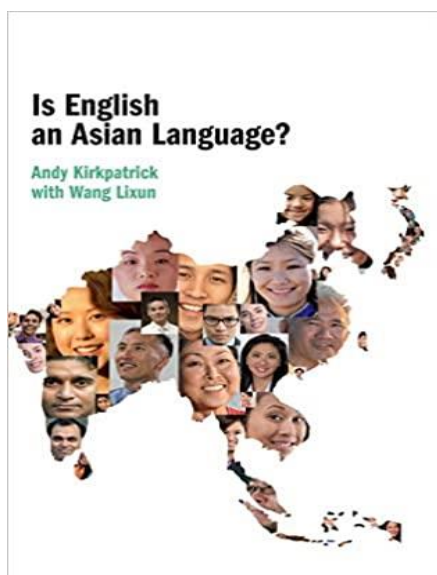




Book Review



Is English an Asian Language? By Andy Kirkpatrick and Wang Lixun, 2021, Pp. 270, Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 9781316471166, \$U.S. 84.85

The unprecedented massive use of English in interactions among non-native speakers contributes to the status of English in Asian countries. The advancement of technology presumably supports this trend by facilitating communication among Asian people across countries. With varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Asian users of English commonly use English as a lingua franca in their interactions with fellow Asians (Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2018). This phenomenon is the launchpad of the book entitled *Is English an Asian Language?* written by Andy Kirkpatrick and Wang Lixun (2021). As signaled in the short title, the authors posed a

thought-provoking question surrounding "the idea of English as an Asian language" (p.3). The question is why English is chosen. This critical question is answered via eleven chapters in three major themes: (1) the historical development of English; (2) the process of language fusion of English with the indigenous language and culture; and (3) the recent expansion of English in the social, cultural, institutional, and educational milieu in the Asian context.

The book enthralls readers with the conceptual foundation and empirical reports of English in Asia. The personal-experience-based presentation style leads to straightforward discussions and thus, makes the book especially valuable and accessible to a broad audience, including novice researchers, established scholars, policymakers, educators, and even learners themselves. The eleven chapters interlock with each other; each connects nicely with the next one. Thanks to the brief examples and rich excerpts taken from actual interactions as presented in each unit, readers have little difficulty understanding the concepts and arguments that are particularly valuable for pedagogical reasons.

In Chapter 1, "How English came to Asia," the authors focus on India and China as two emerging powers with considerable populations. English came to India through British colonization, while it was introduced to China by European missionaries who also worked as traders. In India, until now, while the dominance of English has been criticized by the "Orientalist" who supports local languages, the "Anglicist" who supports English and Western education have successfully posited English as an additional language (p.13) and a mandated subject in the school curriculum, starting from the first grade of primary school. On the other hand, the language reform in China emphasizes the mastery of English "as the language of technology and scientific knowledge" (p.17). English education in China starts in the third grade of primary school. However, as highlighted by the authors, the intensification of the learning and use of English in both countries as either an official language or a school subject, slowly creates a gap between the rich and the poor in the access to English. Students from well-off families have more and better facilities to learn English than those from low-income families and economically less developed regions.



In addition to these two most populous Asian countries, English has been used as the sole working language among countries involved in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The consideration of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds made the ten ASEAN countries decide that English, an 'outside language', to serve as the lingua franca to mediate the communication among them. Furthermore, the authors explore English's educational and institutional roles and review empirical studies of English varieties in these countries.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of a corpus study in Asia. The authors introduce the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) as a laudable language resource that can be used as additional materials in the classroom and as a tool for checking contextualized words and phrases. To ensure the reliability and validity of the corpus, the authors provide detailed methodological procedures involved in compiling the data. The authors highlight the potential of using corpora as a reference to support the argument that English has served as a lingua franca in Asian multilingual communities.

The topic in Chapter 3 deals with "Asian Varieties of English vs. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Asia." Rooted in Kachru's (1990) World Englishes classification of countries into an inner circle (using English as the first language), outer circle (using English as a second language), or expanding circle (using English as a foreign language) countries, the authors emphasize that the outer-circle countries colonized by the British empire were prone to transforming English into new varieties, which gradually become an institutional language. This language usage rule increases the intensity of English use for daily routines, and most speakers combine English with the linguistic repertoire and cultural background of their source languages. This unintentionally leads to new English linguistic resources, and these varieties commonly also represent the identity of the speakers, i.e., Indian English and Singaporean English. However, to provide a broad scope of exploration, the book could have benefited from introducing the historical developments in expanding circle countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. Currently, there is a lack of research into the sociolinguistic profiles of English language use in these countries.

Chapter 4, entitled "What Do Asian Multilinguals Talk about When Using English as a Lingua Franca?" introduces a systematic approach for language practitioners to using the ACE corpus to study varieties of English. This chapter exemplifies various situations where English is used in Asia through excerpts of conversations from various types of speech.

Chapter 5 presents empirical reports of the transfer of linguistic features and pragmatic norms as well as common communicative strategies used by Asian speakers of English. The pragmatic meaning of even the same linguistic term may vary by culture, leading to misunderstanding and posing a challenge for interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To deal with this issue, this chapter has also nicely presented various communicative strategies commonly used by Asian speakers.

In Chapter 6, the book introduces a list of borrowed words in different English varieties in Asia and some of the Asian literature written in English. In the following chapter entitled "Non-standard Forms in Asian Englishes and ELF," the authors disclose the unique structure of English in Asia compared to English in Inner circle countries (e.g., UK, US, etc.). Speakers of Asian English use codemixed varieties that sometimes embed features of the source languages, especially in informal communication. Further, in spoken language interaction, speakers sometimes unmark tenses (e.g., missing the past tense marking) and have grammar issues (e.g., error in marking number agreements). The description and supporting samples are well-written to provide new insights to Asian language learners about the fact that non-standard English is acceptable and normal as long as it is understandable and suitable to the communication context.

Chapter 8 discusses English in Asia taking a broader perspective by segmenting the linguistic resources into ACE and representing some significant themes: law, religion, and popular culture. Furthermore, Chapter 9, entitled "English as a Language of Education in Asia," comprehensively explains the status of English language education and its representation in the mandatory curriculum.

What makes the book a timely and unabashedly seminal piece of work like a breath of fresh air to English language studies practitioners, especially those involved in language pedagogy, is the implications offered in Chapter 10, where the authors address some thought-provoking issues, such as "(i)

when English should be introduced into the curriculum; (ii) whether it should be introduced as a subject or as a medium of instruction (MoI); (iii) how English should complement local languages; and (iv) which English should be taught" (p.179). These considerations propel us to reflect on contemporary English language teaching practices. Furthermore, for teachers, teacher educators, and language practitioners, the following five principles of the lingua franca approach postulated by the authors can be upheld as the state-of-the-art teaching and learning principles:

Principle#1 The native speaker of English is not the linguistic target. Mutual intelligibility is the goal.

Principle#2 The native speaker's culture is not the cultural target. Intercultural competence in relevant cultures is the goal.

Principle#3 Local multilinguals who are suitably trained provide the most appropriate English language teachers.

Principle #4 Lingua franca environments provide excellent learning environments for lingua franca speakers.

Principle #5 Assessment must be relevant to the ASEAN/Asian context. (p.189)

Once again, the existence of English as a lingua franca can be either benign or evil. It could improve the chance of Asians to connect to the other parts of the world, while the dominance of English could also hijack local Asian languages. Although the chapters are not based on original data but rely on data from other sources, this comprehensive book provides a theoretically informed and well-grounded scholarship that helps readers understand various usages and practices of English in Asia, generates insights and informs stakeholders in designing rules regarding the status of English in educational and institutional contexts. Overall, this book is an essential and well-structured resource for new and seasoned academics and scholars interested in the theoretical and practical implications of English in Asian countries.

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