

English Language Education Across Greater China

BILINGUAL EDUCATION & BILINGUALISM

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English Language Education Across Greater China

Edited by
Anwei Feng

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Foreword

Two questions continually tease students and scholars of global English – especially those interested in the statistics of English use. What on earth is happening in India? What on earth is happening in China? The vast populations of these two countries impact immediately on any estimates we dare to make about the number of people in the world who speak English. We await an up-to-date evaluation of the situation in India. This book provides just such an evaluation for China.

But quantitative data is of far less interest than qualitative. It is not the number of speakers that matter, but their spread, their character and the range of linguistic situations in which they are using English. This sociolinguistic perspective is critical, and it is good to see it present from the opening chapter. A regional perspective is critical too. Generalisations about language use in China often fail to take account of the huge diversity that exists – not only in languages and dialects, but in language policies, planning and pedagogical implementation. It is rewarding to see so many regions of China given separate treatment in this collection – as well, of course, as to see a separate analysis made of the situations in Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.

Plainly, we can observe a sociolinguistic transition rapidly taking place in China. The timeframes that accompanied such transitions in the past no longer obtain. The internet, in particular, has changed everything, and the rate at which the Chinese have taken to this new technology is bound to have a significant effect on English language awareness, learning and use. The question of fluency remains open: we do not yet know just how well or how often people are using the language, and statistics will remain uncertain until more precise information is available. But, as is pointed out, the increasing presence of competent Chinese English contributions in internet forums is an indication of the speed of progress.

Another indication is the arrival of linguistic creativity. One of the most interesting things I read in this collection was the way a new variety of English – the authors call it China English – is emerging in the literature and the media. Such localised varieties can be predicted for any country that has adopted English as a medium of communication; but

hitherto this has been observed chiefly in countries where English is a first or second language. Notions such as American English, Australian English, Caribbean English and Indian English are familiar, not least with reference to the linguistically distinctive literatures they have produced. All countries will develop such literary English varieties in due course, but I imagined that it would take quite some time before we would see such varieties develop in countries where there is no historical tradition of English cultural contact. China is altering that expectation, and cases like Taiwan are providing us with a further affirmation of the fuzziness that exists between the notions of second language and foreign language.

Anwei Feng and his colleagues have done English language scholarship a great service in providing such a wide ranging and detailed account of a linguistic region that is going to play an increasingly important role in the future of English. I saw English in China, hitherto, as through a glass darkly. The image is much brighter now.

David Crystal

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Apex of ‘the Third Wave’ – English Language across Greater China

ANWEI FENG

This volume, as the title suggests, aims to provide comprehensive coverage of English language use and education across countries and regions in Asia normally defined under the umbrella term, Greater China. The concept of Greater China has been used frequently by economists, political scientists and sociologists to refer to countries and territories including mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan because of the historical ties and the growing economic, cultural and socio-political interactions and activities between them. However, the phrase is also used occasionally in a wider sense to include Singapore and other countries in Southeast Asia, and even other parts of the world, owing to their sizeable Chinese communities (Harding, 1995). In the literature of language education, this term has rarely made an appearance. Recent volumes on English language education, for example, either deal with mainland China exclusively (Adamson, 2004; Feng, 2007; Lam, 2005; Zhou, 2004) or cover many countries in Asia or the Far East that happen to be geographically close (Ho & Wong, 2003; Kachru, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2002).

As a concept fully laden with socio-political, economic and cultural connotations (Harding, 1995), its potential implications for education in general across the territories and for language education in particular should be appreciated and investigated. This was a major impetus to produce this volume. As the concept is perceived in various ways, to define the scope of the volume and make meaningful comparisons, we do not adopt the concept in its wider sense, but focus on countries and territories that can be seen as the ‘core parts’ of Greater China. These core parts are geographically close, demographically dominated by ethnic Chinese and culturally, economically and socio-politically interrelated.

More importantly, for a volume on language education, the core parts or territories we choose to study are those that either speak Chinese as their mother tongue or use it as an official language. The rationale behind this selection criterion is that we wish to see how the use of English and English language education impact on Chinese, which is either the mother tongue or an official language in these societies, even though the former is the focus of our study. Hence, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao and Singapore are chosen in line with this criterion and are examined in turn in this volume. Among these territories, mainland China receives most attention owing to its size and diversity of population.

Another major impetus to compile this volume derived from reviews of the recent literature on the spread of English across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The literature is extensive and well acknowledged. However, there seems to be a lack of agreement on how the historical and current spread of English can be appropriately portrayed. One model often claimed to summarise well the history and current situation of the spread of English and cited widely, including by the authors in this volume, is suggested by Kachru (1985, 1986, 1992b, 2005). With this model, the complex phenomena of the spread of English are graphically conceptualised as three concentric circles: *the inner circle*, *the outer circle* and *the expanding circle*.

At the centre is the inner circle, traditionally seen as the base of English where the language is used as the native, first or dominant language in public domains, or English as the Native Language (ENL) territories (McArthur, 2001). This circle, to a large extent, reflects the result from what is often termed the first diaspora (Baugh & Cable, 1993; Kachru, 1992b) characterized by the spread of English in the 17th and 18th centuries and involved the migration of significant numbers of English speakers from the British Isles to North America and Australasia. The most noteworthy outcome of this diaspora, juxtaposed with the spread of other languages such as French, Spanish and Portuguese during the same period, is the fact that English was established as the national language of a number of new nation states, including the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Fishman, 1977). It is commonly suggested that this outcome is a crucial factor in the development of English as a global language.

The outer circle, according to Kachru (1985, 2005), comprises countries such as Singapore, India, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia, where English has a long history of institutionalised functions and is used as a second/official language, i.e. English as a Second Language (ESL) territories (McArthur, 2001), usually in formal

domains such as education, law, governance and mass media, or the language of the social elite (Crystal, 1997). This circle is often said to be the result of the second diaspora (Kachru, 1992b) that brought about the spread of English in the colonial context. Many authors, such as Crystal (1997) and Kachru *et al.* (2006), cover in detail the historical development of English into a second and/or official language in regions or countries including South Africa, West Africa, East Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

The outermost circle is termed the expanding circle, comprising most countries, other than those in the inner and outer circles, including, notably, the world's most populous countries such as China, Russia, Japan and Brazil, where English is taught and learned in most cases as a foreign language, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) territories (McArthur, 2001). The expanding circle is usually seen as a phenomenon in the post-colonial era when the most rapid spread of English was witnessed all over the world (Bolton, 2006). Statistical data given in Crystal (1997) and McArthur (2001) show that speakers categorised as EFL users in this circle could amount to 1000 million, more than the numbers in the inner and outer circles put together. This global expansion is hugely and increasingly significant for any account of the notion of global English or the spread of English in the 21st century.

It is widely acknowledged that Kachru's three-circle model and his other discussions on varieties of English or world Englishes (notably, Kachru, 1986, 1992a) have contributed substantially to the debates on the spread of English, nativisation of English, English as a global language, world Englishes, etc. These notions themselves suggest the autonomy and plurality or heterogeneity of the English languages in the contemporary world. Kachru's theory is so well-received that it has triggered a sizeable amount of literature on the three concentric circles and on world Englishes. In 1997, a special conference held in Singapore to honour him resulted in a volume by Thumboo (2000) entitled *The Three Circles*. Many authors, such as Melchers and Shaw (2003), use the three-circle framework to structure their work on the history of English or variety of English. In a more recent anthology on world Englishes, Kachru *et al.* (2006) still make use of the three-circle model as the starting point and indeed the main theme of the massive *Handbook*.

The descriptive model, however, is not without criticism. McArthur (2001: 8) comments that the model 'seems to belong to a tidier world' rather than to the world in the 21st century. It can hardly address issues such as multilingualism, ENL varieties, the 'native speaker' controversies and issues related to changing ENL/ESL/EFL context as a result of