been 'stretched' and adapted to suit the cultural needs and lived experiences of their multilingual users.

From World Englishes to English as a Lingua Franca in Asia.

A WE or AVE is used within a speech community by people with common linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Code-mixing is therefore a natural part of any WE. Consider this example of colloquial Singaporean English:

*Pulau Ubin zuo mo?¹ makan seafood or phatoh?
Emails he takes like 2 days later. Then when I
reply to ask further, lagi 2 days gone. Merng so
much of bun tuay, but neh cor-mit if can make it
for sebben Low-vember also. Yah, you ganjiong
also bo pian. Den just now kar chiew dian give
her two time bo lang answer. So tua pai one hor.
When eventually answer, tone like kanna stone
tiok ... then a bit enthu. Aiyoh, I also blur. Sekali,
fly our pigeon, then how?*

‘Why Pulau Ubin? Is he there for seafood or a date? He takes two days to answer his emails and when I replied with more questions, another two days go by. He asked so many questions but still is unable to commit to the 7th November date. There is no point your getting anxious, nothing to do. He is up himself. When he eventually called back, he first sounded lost and then he got excited, it got me confused. What if he stands us up? What are we going to do? (Cavllero et al. forthcoming)

ELF, by definition, is used by people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is why it is impossible to codify or standardise. The English used will depend on the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the speakers in any given situation. That is why it is termed 'dynamic' and being 'constantly negotiated'

(and why it is hard to assess if you feel language assessment needs to assess linguistic norms in some way)

- In 2009, English was officially made the sole working languages of ASEAN. This is an exemplary illustration of a use of ELF
- Le Luong Minh (then Sec. Gen. of ASEAN) in 2013

‘With the diversity in ASEAN reflected in our diverse histories, races, cultures and belief systems, English is an important and indispensable tool to bring our Community closer together’

‘Used as the working language of ASEAN, English enables us to interact with other ASEAN colleagues in our formal meetings as well as day-to-day communications’.

‘In order to prepare our students and professionals in response to all these ASEAN integration efforts, among other measures, it is imperative that we provide them with opportunities to improve their mastery of the English language, the language of our competitive global job market, the lingua franca of ASEAN.’

A Cambodian Minister explains:

- ‘If we don’t know English, how can we participate? [In ASEAN] We need to know English so that we can defend our interests. You know ASEAN is not some kissy-kissy brotherhood. The countries are fiercely competitive, and a strong knowledge of English will help us protect our Cambodian interests. You know, when we use English, we don’t think about the United States or England. We only think about the need to communicate’. (Clayton 2006, 230-33, Kirkpatrick 2010:57)

As you know we have collected the Asian Corpus of English, a corpus of naturally occurring English as a lingua franca being used by Asian multilinguals.

One topic that is popular is language itself.

S1: female Bruneian student at UBD (a local)

S2: female Chinese student at UBD

- S1: so how long have you been in brunei?
- S2: five months
- S1: five months?
- S2: yeah
- S1: so you're from china are you?
- S2: yeah
- S1: which part of china are you from?
- S2: the: south part of china the south
- S1: hh okay so your first language would be:
- S2: cantonese
- S1: hh ah okay
- S2: yeah

- S2: yeah
- S1: all right so erm: why did you choose to come to brunei?
- S2: because at that time there are lots of competitors to we we all want to ex- er to be exchange students abroad and i think at that time i think brunei is easier to
- S1: really?
- S2: yeah to study
- S1: okay
- S2: in yeah
- S1: yah i remember two years ago we had two students from china
- S2: o:h
- S1: yeah one of them was actually from hong kong?
- S2: oh yeah
- S1:but she studied in china. yeah. and both of them came here to do erm english
- S2: ah yeah
- S1: wha-er: what are you taking?
- S2: er here?
- S1: yeah
- S2: er communication and english

- S1: all right.so er:m can you k- er can you try to compare UBD to your own university is it different here than is it over there
- S2: yah i think it's quite different because er in my university even i'm english major er most of time oh no not most of time sometimes my lecturers they don't speak english even
- S1: o:h
- S2: they are yeah. english teachers but here you have to speak english all the time.
- S1: yeah.
- S2: yeah.
- S1: i think that's the best way to learn

Bruneian Chinese (S2) talking with Filipina (S1),
Thai male (S3), Vietnamese female (S4) talking
about language

S2: my first language when i fam- when i'm at
home in the family are actually dialect chinese
dialects i speak a few languages well i speak to
my father in a different dialect i speak to my
mother in a different dialect-kay so that is when
i am at the age of one one to three one to four

- SX-family
- S3:chinese dialect
- S1: growing
- S4: mhm
- S2: so two dialects growing at the same time and at the same time our neighbours spoke malay
- S4: mhm
- S3: mhm
- S2: we live in an area where there were a lot of malays there were a lot of malays li- living in the area as well
- S1: your mother's chinese
- S2: my father's chinese my mother is chinese
- S4: mhm
- S2: erm so but we spo- i spoke dialect chinese: so i had so i grew up with a lot of languages around me

- S1:that's interesting
- S2: and i don't i don't actually remember
- SX-f: (laughter)
- S2: how i i only knew that i was drilled in grammar but erm i felt for a ve- very long time that even when i was i can still think back and i was in kindergarten i could understand the teacher
- SX-f: okay
- S1: uh-huh
- S4: hm
- S2: and she spoke erm english
- SX-f: hm
- S2: at that time so it wasn't a major difficulty because i was so small and so young
- S1: eah yeah so what would you say is er what is your first language now
- S2: definitely english now i mean english has become i think in english i
- S3: English english
- SX-f: (laughter)
- S4: so you have so you have your mo- mother tongue father tongue
- SX-(laughter)
- S2: in the language i use most
- S1: neighbourhood tongue

Four Vietnamese (S1, S2, S3, S5) - all female. Chinese participant (S4) is male.

- S5: how about spending er your money in a freezer i heard some rich guys said that when he is near death er so people put him in a freezer until they find a cure way (laughter)
- S2: freezer really
- S4: yes
- S5: i yah yah i know that
- SS: (laughter)
- S5: i heard about it
- S4: like pushing a fish in a freezer and it won't rot (laugh)
- S2: what for
- S4: it won't rot
- S5: oh right yah

- S4: it stops your illness (laughter)
- S5: to keep his er to keep his body till they find a cure for his illness then he can live again
- S3: really
- S4: yes (laughter)
- S2: oh my god
- S1: no
- S2: oh who's know
- S5: no i don't
- S4: but i don't know he is dead or alive now (laughter)
- S2: (laughter)
- S3: (laughter) or maybe he's still in a freezer
- S4: (laughter)
- S5: do you want to be in a freezer
- S4: nope
- S5: (laughter) how about you
- S2: okay freezer just for food
- S3: no freezer just for food
- S5: what kind of you can become food too
- S3: and you
- S2: okay stop that

English for Islamic Values?

Nashruddin argues that students in the Madrasas need to learn English because, due to the incidence of terrorist attacks, many view Islam as an intolerant religion. 'Muslims can counter this untruth by telling people embracing different religions that Islam does not support terrorism' (2015:69)

Nashruddin adds that a major goal of learning English is to 'provide students with adequate knowledge and skills in using English language in their daily lives (e.g. in conversation)' so that, for example, 'students are able to explain how to perform *shalat*, how many pillars of Islam are, and what Islam is' (2015:76).

Some *pesantren* are also teaching English. Fahrudin (2013) reports that parents support the teaching of English as long as the curriculum does not incorporate the teaching of Western values.

As a simple example of what this means in terms of the actual English language curriculum, in the lesson on discussing future plans, students are taught to append *Insyah'Allah* (God willing) to sentences to give '*Insyah'Allah, I will come tomorrow.*'

Dewi (2012) surveyed the attitudes of staff towards English across several universities in Yogyakarta. The universities included Islamic, secular and Christian institutions. 3 typical quotes:

‘I learn English because I want to be heard’, ‘English can boost our confidence as a nation’ and ‘English makes me more confident I do not feel inferior anymore’ (2012:16-17).

In terms of the lecturers’ attitudes to the role of English and religion, Dewi concluded ‘Regardless of their religions, the participants do not perceive English as a threat’ (2012:18).

To conclude:

Asian Varieties of English (each with sub-varieties)

ELF in Asia (and consider education from kg. to tertiary and the language of the law in HK)

It is the age of the English-knowing Asian multilingual.

English is both in Asia and of Asia.

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