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Is English an Asian Language?

In this chapter I shall argue that English has become an indigenous Asian language. After extensive language contact, Asian varieties of English have developed, so that it is now a language not only *in* Asia but *of* Asia (Kachru, “English” 102–103). Indeed, I shall show how English has extended into perhaps unexpected roles, roles traditionally filled by local languages. I shall support the argument by providing examples of Asian varieties of English and of Asian literatures written in English which illustrate how the cultures of Asia are reflected in these literatures. The tension between those authors who feel that they have been able to ‘stretch’ and reshape English to reflect their own cultural experiences and those who see writing in English as a form of cultural treason will be reviewed. I shall also give examples of the wide range of functions for which English is currently used within Asia, functions which Asian languages might normally be expected to fulfil. The teaching of English for Islamic values and purposes in the mosque schools of Indonesia and the continued use of English in many Asian legal systems will be given as two instances of this. The article will also distinguish between 1) the roles played by Asian varieties of English – primarily, but not exclusively, as markers of cultural identity – and 2) the role of English as a lingua franca within Asia – primarily, but not exclusively, as a medium of communication between communities and cultures. I shall conclude by asking whether English as an Asian language is threatening the roles and status of languages in Asia.

Keywords: English as an Asian language; Asian literature in English; English as a lingua franca; Asian varieties of English; post-colonialism

1 English Users in Asia

English has been spoken in Asia for at least 500 years. It arrived in India at the beginning of the seventeenth century when Queen Elizabeth I granted a group of traders a monopoly who then established the East India Company (EIC). They started trading in Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay

(Mumbai) and later Madras (Chennai) (Gilmour). The presence of the East India company did not mean that a whole host of English speakers suddenly descended on the sub-continent. One reason for this was that missionaries, who normally swiftly follow traders, were banned by the EIC for fear that they would cause unrest “with their zeal and enthusiasm for conversion” (Gilmour 17). The majority of English speakers in India at the time were soldiers. Even by 1850, there were only 10,000 British civilians in Asia. What gave English a firm foothold was the English *Education Act* of 1835 and Macaulay’s (in)famous “Minute on Indian Education” in the same year. The *Education Act* identified funds for the education of Indians, including the teaching of English.

Parts of Macaulay’s “Minute” makes uncomfortable reading today, although some contemporary proponents of the use of English as a medium of instruction in universities in non-Anglophone countries may still believe Macaulay’s assertions.

[...] English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic [...]. It may be safely said that the literature now extant in that language (i.e. English) is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. (Sharp 57–58)

It is important to stress that the British only aimed to teach English to an elite group of Indians so that they might become, in Macaulay’s words, “Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Sharp 57). While, initially, English was taught to the upper classes, demand for English grew, precisely because it was seen as a passport to becoming a member of the elite. There has been much debate and controversy within India about the role of English. Both Gandhi and Nehru had hoped that independence would see English removed from India and replaced by Hindi (Graddol 52). Speakers of Indian languages other than Hindi, on the other hand, campaigned for the retention of English. For example, students at Bangalore University adopted the slogan “Kill kill Hindi. Kiss kiss English” (Kirkpatrick “Is English” 14; Nault 80). Today, English operates across a wide range of functions (D’Souza 145–159) and remains as an official associate language. Today, the population of India stands at some 1.3 billion. A recent survey (Bolton & Bacon-Shone 49–80; see Table 1 below) places the number of English users in India today at 260 million, representing about 20 percent of the population. As will be illustrated below, it is a language now adopted by people of lower social status, including members of the so-called ‘Untouchable’ caste, the Dalits.

To turn now to China, the most highly populated country in Asia, the same survey (see Table 2 below) places the number of English users in China even higher than in India with a figure of 276 million. This is a remarkable figure not least because, unlike India, China was never a colony of an English-speaking empire. English never attained any institutional or official role in China as was the case in those countries of Asia which were colonies of Britain (such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia) or of the United States (for instance, the Philippines). Bolton recounts the first contact between British traders and the Chinese as recorded in volumes 1 and 2 of *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, published in the seventeenth century (182–183). Trade between the British and the Chinese, primarily conducted through middlemen known as *compradors*, soon developed, as did a contact language known as ‘pidgin’ (or business) English (Bolton 182). Unlike in India, missionaries followed traders and they established schools across China, where English was often taught alongside local vernaculars. It was China’s ignominious defeat in the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century that made the weakening Qing Dynasty realise the importance of learning English for acquiring modern technologies, the lack of which had caused their defeat. Since then, China has enjoyed a love-hate relationship with English, often portrayed as the language of the enemy, the language of the running dogs of imperialism, or instead as a crucial and valuable tool. Today, it is the second language of education in China, after the national language, *Putonghua*, and its written form, Modern Standard Chinese, and is introduced as a compulsory subject from Grade 3 of primary school.

India and China provide the majority of English speakers in Asia, but there are millions of English speakers in other Asian countries. Bolton and Bacon-Shone (53; 60) have calculated the total number of English users in Asia, using data from surveys and government censuses. Table 1 lists countries which were colonies of English-speaking empires and Table 2 lists those that were not. Both tables have been slightly adapted. Note that Myanmar, while it was a colony of Britain, is placed in Table 2 as, after the military coup in 1962, the country virtually became closed and English was removed from all curricula and its functions radically reduced. The total number of English speakers in Asia is therefore approaching 800 million. This is more than the total number of those who speak English as a first language. There is no doubt, therefore, that English is in Asia.

Society	Current estimates	Approx. total of English speakers
Singapore	80%	3.1 million
Philippines	65%	66.7 million
Brunei	60%	0.2 million
Hong Kong	53%	3.9 million
Malaysia	50%	15.5 million
Pakistan	25%	50.9 million
Sri Lanka	25%	5.3 million
Bangladesh	20%	32.6 million
India	20%	260.0 million
Total		438.2 million

Table 1. English speakers in post-colonial countries

Nepal	30%	8.5 million
Macau	28%	0.2 million
China	20%	276.0 million
Myanmar (Burma)	10%	5.2 million
Japan	10%	12.5 million
South Korea	10%	5.1 million
Taiwan	10%	2.4 million
Thailand	10%	6.5 million
Vietnam	10%	4.6 million
Cambodia	5%	0.8 million
Indonesia	5%	13.0 million
Laos	5%	0.3 million
Total		335.1 million

Table 2. English speakers in countries with no historical English colonial rule

2 Uses of English in Asia

In arguing that English is both in and of Asia, Kachru (“English” 102–103) lists five uses of English. They are:

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

The first use here, as a vehicle of linguistic communication across distinct linguistic and cultural groups, is evidenced by the numbers reported in the tables above. Later in the paper, examples of the use of English as a lingua franca by Asian multilinguals will be provided in support.

Use (ii), as a nativised medium for articulating local identities within and across Asia is evidenced by the development of different varieties of Asian English. These nativised indigenised L2 varieties have typically developed in countries which were colonies of English speaking empires. In the context of Asia, examples include Bruneian English, Filipino English, Indian English, Malaysian English, Singaporean English and Sri Lankan English. For some people in places such as the Philippines and Singapore, these indigenised varieties have actually become their speakers’ first languages. Schneider has proposed that colonial and postcolonial varieties of English go through the following five stages of development:

- (i) The Foundation Stage. This is when English arrives in a new territory.
- (ii) Exonormative stabilisation. This is when the educated variety of the colonial country becomes established as a norm and is the classroom model. This period also sees the development of elite bilingualism.
- (iii) Nativisation. The nativisation phase sees the adoption of local phonological, structural and cultural features as a new variety of English develops.

- (iv) Endonormative stabilisation. This typically occurs after independence and the local variety becomes established and is seen as socially acceptable and respectable.
- (v) Differentiation. At this stage, the new variety starts to develop sub-varieties.

These varieties are situated at different stages and at which stage to place the different Asian varieties of English is the subject of debate (e.g. Deterding; Evans; Buschfeld et al., Hundt). However, it is argued here that the mature varieties such as Indian, Filipino and Singaporean have reached the final stage in that different sub-varieties of these Englishes can be readily distinguished. Example (1) below is of colloquial Singaporean English and it exemplifies Kachru's second use, as a nativised medium for communicating local identities. In the example, an administrator is bemoaning the fact that a contractor appears to have gone missing. As with all varieties of World Englishes, Singaporean English is a contact variety characterised by code-mixing and translanguaging. This excerpt includes Chinese dialect (in italics) and Malay (underlined; Pulau Ubin is the name of an island):

- (1) Pulau Ubin *zuo mo?* Makan seafood or phatoh? Emails he takes like 2 days later. Then when I reply to ask further, lagi 2 days gone

‘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.’ (Cavallero et al. 422)

The translation into ‘standard’ English is necessary, as only speakers of this variety will be able to understand it. These contact varieties of World English act very much as identity markers and are, by definition, used with people who share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, in the excerpt above, the combined use of Malay, Chinese and English marks the speaker's identity as a speaker of this variety of English. As will be illustrated below, this identity function is reduced when Asian multilinguals are using English as a lingua franca as then they are, by definition, interacting with people who do not share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is not to say, however, that when used as a lingua franca, the language does not express identity, only that its major function becomes one of communication.

Educated varieties of Asian Englishes are also seen in mature varieties of Asian Englishes. These will naturally contain words from local lan-

guage in the same way that Australian English has borrowed words from Australian Aboriginal languages. *Kangaroo*, *koala* and *boomerang* are just three of hundreds of such borrowings (Dixon et al.). Words from local languages are needed to explain or portray local phenomena. Items of food, clothing and terms for local customs are commonly borrowed. Such borrowing can also reflect creativity and humour in the development of neologisms. In 2018, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* called for new words from Filipino English and then published several of those supplied by Filipinos who responded to the call. One such word was *trapo*. As the *OED* commentary notes:

But perhaps no other word is more quintessentially Filipino than the word *trapo* – a derogatory term for a politician perceived as belonging to a conventional and corrupt ruling class. *Trapo* is a combination of the two words that make up the English phrase *traditional politician*, but it is also the Spanish word for a cleaning cloth, which has also been borrowed into Tagalog and other Philippine languages. This elevates *trapo* from a simple portmanteau to a clever and provocative play on words that equates a corrupt politician to a dirty rag, and from a mere loanword to a five-letter distillation of centuries of Philippine political, cultural, and linguistic history. (“Trapo,” *Oxford English Dictionary Supplement*)

Examples (2) and (3) below come from different varieties of Indian English. Example (2) comes from a teenage journal and records two young girls chatting.

- (2) Two rival groups are out to have fun ... you know generally indulge in *dhamal* and pass time. So, what do they do? They pick on a *bechaara bakra* who has just entered college (D’Souza 152)

Dhamal is of Sanskrit origin and traditionally referred to a type of Sufi dance but now refers to dance in general. *Beechara bakra* are Hindi words which mean ‘poor goat.’

Example (3) is literary and taken from an academic book discussing Indian literature written in English. It contains no code mixing but is marked by Indian rhetorical tropes in its use of extended metaphor and what Kachru has called ‘phrase-mongering’ (*Indianization* 40).

- (3) Years ago, a slender sapling from a foreign field was grafted by “pale hands” on the mighty and many-branched Indian banyan tree. It has kept growing vigorously and now an organic part of its parent tree it has spread its own probing roots into the brown soil below. (Naik & Narayan 253)

This third example illustrates use of a World English as a literary medium for expressing the culture and lived experiences of its new users. It is worth noting that code-switching here is not limited to linguistic borrowing from local languages but also includes the borrowing of stylistic and rhetorical tropes. This use fulfils the third function on Kachru's list above, where English functions as one of the Pan-Asian languages of creativity. And it is to Asian literatures in English that I now turn.

3 Asian Literatures in English

While some authors feel that their variety of English can be shaped to reflect accurately their own background and culture, others feel that to write in English is a form of “cultural treason” (Wikkramasinha, qtd. in Canagarajah 375) and results in “psychological amputation” (Schmied 119). Perhaps the best-known voice arguing against the use of English to create local literary works is that of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the Kenyan writer who now writes primarily in Kikuyu, his native language. In his book, *Decolonising the Mind*, he writes that, “In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language and all the others had to bow before it in deference” (11). He goes on to report that children who were found to be speaking Kikuyu in school were forced to wear “a metal plate round the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DON-KEY” (11). Perhaps what was even worse, students were encouraged to tell on their fellows if they were caught speaking Kikuyu: “Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and, in the process, were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one’s immediate community” (11). But as Ngũgĩ goes on to say “Language, any language has a dual culture: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (13). The question that arises is whether it is possible for English, in the guise of a local contact variety, to be a carrier of the culture of its new speakers. Many writers from Asian colonial backgrounds believe that it can. The Indian novelist and poet, Raja Rao, argued that,

We shall have English with us and amongst us, and not as our guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our castes, our creed, our sect and of our tradition [...]. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write like Indians. (qtd. in Srivastava & Sharma 190–205)

The Pakistani novelist, Bapsi Sidhwa, expressed similar sentiments in arguing that English could be adapted to suit local needs and contexts.

“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” (231). The Filipino poet, Abad, has said almost exactly the same thing: “English is now ours. We have colonised it too” (170). And in their opening speech at the 2021 Swiss Association of University Teachers of English (SAUTE) *Migrations and Contacts* conference, Michael Frank and Daniel Schreier cited Salman Rushdie’s belief that, “the English language has ceased to be the sole possession of the English.”

I shall give below some examples of Asian literatures written in English to illustrate that English can be adapted to successfully reflect the cultures of the Asian authors writing in English. In this way, English has thus become a Pan-Asian language of creativity. The first example (4) comes from the Sri Lankan poet, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, the writer cited above who felt that to write in English was a form of cultural treason. Fortunately, he still continued to write in English and left poetry of great beauty. This poem is called “The Cobra” and recounts the death of the narrator’s wife, killed by a cobra, which has subsequently been killed by the villagers (perhaps – see below) and whose head has been hung up for all to see.

(4) 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.

Sri Lankan scholars such as Arjuna Parakrama and D.C.R.A. Goonetilleka have criticised the poem on the grounds that a dead cobra’s head could not look like a flag or that its eyes could be like braziers (Dissanayake). In contrast, others have pointed out that the cobra must have been alive when the villagers came to view it – that explains why they stood ‘some-

what afar.’ But surely the main point is that it is a beautiful poem that illustrates the poet’s linguistic and cultural affiliations. ‘Paramitas’ is a Buddhist term referring to the noble character traits associated with enlightened beings.

Abayasekera has discussed a number of Sri Lankan migrant writers, who now live in North America and the United Kingdom and asked whether migrant writers can write authentically about the countries of their birth. One such novel, Anuk Arudpragasam’s *A Passage North*, takes the devastation of Sri Lanka’s civil war as its theme and has recently been nominated for the Booker Prize. The author, who was born in Sri Lanka and is a frequent visitor, has noted that the book is “more about witnessing violence from afar than it is about experiencing it up close,” but this reflects his own experience of witnessing the violence from afar – in his case from the capital, Colombo (Arudpragasam).

A migrant writer who has written compellingly about the land of his birth is the Chinese novelist Ha Jin, who now lives in Boston. Example (5) is an excerpt from one of his short stories, “In Defence of Foreignness.” The head of a unit is interviewing a new arrival.

- (5) “Your name?” the chief asked, apparently reading out the question from a form.
 “Chiu Maguang”
 “Age”
 “Thirty-four”
 “Profession?”
 “Lecturer”
 “Work unit?”
 “Harbin University”
 “Political status?”
 “Communist Party member”

Two questions from this short dialogue are worthy of comment. The first is the use of the phrase ‘work unit.’ This is a direct translation of the Chinese term *danwei*. A *danwei* is much more than simply a place of work. For example, state owned enterprises would provide their workers housing, health care and education for the children. The question ‘Political status?’ also reflects life in a China ruled by the Communist Party. “A person’s political status can be as a Communist Party Member, a Youth League Member, a Young Pioneer or simply a member of the masses” (Xu 286). This brief record of an interrogation, while written in English, is infused with Chinese culture. Yet Ha Jin is careful not to translate Chinese idioms directly into English but rather to paraphrase them. For

example, the literal translation of a Chinese idiom referring to investing in a questionable business venture is “to hit a dog with a pork bun.” This he renders as “to hit a dog with a meatball” as he feels this better suits the context (Ha Jin 466). This is an example of what Pitzl has called “remetaphorisation” (317), although in Ha Jin’s case this is carefully planned and not an *ad hoc* construction, as are Pitzl’s examples. But he is in no doubt that English can reflect the cultures of its new users and that English is immeasurably enhanced by this process: “One unique glory that English has is a body of literature created by writers to whom English is not a given but an acquisition” (Ha Jin 461).

Writing in English when it is an acquired language is not without its struggles of course. Ha Jin cites this excerpt from Salman Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*:

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (Rushdie 17, qtd. in Ha Jin 468)

This leads back to Ngũgi’s *Decolonising the Mind* and his assertion that “Language, any language has a dual culture: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (13). The examples of Asian literatures in English cited above suggest that English, in its guise as an Asian variety of English, can carry the culture of its new users. An Asian variety of English can therefore help decolonise the mind. As Lim et al. have argued,

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. (806, ellipses in original)

In this way, English robustly fulfils Kachru’s third use, as a Pan-Asian language of creativity. I now turn to consider the fourth function Kachru enumerated, that English is a language that has developed its own sub-varieties, indicating penetration at various levels. We saw above that mature varieties of Asian Englishes have developed their own sub-varieties.

Here, I focus on the wide range of contexts in which English is now used in many Asian settings and this will also further illustrate the development of sub-varieties. First, the role of English in liberating the so-called ‘Untouchables’ caste of India, the Dalits, will be briefly reviewed.

In an article that presents a cogent counter-argument to Phillipson’s theory of Linguistic Imperialism (Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*) and his categorisation of English as a ‘Linguafrankensteinia’ (Phillipson, “Lingua franca”), Choudhury records how the Dalits have espoused English as a language of liberation from the Brahmanic caste system:

one has to acknowledge the fact that (western/colonial) ‘modernity’ that comes with English is something that is not accessible to the ‘untouchables’ – the Dalits and Bahujans whose marginalisation has been justified over centuries by dominant varieties of Hinduism. (Choudhury 115)

Choudhury then quotes the Dalit writer, Limbale, pointing out the advantages of there being an English translation of his autobiography:

Because of English translation I get [a] world platform to present myself and my community [...]. We want liberty, fraternity, freedom. We want to eradicate this cruel Hindu caste system. This message reached out [to the] world at large through English translation. (Choudhury 116)

Choudhury is also at pains to point out that this espousal of English as a language of liberation among the Dalits is not a postcolonial phenomenon. Savitribai Phule, “a crusader for girl education” (Choudhury 116), wrote poems in the 1850s urging the learning of English. The final stanza of the poem “Learn English” (117) reads,

To learn English
To dispel all woes
Throw away the authority
of the Brahmin and his teachings
Break the shackles of caste.

Choudhury thus concludes that, far from being a ‘linguafrankensteinia,’ in a context such as India, “English has been an agency for the empowerment of subalternised groups like the Dalits” (118). As Brutt-Griffler argued some twenty years ago, English “owes its existence as a world language in large part to the struggle against imperialism, and not to imperialism alone,” ix) In the example above, English is being used by Dalits as a potential tool of liberation from “the shackles of caste.”

4 Penetration of English: Religion and Law

The second role that English is playing to be discussed here is related to the first in that English is playing a major role in religions across Asia (Kirkpatrick, “Is English”). Here I shall focus on its role in Islam. English is currently taught in many *madrassas*, schools which specialise in Islamic instruction and which are often attached to mosques. In Bangladesh, both state and privately run *madrassas* offer English in response to government demands that their curriculum be modernised, although the students’ scores in this subject are lower than those in public education (World Bank). The situation is somewhat different in Pakistan, where there are some 4000 *madrassas*, the majority being operated by the Sunni sect of Islam. The government has long been trying to persuade these schools to offer English but with little success to date. The opposition to English comes from the *Ulema*, the Council of Muslim scholars, who fear English as it is seen to challenge their view of the world. As Rahman reports, “the average *madrassa* student still has a medieval perception of the world” (5).

English is also taught in the *madrassas* of Indonesia, although, as there are some 40,000 of these, most of which are privately operated, it is difficult to generalise. However, Nashruddin, an Indonesian English teacher who spent ten years teaching at a *madrassa* in the Indonesian province of Western Java has recounted his experiences. He notes the value of English for his students as they can use English to counter the perception that Islam is a religion of violence and terrorism. “Muslims can counter this untruth by telling people embracing different religions that Islam does not support terrorism” (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 there are, and what Islam is” (76; also see Kirkpatrick, “Is English” 152–155).

Boarding schools attached to mosques in Indonesia are called *pesantren* and many of these too have introduced English into their curricula. One might expect that parents would be cautious about allowing their children access to English for fear that they will be introduced to values that run counter to their own. However, as Didin Fahrudin notes, parents are happy for their children to enrol in courses with titles such as ‘English for Islamic purposes.’ A simple example of what this might mean is that students are taught to append the Arabic phrase *Insyah’Allah* (Allah will-

ing) to all sentences expressing plans for the future, as would be the case when using Arabic, Indonesian and many of the other languages of Indonesia.

The role of English as a proselytiser of Islam in the Indonesian context has been recounted by Anita Dewi. She asked university academic staff their views of the role and place of English. The staff represented a number of different universities – including Islamic, Christian and secular – in the city of Yogyakarta. None of the staff surveyed perceived English as a threat. The Muslim staff reported that English could benefit them and their religion saying, for example, “[English] is also necessary for us to master English for proselytising,” “English helps the development of my religion,” and “English can deliver information about my religion” (22).

A further area where English has penetrated in many countries across Asia is the law. As Powell has reported, the legal systems of Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Singapore remain based on the system of Common Law introduced by the British. This was also the case in Hong Kong where legislation is enacted in both Chinese and English. However, as Bolton et al. note,

There are hundreds of thousands of reported cases which form the basis of the common law, and it would obviously be impractical to attempt to translate these into Chinese. While in future there is likely to be an increasing number of judgments in Hong Kong delivered in Chinese, English will continue to be the only medium in which the majority of judgments from overseas is reported. (460)

At the time of writing, the legal system inherited by the people of Hong Kong is being replaced by the Chinese judicial system; and many would argue that losing this colonial legacy will be to their disadvantage.

The legal role English is playing in parts of Asia can perhaps best be represented as follows:

India,	English remains a language of the law and sole language of the Supreme Court
Pakistan	English as official language, but Urdu also allowed in the Supreme Court
Bangladesh	Muslim and Hindu marriages regulated through English
Philippines	English most used language of the courts Shariah law has been codified in English for Muslim population

Malaysia Malay used but English still allowed
 (In the provinces of Eastern Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak),
 English is sole language of law)

(Powell 863–886)

This brief treatment of the role English is playing in areas such as religion and the law illustrates its penetration at the national level. When considering the Asian region as a whole, English is the default medium for legal and trade matters and for dispute arbitration. English is the sole working language of the ten nations that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) holds its meetings in English (Kirkpatrick, “Is English”). This role of English as a lingua franca across Asia will be considered in the next section of the article.

5 English as an Asian Lingua Franca

So far, the functions English is playing in Asia have been reviewed. These functions have been fulfilled through the development of regional varieties of English that reflect the cultures and lived experiences of their speakers. The regional varieties of English are used as markers of identity among people who share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As such, they are characterised by code-mixing and borrowing from the local languages that form their speakers’ linguistic repertoire. Thus, for instance, the example of colloquial Singaporean English provided in (1) above comprises borrowings from Malay and Chinese. The poem, “The Cobra,” contains a host of Sri Lankan cultural references.

When English is being used as a lingua franca it is a medium of communication that has been chosen by people who come from different linguistic backgrounds but who share a knowledge of English. The use of English as a lingua franca has been defined by Seidlhofer as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice” (7). Lingua franca speakers are less likely to code mix as they know their interlocutors come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Below are examples taken from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), a corpus of naturally occurring English being used as a lingua franca by Asian multilinguals (ACE is freely accessible for researchers at www.corpus.eduhk.hk/ace/). That English is a common choice of a lingua franca among these Asian multilinguals is

further evidence that it has become a language not only in Asia but of Asia. Examples of Asian multilinguals talking about language have been deliberately chosen here to illustrate their attitudes to and uses of English. Example (6) records a Bruneian female (S2), who is ethnically Chinese, talking about the languages she grew up with. Her interlocutors are a Filipina (S1), a Thai male (S3) and a Vietnamese female (S4). SX indicates that it is not possible to determine who is speaking and SX-f means that a female is speaking but it is not possible to determine which one (see also Kirkpatrick, “Is English” 65)

- (6) 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
 S2: so two dialects growing at the same time and at the same time our neighbours spoke malay
 S4: 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
 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 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
 S2: and she spoke erm english
 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
 S4: so you have so you have your mo- mother tongue father tongue
 S2: in the language i use most
 S1: neighbourhood tongue

In this excerpt, the Bruneian explains that she grew up speaking different varieties of Chinese with her parents and Malay with her neighbours. She also started learning English when she went to school and now feels that

English has become her strongest language. In the second example from ACE, (7), an Indonesian male (S1) is talking to a Chinese-Malay female (S2) about the daughter of a mutual friend who is in England training as an English teacher (see also Kirkpatrick, “Is English” 66–67).

- (7) S2: and she's she is been:: er: england before or not she's been in england before or not
 S1: yes: been
 S2: yah been she has been in england before or not
 S1: before yes she's stu- er: she was study there
 S2: uh-huh you sure
 S1: yah:
 S2: er i just last time we go to her room then i saw her daughter's picture daughter daughter's
 S1: she graduated in england
 S2: hh
 S1: for the undergraduate
 S2: o:h that's why she's:
 S1: yah for the degree program that's why
 S2: yah she speaks
 S1: she can speak
 S2: a lot yah
 S1: english properly
 S2: mhm
 S1: and then even she cannot speak malay (laughter)
 S2: she cannot
 S1: she cannot er i mean she can but not fluently yah
 S2: just a few oh
 S1: she cannot speak engli- er:: malay fluently
 S2: she's still here or she's already
 S1: she's still here she she's: she teaches the: english course

In their conversation, the speakers note that their friend's daughter can speak English ‘properly,’ by which she means a native speaker standard, but that she now cannot speak Malay fluently. These two examples from ACE show how in multilingual contexts which are typical across Asia a learned language, English, can become a speaker's dominant language, replacing the speaker's mother tongue. I have described elsewhere (e.g. Kirkpatrick, “Is English” 162–178; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat) how the adoption of English as the second language of education (after the respective national language) in many Asian school systems is threatening the existence of many Asian languages, so I will not repeat those arguments here. The adoption of English as the second language of education is, however, further evidence of its position as a language *of* as well as *in* Asia.

6 Conclusion

In this article I have argued that English has now become an Asian language. I have illustrated how English now fulfils the five uses enumerated by Kachru (“English” 102–103). It is used 1) as a vehicle of linguistic communication across distinct linguistic and cultural groups and 2) as a nativised medium for articulating local identities within and across Asia. The rise of Asian literatures in English makes English one of the Pan-Asian languages of creativity. And its role in a host of different contexts from literary uses to its use in law, education, religion and as the regional lingua franca across Asia has seen the development of sub-varieties and its penetration at various different levels. The debates and controversies surrounding its use as a literary language also illustrate that English continues to ‘enjoy’ a unique love-hate relationship among its speakers, but this has not seriously impeded its spread, function and prestige. On the contrary, its spread and reach is increasing across Asia as its speakers see the pragmatic value of learning the language. In addition to the functions illustrated above, the rapid increase in the use of English as a medium of instruction in Asian institutions of higher education is just one example (Fenton-Smith et al., Barnard & Hasim, Kirkpatrick & Knagg). This all points to the fact that English not only fulfils the five functions that Kachru originally formulated, but has now extended into new functions which previously have been fulfilled by local languages. This even includes fulfilling functions typically fulfilled by the national language as is the case in education where English has increasingly become the medium of instruction.

New nativised and nativising varieties of English have developed to adequately fulfil these functions. These new varieties are characterised by contact with local languages, evident in code-mixing and borrowing. These new varieties also reflect the cultures and lived experiences of their speakers so much so that they have given rise to literatures in English. To repeat the point made by Lim et al. above, Asian 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” (806). In this way, as seen with the adoption of English as a language of struggle by the Dalits, English can itself be re-shaped to be a conduit for decolonising the mind.

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