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Book Review

English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model, by Andy Kirkpatrick, Hong Kong University Press, 2011, 222 pp., ISBN: 978-988-8028-78-8

The question of establishing of English as a lingua Franca in the South East Asian countries has skillfully been explored and thoroughly reviewed in Kirkpatrick's *English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model* (2011). The intricately woven arguments in the book are presented in light of the complex historical, political, economic and socio-cultural background of ASEAN member countries. The existing language policies on the interface of national and local languages, regional dialects, and the ultimate issue of establishing English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in curriculum development and instruction as well as language education in these countries is quite controversial, which essentially is the point of contention in Kirkpatrick's book.

The extensively informative book is organized into three parts with precision, wherein the readers can trace the eventual development of the arguments leading to suggestions presented at the end. The first part traces the historical context of the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the significant role of English in this. Here Kirkpatrick reviews the background and complexity of multilingualism in each South East Asian country separately. For Malaysia, it is shown how the establishment of English as a lingua franca became necessary perceptive owing to the coexistence of Malay, Mandarin and Tamil in the country and Malay being the national language.

Consequently, ensuring the promotion of English without losing the position of the national language has been a questionable area for the member states of ASEAN. Presenting the example of Singapore (p. 29-30), the author here argues that though Singaporeans are skilled in English, the literacy rate in Chinese, their official language is alarming. Thus, Kirkpatrick here recognizes the potential, or more appropriately the inevitable risk of national and local languages of ASEAN countries being uprooted if English is to be established as a lingua franca.

Part II is an in-depth analysis of the shared intelligibility of the ASEAN speakers in terms of the linguistic features, e.g., lexis, grammar, pronunciation, discourse and pragmatics, that focuses on the necessity of accepting regional varieties in ensuring successful communication. Referring to Crystal (2004) in chapter 5 (p. 95), Kirkpatrick manages to analyze linguistic variations in English due to historical developments and dialects, arguing that the question of establishing English as a lingua franca is idealistic. Referring to the concept of 'Lingua Franca Core' (LFC) and 'non-core' of pronunciation features by Jenkins (2000), the author therefore urges accepting regional varieties of ELF, while native speaker forms should not be the focus of language education. This in turn will develop ELF into a variety of World English.

Therefore, the ultimate need for change in education policy and pedagogy and the establishment of a multilingual model is the point of discussion in the third part of this book. According to Kirkpatrick,

developing curricula on the basis of short-sighted education policies centered on English in spite of the prevailing limitations with regard to teaching resources, teachers and existing complex multilingualism has led to serious consequences in the ASEAN member countries. Defying three established myths about language education and drawing on the experience of the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand (p.147-148), Kirkpatrick argues that the 'teaching of (and in) English' creates a heavy 'cognitive burden' on children at the primary level, where having an 'adequately trained teacher' does not necessarily mean recruiting native speakers of English. To this end, Kirkpatrick emphasizes prioritizing the establishment of national identity and an understanding of the 'post- Anglophone' (p.189) use of English as a lingua franca.

Kirkpatrick finishes his book by proposing a multilingual language education model tailored for the multilingual nations of ASEAN. His model is proposed for Hong Kong and is adapted from the Canadian Immersion Model, for which he recognizes its underlying limitations and expects adoption of the model in other ASEAN member countries. However, in countries with dominant national languages like Thailand and Indonesia, the applicability of this model is questionable. For China, this model is even more questionable, considering the domination of China in Asia.

The exhaustive analysis of the undeniable interconnection of the socio-cultural issues with the language policy and use is one of the most thought-provoking elements of this book. There is the closest of links between language dominance and economic, technological, and cultural power.... (Crystal, 2012). Kirkpatrick therefore explains how even long after the British rule is terminated (except for Burma), the legacy of colonization remains inherent in these countries.

Kirkpatrick's *English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN* presents a fresh perspective on the question of the appropriacy and applicability of English as a Lingua Franca in the ASEAN member nations, given the complexity of expectations and availability of resources. The proposed multilingual model will possibly prove to be illuminative on this question and serve as a reference point for the policy makers, educators and researchers.

References

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Ismat Zarin

Department of English, Eastern University, Bangladesh

Email: zarinzenia@gmail.com