Redesigning the Linguistic Ecology of East and Southeast Asia: English and/or Local Languages?

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Abstract

It is now well-attested and understood that the use of English as a lingua franca is a major, if not the major, role of English in today's world. In Asia alone, it has been estimated that there are nearly one billion users of English. All ten countries comprising the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ratified the ASEAN Charter in February 2009. The Charter officially identifies English as the *sole* working language of the organization.

In this article I shall consider the implications of the development of English as a lingua franca in East and Southeast Asia with a focus on two specific issues: first, what are the implications of English as an Asian lingua franca for the teaching of English, especially given that English now operates in many non 'Anglo-cultural' contexts in settings in which so-called native speaker are absent; and second, what are the implications for the linguistic ecology of the region with the continuing use of English as a lingua franca? Will we see the maintenance or demise of local languages?

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Key words: English as a lingua franca in ASEAN; the Asian corpus of English; multilingual English teachers; Asian cultures

เป็นที่ทราบกันดีว่า การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางในการสื่อสารมีบทบาทสำคัญยิ่งในโลกยุคปัจจุบัน เพียงเฉพาะในทวีปเอเชีย มีการประมาณการว่ามีผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษถึงเกือบราวหนึ่งพันล้านคน ประเทศผู้เป็นสมาชิกสมาคมประชาชาติแห่งเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ (ASEAN) ทั้งสิบประเทศ ได้ร่วมลงนามรับรองกฎบัตรอาเซียนในเดือนกุมภาพันธ์ ปี ค.ศ. 2009 กฎบัตรอาเซียนดังกล่าวได้ระบุให้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางหรือภาษาราชการเพียงภาษาเดียวที่ใช้ในการประสานงานกันในกลุ่มประเทศสมาชิกอาเซียน

ในบทความฉบับนี้ ผู้เขียนจะพิจารณาผลสืบเนื่องของพัฒนาการของภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะที่เป็นภาษากลางที่ใช้ในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกและภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่ประเด็นปัญหาสองประเด็น ประเด็นที่หนึ่งได้แก่ การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางเพื่อการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในกลุ่มชาวเอเชียส่งผลสืบเนื่องอย่างไรบ้าง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเมื่อมีการนำภาษาอังกฤษไปใช้ในบริบทของสภาพแวดล้อมทางวัฒนธรรมในภูมิภาคที่ไม่ได้มีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ และเป็นภูมิภาคที่ไม่มีประชากรซึ่งเป็นผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาแม่ ประเด็นที่สอง ได้แก่ ในเชิงนิเวศวิทยาทางภาษาศาสตร์ การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางอย่างต่อเนื่องในภูมิภาคดังกล่าวส่งผลสืบเนื่องอย่างไรบ้าง และค้นหาคำตอบว่าภาษาถิ่นที่ใช้ในภูมิภาคเหล่านั้นจะยังคงได้รับการเก็บรักษาไว้หรือสูญสลายไปในที่สุด

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะที่เป็นภาษากลางในประชาคมอาเซียน คลังข้อมูลภาษาอังกฤษในเอเชีย ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษที่มีความชำนาญในการใช้ภาษามากกว่าสองภาษา วัฒนธรรมเอเชีย

Redesigning the Linguistic Ecology of East and Southeast Asia: English and/or Local Languages?

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Introduction

In 2009, the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) made English the sole working language of the Association. This had been the de facto position for many years (Krasnick, 1995), but the ASEAN Charter finally formalised the use of English as ASEAN's sole working language. This means that people, whose first language could be any one of several possible Asian languages, would use English as the official means of communication. In this sense, then, English functions as a lingua franca in these situations. It is important, therefore, that we study this use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). To paraphrase Mauranen, if we want to understand the use of English in today's world, 'ELF must be one of the central concerns in this line of research' (2006, p.147). This is why a team has been collecting the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), described in more detail in the following section.

The Asian Corpus of English (ACE)

ACE is a corpus of naturally occurring spoken English used as a lingua franca (ELF). The great majority of participants are Asians, primarily from the countries of East and Southeast

Asia, who are using English to communicate with each other in natural settings. ACE which comprises about one million words (equivalent to about 110 hours of recorded data) will be officially launched at two conferences later in 2014. The European launch will take place at The English as a Lingua Franca Conference being held in Athens 7-10 September and the Asian launch will be at the ACELT conference, hosted by Ateneo de Manila University, October 21-22. Nine teams in eight countries are involved in the ACE project, namely:

Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippines
Chukyo University, Japan
Griffith University, Brisbane (project leader)
Guangxi University, Nanning, China
Institute of Education, Hong Kong
National Institute of Education, Singapore
SEAMEO RETRAC, HCM City, Vietnam
University of Brunei
University of Malaya

ACE aims to provide a truly representative sample of English as used as an Asian lingua franca and, as far as possible, seeks to meet the following criteria.

(i) gender: an equal balance between male and female participants;
(ii) inclusive – ACE data is sourced from a region rich in its diversity. The aim is to make the corpus representative of this diversity;
(iii) genre balance – the speech events include educational, leisure, business and scientific settings;

(iv) a range of types of events – including regular conversations, interviews, meetings, panels, news conferences, Q and A sessions, seminars, service encounters and discussions;
(v) geographical spread–data should be collected from representative sites across East and SE Asia;
(vi) linguistic balance – the data needs to represent the diverse linguistic backgrounds of East and SE Asia (Patkin 2011, p.10).

Once the data has been collected, it is transcribed using VoiceScribe, developed by the VOICE team (see below). Different mark ups, like intonation, emphasis, laughter are marked and shown in symbols of different colours. John Patkin, the chief transcriber of ACE, has produced a user friendly manual for researchers who wish to use Voicescribe (Patkin, 2011).

The team has been careful to make sure the data is transcribed as closely as possible to the original speakers' usage. Native speaker norms are not used as a benchmark, as any use of native speaker norms as the linguistic benchmark against which 'correctness' is judged would be inappropriate for several reasons. First, the presence of native speaker varieties of English means that there are several native speaker 'norms'. The American 'different than' and the British 'different from / to' is but one example. Second, the presence of so many non-standard forms in all vernacular varieties of English suggests that, in the spoken world at least, variation is the rule rather than the exception. As Britain has pointed out in his discussion of vernacular varieties of British English, 'Standard English is a minority dialect in England' (2010, p. 37). Third, the development of newer varieties of English –

many of which are Asian-based – have speakers who have learned English as an additional language, and these Englishes naturally have to reflect the cultures and lived experience of their speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2007; 2010). A fourth reason why judging ELF against native speaker norms is inappropriate is that the majority of ELF users are multilinguals who use English with fellow multilinguals. It is the ability to use English successfully in multilingual contexts that becomes the key benchmark for success for multilingual speakers. As Garcia has argued, we should avoid 'the inequities' in measuring multilingual speakers against monolinguals (2009, p. 386). McKay goes further, saying, 'Reliance on a native speaker model as the pedagogical target must be set aside' (2009, p. 238). As studies on ELF corpora are beginning to illustrate, the use of non-standard forms does not necessarily impinge on communication. Indeed, the use of certain non-standard forms – for example a tendency towards syllable timing as opposed to the stress-timing of traditional native-speaker varieties of English – far from hindering communication, may actually enhance it (Deterding and Kirkpatrick, 2006).

In addition to describing how Asian multilinguals use English, an important aim of ACE is to allow researchers to compare Asian ELF use with European ELF use, as described in the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) (https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/.) ACE is being collected and transcribed following VOICE protocols and the transcription software, VoiceScribe, to ensure that researchers will be able to reliably and easily compare data from both corpora.

In general terms, ACE should thus be able to provide data for researchers to investigate questions such as:

(i) The role of the first language on the use of non-standard morpho-syntactic forms in ELF.
(ii) The extent to which the universal hypothesis, which proposes that vernacular universals realised as certain non-standard forms occur in all varieties of English, can be supported/rejected.
(iii) The extent to which English can and does act as a conduit for Asian cultural values and norms.
(iv) Whether there are significant differences between the VOICE and ACE data and, if so, what might be the causes of any differences.

The findings have potential significance for linguistic research as the debate between the influence of language contact on the speaker's second language (in this case, English) and/or the existence of vernacular universals across all varieties of spoken English is one of the most controversial areas of debate in contemporary linguistics. In other words, to what extent can any distinctive linguistic features of ASEAN ELF be attributed to the influence of local languages? I consider this below, bearing in mind Thomason's wise advice to be cautious about assigning single causes for language change as "in most cases, no cause can be firmly established and because of the real possibility that multiple causes are responsible for a particular change" (2010, p. 31).

In an attempt to consider the extent, if at all, the L1 influences the English of speakers of Asian ELF, this article will consider extracts from ACE containing speakers whose L1 is some form of Malay (See Kirkpatrick & Subhan, 2014 for a fuller account). If substrate influence is significant, we could expect regular non-marking for tense, as Malay itself does not mark for tense.

In the 16-hour sample comprising 43 interactions there are 11 participants who have Malay as an L1; this includes 4 Bruneians who are L1 speakers of Brunei Malay, but also highly proficient in standard Malay. The total number of instances where either singular present tense '-s' or simple past tense could have been marked is 413. Of these possible instances of tense marking, 306 instances are marked and 107 are not. However, if the relative formality of the interactions is taken into account, we note that, in more informal interactions, such as informal conversations, the relative number of marked versus unmarked instances of these tenses is 153 marked against 100 unmarked. In stark contrast, however, in more formal interactions, such as preparing motions for a debate, there is a significant drop in the number of unmarked verbs, as there are only 7 instances of non-marking compared with 152 of marking. This is not surprising as one would expect the participants to use a more basilectal and colloquial style while engaged in more informal conversations and a more mesolectal and formal style while discussing which arguments to marshal for a debate on a particular topic. It does highlight, however, the importance of specifying the context and level of formality of the situations from which data has been drawn. For this subset of the ACE corpus, it would appear that the level of formality is a critical factor in whether speakers mark or do not mark for past tense.

Can we then say that non-marking of the present simple and past simple tenses is a systematic feature of the basilectal varieties of these speakers' English? As it is very difficult to predict which verbs will be marked and which will not (see example below), I do not think we can say that this is a systematic feature, as non-marking does not appear to follow a specified or identifiable system or principle. It might be more accurate, therefore, to classify the non-marking of these tense forms in this

data set as being a potential characteristic of informal basilectal speech. In contrast, non-marking is clearly not characteristic of these speakers' mesolectal or more formal variety of English. This again serves to underline the importance of specifying the level of formality of the data being used. All we can say from this data is that the basilectal variety occasionally displays non-marking of the present simple and simple past verb forms (although it is **not** as common as the use of marking). The mesolectal variety, in contract, systematically marks for these tenses.

In this subset of the ACE data, past tense forms are thus more frequently marked than not, as is the present simple '-s', even by speakers whose first language is some form of Malay, a language that does not mark for tense. This would suggest that the substrate influence is not as great – at least upon tense marking – as has previously been supposed (e.g., Ansaldo, 2010). Where we do see substrate influence is in the use of Malay discourse particles, as in the example below, which is of a more informal, conversational style. The main speaker (S1) is a female Malaysian of Chinese descent, who also speaks Malay. The extract is divided into two sections, indicated by a dotted line. A small excerpt between the two sections has been omitted. The marked verbs are in bold and the unmarked forms are italicised. I have underlined the use of the discourse particles.

S1: ah eh the men getting girls pregnant then about twenty five years below ah than I ask a lot of people lah then I ask my friends so my first three of my friend when I first ask ah they say oh I'll ask her to abort the baby

S2: laugh

S1: ah number one number two then after that the I **met**erm you know who NAME **he's** forever action type

S2: one of the Malaysian guys

S1: he **he's** a Malaysian staying in Singapore ah he **stayed** underneath us then

. . . . . .

S1: then he **said**erm if the if I **was** younger lah and then I **would** think about leaving school lah I say why give it to your mother or father to take care lah I **might have done** that lah cos my parents then he **said** then he **said** no lah the most important time for a child **is** four years mah and I want to bond with my child

The only unmarked verb form here is 'ask', and there are three instances of this. A possible explanation is phonological as the triple consonant cluster in [askt] is difficult to sound. Otherwise, all tense forms are marked. In addition, the copula is never deleted. The evidence of substrate influence does not come from non-marking of tense forms or copula deletion. Rather it comes from the use of discourse particles such as 'lah' (six instances) and 'mah' (one instance). It may be that linguistic features that signal cultural or pragmatic norms may be more likely to be transferred to ELF, especially when the speakers share similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

While this is a very small sample, other scholars have recently questioned the influence of the substrates on the

morpho-syntactic features of the English of multilingual speakers, suggesting that the frequency of the use of nonstandard forms, while attested, is less than previously supposed (e.g., Hall et al., 2013; Van Rooy, 2013).

To move from syntax to culture, the ACE shows that Asian ELF users regularly discuss Asian-centred topics. A preliminary study (Kirkpatrick, Patkin, & Wu, 2013) discovered that the topics discussed by participants in selected sections of the ACE were, hardly surprisingly, overwhelmingly Asian-focused. These topics included Asian foods and their cultural significance, the difficulty in deciding the first language of multilinguals, prejudice against ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, the plight of Burmese refugees on the Thai border, the advantages and disadvantages of private and public banking in certain countries, and issues associated with Islamic financial services.

This is potentially significant for the English language teaching curriculum. In these 'post Anglo-cultural' contexts, Asian multilinguals with knowledge of regional cultures are likely to make more appropriate English language teachers than native speakers, as the former will be better guides to the relevant cultures. At the same time, English language curricula and materials need to take into consideration the needs and interests of local learners and speakers of English who will be primarily using English to communicate with fellow Asian multilinguals. In short the findings have the potential of radically altering our understanding of the way English is currently being used in East and Southeast Asia and thus radically altering the way in English should be taught in these settings.

While the English(es) used in the ASEAN region are developing to reflect the cultures and needs of their speakers,

English has also become the most taught language across the region. All schools systems, with the exception of Indonesia, have English as a compulsory language, with most systems introducing English from grade 3 and some even earlier, with a few even using it as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 (Singapore and Brunei). There seems to be a tendency towards Asian multilinguals becoming bilingual in their national language – be that Thai, Filipino or Indonesian – and English. These English-knowing bilinguals may slowly be replacing Asians who are multilingual in Asian languages, whether this might be multilingual in the languages of their nation (such as in multilingual Indonesia and the Philippines, for example) or in Asian languages across the regions (such as in Thai and Malay, for example). The official status now attached to English by the ASEAN community is partly the cause of this possible shift from multilingualism in Asian languages to bilingualism in English plus the national language. This tendency has the potential of seriously threatening the linguistic ecology of the ASEAN region. To put it bluntly, many of the languages of the region, especially those spoken by few speakers, may become endangered. There is anecdotal evidence that even languages with very large numbers of speakers, such as Javanese and Cantonese, for example, are reporting a decline in the overall numbers of their speakers.

It is with the points I have made in this article in mind that the following principles for the teaching of English across the region have been proposed. I call this the lingua franca approach and here simply list the principles with a brief explanation of each. (Interested readers can refer to Kirkpatrick forthcoming for a fuller account.)

Principles of the Lingua Franca Approach

Principle#1 The Native Speaker of English is Not the Linguistic Target. Mutual Intelligibility is the Goal.

The role of English as a lingua franca in ASEAN means that English is primarily used between multilinguals whose first languages comprise a variety of Asian languages and who have learned English as an additional language. There is no need for such people to approximate native speaker norms. In the ASEAN context, what is therefore important for an ASEAN speaker is not to sound British or American when speaking English, but to be mutually intelligible when communicating with their ASEAN counterparts. There is an important identity dimension to this. In spoken English, an insistence on standard forms needs to be replaced by an insistence on mutual intelligibility. And, as the ACE data described above suggests, the use of non-standard verbal forms is actually less frequent than in vernacular varieties of British English.

Principle#2 The Native Speaker's Culture is Not the Cultural Target. Intercultural Competence in Relevant Cultures is the Goal.

The cultures traditionally associated with English, such as British and American 'Anglo' cultures, are not as relevant to ASEAN users of English as are the cultures of ASEAN itself. The curriculum needs to focus on the cultures that comprise ASEAN and Asia (Honna, 2008). This is all the more important as government schools in ASEAN typically do not offer courses in any of the national languages of the group, other than their own, of course. The English curriculum therefore could provide these students with the opportunity of at least learning about the cultures

of their region. The importance of this can be gauged by noting that ASEAN is culturally extremely diverse. Not only are the major religions of Buddhism (Thailand, for example), Islam (Indonesia for example), and Christianity (The Philippines, for example) worshipped across the group, there are also literally hundreds of ethnic groups represented within the nations of ASEAN. The ELT curriculum therefore provides an opportunity to develop ASEAN intercultural competence in the citizens of ASEAN countries.

The lingua franca curriculum can also include topics that might be considered as culture with a 'small c'. For example, it is evident from the Asian Corpus of English that, not surprisingly, the topics that Asian multilinguals discuss are primarily concerned with Asian events and phenomena. Such topics could therefore provide materials for the ASEAN ELT lingua franca curriculum. A curriculum incorporating these changes would seem particularly important given the move towards the Asian Economic Community in 2015 (Chongkittavorn, 2014).

Principle#3 Local Multilinguals Who are Suitably Trained Provide the Most Appropriate English Language Teachers.

There has been a long struggle to promote and validate the non-native speaker teacher of English. Many scholars, themselves non-native speakers of English, have argued that a prejudice against non-native speaker teachers of English exists (e.g., Braine, 2010; Moussu & Lurda, 2008). The lingua franca approach really requires non-native speaker teachers of English. Remembering that the language learning goal is not to approximate native speaker norms, but to be able to interact successfully with fellow Asian multilinguals, it follows that an Asian multilingual who is profi-

cient in English and who has the relevant qualifications represents the most appropriate teacher. Being multilingual in at least one Asian language and English provides the teachers with obvious advantages as language teachers, especially if they also speak the language(s) of their students.

First, they will have successfully accomplished what they are setting out to teach and thus have empathy with and an understanding of the problems that their students face (Medgyes, 2002). Second, being Asian multilinguals who are proficient in English and who come from the same or similar linguistic backgrounds to their students, they not only represent good role models for their students, they also provide the most appropriate linguistic models for their students. The local multilingual teacher can provide the linguistic target for their students.

Third, local multilingual teachers with intercultural competence in the cultures of ASEAN can also offer cultural insights for their students. It has traditionally been assumed that a great advantage of the native speaker teacher is that s/he can offer students a guide to the target culture (cf. Moussu & Lurda, 2008). But, as argued above, the cultures which the learners need to know are the cultures found within ASEAN. Thus the ASEAN English language teacher needs intercultural competence in regional cultures, coupled with the ability to transmit or instil this intercultural competence in the learners.

The fourth reason why the local multilingual is the most appropriate English language teacher for ASEAN is that s/he can use the language of the students to help them learn English. That is to say that a bi- or multilingual pedagogy can be applied in the classroom. In the ASEAN context, adopting a bi- or multilingual pedagogy can be more effective than adopting a strict monolingual

pedagogy. It is hard to justify a monolingual pedagogy when the aim of all language learning is, by definition, to create multilinguals. It is therefore hard to justify denying students and teachers the right to make use of their shared linguistic resources in language learning. There are many ways in which the first language of the students can be exploited in the learning of the second language and these have been documented by several language teaching professionals and scholars (e.g., Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Swain, Kirkpatrick & Cummins, 2011). The fundamental principle to be adhered to is that the first language must be used in such a way as to help the student learn the second language.

The fifth reason why the local multilingual is the preferred English language teacher is that an obvious goal of language learning is to develop multilinguals. Multilinguals deserve respect and the multilingual teacher can instil this sense of respect for multilinguals and multilingualism in the classroom. It is important to establish a classroom philosophy through which the English language learner is not judged against native speaker norms and thus constantly evaluated as falling short of the mark, but is judged as a language learner who is developing multilingual proficiency. The students are becoming linguistically sophisticated multilinguals. They are not failed or deficient native speakers.

Principle #4 Lingua Franca Environments Provide Excellent Learning Environments for Lingua Franca Speakers

It is commonplace to assume that the best way to learn a language is to go to where the language is spoken as a native language. In many cases, this, of course, is true. However, in the contexts with which we are dealing in ASEAN, sending students

to learn English in native speaking countries may not be the most effective way of developing English proficiency among the learners. Rather, sending them to countries where English is used as a lingua franca may be far more beneficial. Thai students, for example, may make far more progress if they go to the Philippines or Malaysia to study English than if they were to go to Australia, Britain or the US. In 'native speaking countries, the students may feel awkward as they assume that their English will be evaluated against native speaker norms. This may well lead them to remain silent observers rather than active participants.

Principle #5 Assessment Must Be Relevant to the ASEAN Context

There is no point adopting the principles outlined above and then assessing the students against native speaker norms and cultures. Assessment must be closely aligned with what is being taught. This means that students need to be assessed on how successfully they can use English in ASEAN settings. This, in turn, means developing measures of functional proficiency – whether students are able to perform certain tasks in the language - as opposed to measuring how closely the students' English conforms to native speaker norms. For example, a pronunciation benchmark that only awards the top level to speakers whose accent betrays no first language influence is precisely the type of benchmark that needs to be discarded. Such benchmarks need to be replaced with criteria that measure how successfully students can get their messages across and perform certain linguistic tasks. While by no means a perfect set of measures, the European Common Framework of Reference offers a potential example of the type of functional assessment that could be adapted for the ASEAN context. It must be underlined, however,

that it is important that ASEAN develop its own measures of assessment rather than rely on those developed elsewhere. Only then can the assessment be properly linked to the aims of the English language teaching programmes.

To these five principles I now add a sixth[i] namely that the lingua franca approach to the teaching of English allows the major focus of the English teaching to take place in the secondary school not the primary (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Instead the primary school should focus on the teaching of local languages – ideally using the mother tongue of the child as a medium of instruction where this is possible, but using the local lingua franca where this is not. Giving students a strong foundation in their mother tongues and national languages will act as an excellent support for their later learning of English

Conclusion

Since English is used as a lingua franca in ASEAN, this is the role that should underpin the teaching of English in the region. The lingua franca approach provides a radical departure from the traditional methods and tenets of English language teaching. Most importantly, the approach takes into account that English is being used as a lingua franca in settings far removed from traditional Anglophone and Anglocultural centres. The linguistic and cultural ecology of the English being used is reshaping the language itself. If the primary goal of English language learning is to communicate successfully with fellow Asian multilinguals, then the cultures with which learners need to become familiar are not necessarily those associated with Anglo cultures, but those that shape the nations of ASEAN. The promotion of ASEAN cultures through the English curriculum is of particular importance as

the promotion of English means that local languages (and therefore their cultures) are not being taught in schools, and this threatens the existence of many languages of the region. A way of maintaining local languages and cultures is to make these the focus of primary school, with English becoming more important in secondary school.

Finally, the most appropriate teachers for the lingua franca approach are suitably trained Asian multilinguals. Such teachers provide both role and linguistic models for the students and can act as guides to the cultures of the region. It is such teachers that ASEAN governments should be promoting and training.

Biodata

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[i] There is also the principle that 'Spoken is not the same as written', but, in this paper, the focus is on spoken English.