

REVIEW ARTICLE

Multilithic English(es) and language ideologies

BRAJ KACHRU, *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005. Pp xxiv, 333. Pb. \$27.95.

YAMUNA KACHRU & CECIL NELSON, *World Englishes in Asian contexts*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006. Pp. xxiv, 412. Pb. \$32.50.

RANA RUBDY & MARIO SARACENI (eds.) *English in the world: Global rules, global roles*. London: Continuum, 2006. 218 pp. Pb. £30.00.

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With the growth of Asia's manufacturing and service industries, the prediction that China and India, respectively, will have the first and third largest global economies within 30 years, a population that comprises over 50% of the world's people, and massive English language programs throughout the region, it is no surprise that the role of English in Asia has become a major concern. At a recent (2006) Asia TEFL conference in Japan, the notions of Asian English(es), along with Asian methodologies and Asian knowledge, were topics of considerable discussion. The size and diversity of Asia, however, makes it a very difficult entity to define: The Asia TEFL conference included delegates from Israel and Iran, and two of the books under review here, Braj Kachru's *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon (AEBC)* and Yamuna Kachru & Cecil Nelson's *World Englishes in Asian contexts (WEAC)*, include (with identical maps) Australia and New Zealand. In some ways, the idea of Asia is defined by what it is not: Europe and North America. It is also not, of course, South America or Africa, though with *WEAC* containing a chapter on African Englishes (as well as African American Vernacular English, or AAVE), it seems as if they might be allowed in. It is clear nevertheless that various notions of Asia – as an economic zone, as a cultural entity, and as a user of a type or types of English – are widely used. We need to take the notion of Asia and Asian English(es) seriously, if only to try to understand what is meant by Braj Kachru's explanation that *AEBC* is “essentially about the Asianness in Asian Englishes and their gradual, yet marked, distinctiveness” (p. xv).

With increasing collaboration across the region, and the eventual possibility of an Asian economic and political entity that parallels the European Union, a comparison with Europe is intriguing. While Europe has sought to make its national languages the working languages of the EU (while also supporting some

of the minority languages of the region), Asia has embedded English as the working language of many of its international organizations, such as ASEAN. English has nevertheless come to play a dominant role in Europe, described either in negative terms as “a simplified, pidginized but unstable ‘Euro-English’ that inhibits creativity and expressiveness, whether English is used as a mother tongue or as a foreign language, a language that is spoken with so much imprecision that communication difficulties and breakdowns multiply” (Phillipson 2003:176), or in a more positive light as the European lingua franca (papers by Jennifer Jenkins and Barbara Seidlhofer in *English in the world: Global rules, global roles* henceforth *EWGLGR*). Looking at the growing role of English in Asia, it is important to establish whether the focus is on the role of the language(s) within the social, cultural, and political contexts of the region (English in Asia), on a pan-Asian variety of English as a lingua franca (Asian English), or on the development of regional varieties of English that may reflect the diversity rather than the commonality of Asia (Asian Englishes). Indeed, it is the tension between these orientations – the centripetal pull of the interest in English as an Asian lingua franca, and the centrifugal pull of a pluralist model of Asian Englishes – that is a key issue of contention in the books under review.

It is not surprising that Braj Kachru’s *AEBC* sits squarely in the pluralist camp, since Kachru has for decades been the most eloquent and forthright campaigner for the pluralization of Englishes (references to his own work from 1965 to the present comprise four pages of the bibliography). It is perhaps ironic that although the subtitle, *Beyond the canon*, is a reference to new Englishes and literatures, the arguments here nevertheless present the canon of the world Englishes (WE) framework. The book is largely a collection of updated papers published in the 1990s, with the addition of a loosely structured afterword, “Present tense: Making sense of Anglophone Asia.” (Chapter 4 is listed in the acknowledgments as having appeared in 1966, but this should be 1996. The book unfortunately has quite a number of such errors, including misspellings such as “Karchu.”) For those familiar with Braj Kachru’s work, there is little new here, though this volume may be a useful collection for those interested in the growing theme of Asian Englishes as it “contextualizes selected dimensions of world Englishes in Asia’s Anglophone societies” (1). As with all of Braj Kachru’s work, therefore, it is concerned with pluralism, with the battle against the attempts to control, own, and define English according to centrist, native-speaker norms. It is a celebration of diversity and the centrifugal forces of bi/multi-lingual English language use, addressing topics such as Asian Englishes, “to alter and relocate the focus of our ongoing debate on this linguistic icon. The English language is generally discussed as a language that is *in* Asia, but not *of* Asia.” (9); *eikaiwa* (English conversation) ideology in Japan and elsewhere, which insists that English be learned for conversation with its native speakers, preferably North Americans; “Englishization,” the effects English has on other languages, which for Kachru is generally a positive and creative role, English having, for example, “func-

tioned as the main agent for releasing the South Asian languages from the rigorous constraints of their classical literary traditions" (113) (a position reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's comment that the best literature in India since independence has been in English, an opinion strongly critiqued by writers less in thrall of English [eg. Radhakrishnan 2007]); the lack of attention to world Englishes within work on English for specific purposes (ESP); creative writing in world Englishes; a discussion of whether English is responsible for the death of other languages – "the jury is still out on this" (83); and pedagogical implications of a world Englishes perspective.

Also unsurprising is the fact that the book by Yamuna Kachru & Cecil Nelson takes a similar line and covers much of the same ground (using exactly the same map of Asia and concentric circle model of Asian Englishes). As a series of short and clear chapters on a range of world Englishes topics, however, it is pitched at a different audience as an undergraduate to postgraduate resource book. It covers a wide range of topics in world Englishes, including structural variation, intelligibility, language acquisition, teaching, and testing world Englishes and literature; there are chapters on the specific contexts of South Asian English, East Asian Englishes, and so on, as well as a section on "applied theory and world Englishes," which includes discussion of dictionaries, code-mixing, and genres across cultures. There is also a useful and extensive glossary. *WEAC* presents a more balanced position than *AEBC*, including, for example, a discussion of critical views of the global spread of English: While Robert Phillipson's and others' critical work are described as "ideological perspectives," "not purely linguistic or sociolinguistic" (17) and are relegated to chap. 22, they are at least discussed. This volume could serve as a useful course book for students interested in understanding the different roles and uses of English across the region.

While commendably committed to the pluralist agenda of the world Englishes framework, with arguments against centrist standard language ideologies and for an understanding of English use in multilingual contexts, both books are also limited by their close adherence to the WE framework. Even though the concentric circle model of Englishes is a revised Asian version – with Australia and New Zealand as examples of the inner circle, India, Singapore and the Philippines in the outer circle, and China, Indonesia, and Thailand as examples of the expanding circle – this revised version is nevertheless as constraining as earlier models (see Bruthiaux 2003). While Australia's and New Zealand's membership in Asia remains contentious (and I suspect their inclusion here is more a result of a desire to include "inner circle" countries in the model than a careful consideration of geopolitical or geolinguistic relations), their position in the inner circle on the one hand overplays their role in the region (global media, international business, and popular culture may have far more influence than this regionalist model suggests) and underplays the diversity within them. One concern is what gets included and what gets left out. *WEAC*, for example, includes chapters on "a sub-variety," African American Vernacular English (AAVE), in

order to emphasize that “no national variety is unitary” (5), and on African Englishes, in order to show “shared characteristics of Englishes in the Outer and Expanding Circles” (4). Yet it does not include chapters on pidgins and creoles for reasons of space (even though Papua New Guinea, for example, is within the model of Asia proposed).

Mufwene (e.g., 2001) has frequently lamented this exclusion of English-based pidgins and creoles, suggesting that “the naming practices of new Englishes have to do more with the racial identity of those who speak them than with how these varieties developed and the extent of their structural deviations” (2001:107). To categorize AAVE as a “sub-variety,” furthermore, avoids the continuing debates about its creole origins (Rickford 1997, Mufwene 2001), and reproduces a problematic hierarchy in which some varieties of English are less than others. Similarly, to discuss Australia and New Zealand English only in terms of inner-circle, norm-providing models and to ignore Maori and Aboriginal English – where the role of “Aboriginal lexical items” (*boomerang, kangaroo, koala*) is only to contribute to the distinctiveness of Australian English (*WEAC* 246) – is to avoid the more complex and interesting questions around Aboriginal English and its relation to Kriol (see Malcolm 2001). English for Indigenous Australians can be a creole, a foreign language, a second language, or a first language. Although there is always a nod toward this sort of diversity, the concentric circles model is not very good at dealing with it. Similar diversity can, of course, be found in the other circles. Although much has now been written about English in the expanding circle, the concentric circle model has always been far more effective at dealing with the outer circle. In *AEBC*, for example, the chapter on English in Japan deals with *eikaiwa* ideology and English borrowings in Japanese but never comes to grips with the harder question of whether Japanese English should be considered a variety. Similarly, the discussion of English in Japan in *WEAC* also deals mainly with borrowings into Japanese, and it is not clear whether “East Asian Englishes” and “South East Asian Englishes” are to be seen as English varieties in themselves.

The third book under review here (*EWGLGR*), edited by Rani Rubdy & Mario Saraceni, has a broader focus than Asia but much to say that is relevant. It takes as a central focus the emerging debate between the pluricentricism of world Englishes and models of English as an intercultural language or lingua franca (EIL/ELF), though various chapters address other concerns. The editors suggest three contending frameworks: a centrist, standard English (usually British or American), a pluralist world Englishes framework, and the EIL/ELF position. The WE framework, as already discussed, provides a useful position on diversity but does not provide such a useful stance on global English teaching, since it has always been more concerned on the one hand with description of varieties rather than pedagogy (though both *AEBC* and *WEAC* have useful comments on pedagogy), and on the other with outer-circle Englishes rather than global and expanding Englishes. Indeed a plausible case can be made that the ELF focus is

trying to address precisely that gap left by the holes in the WE model: how to come to grips with a non-centrist understanding of English as an international language that is dependent neither on hegemonic versions of central English nor on nationally defined new Englishes, but rather attempts to account for the ever-changing negotiated spaces of current language use. The ELF model, it is argued, “liberates L2 speakers from the imposition of native speaker norms as well as the cultural baggage of World Englishes models” (8). It is a shame that this book has arguments for and against ELF models, but no strong proponents of WE models.

On the side of the ELF position, Jennifer Jenkins argues for the need for a description of pronunciation in order to aid intelligibility; similarly, Barbara Seidlhofer, in a defense against misconceptions about ELF (the sources of which are, unfortunately, not named), makes her case for the importance of empirical descriptions of the lexicogrammar of ELF; and Andy Kirkpatrick argues that an ELF model is preferable to native or nativized (inner- or outer-circle) models on the grounds that it becomes “the property of all, and it will be flexible enough to reflect the cultural norms of those who use it. In this it differs markedly from both native and nativized varieties of English, as native and nativized varieties must by definition reflect the cultural norms of their speakers” (79). Brian Tomlinson, Luke Prodromou, and Peter Tan et al. raise concerns with the ELF position, suggesting that it is prescriptivist, imposes a new and limiting model on learners, or adds a complicating third level to the already existing “Anglo English” and “non-Anglo English” (Tan et al.) that learners in contexts such as Singapore already deal with. Brian Tomlinson instead suggests a multidimensional model (of rather utopian breadth), insisting in any case that learners learn what they need, not what they are taught. Luke Prodromou argues for a better account of what successful bilingual learners do, rather than what he sees as a lowering of the bar in descriptions of a reduced form of English in ELF. Anthea Fraser Gupta argues for an appreciation of the variability of standard English. Tan et al., like Suresh Canagarajah’s comments in an interview in the final chapter, suggest we need to focus on how speakers negotiate with each other. This is either a question of relying on humans to be able to figure things out anyway – how “postcolonial speakers of English creatively negotiate the place of English in their lives” (200), as Canagarajah puts it – or teaching people an understanding of how to work with diversity. Other chapters in the collection focus on the importance of moving away from a model of native-speaker competence (Sandra Mackay), or a move to English as an intercultural language (Nicos Sifakis), the tension in the Philippines between an acknowledgment of a local variety and the need to teach a more central version (Ruanni Tupas), and the need to understand the relation between English and local languages (Michael Joseph and Esther Ramani). These last two chapters also make issues of politics central to their discussion, a focus that is missing from too many of the other chapters and the other books under review, with their decontextualized discussions of models of English.

Several important themes emerge from these discussions. As Rubdy & Saraceni suggest, “so long as the underlying tacit assumption is that once the Lingua Franca core is systematically codified, it can then be used as a model for teaching and learning this form of English in the classroom, the question that arises is whether one form of prescription is not being (unwittingly or even wittingly) replaced by another” (10). Yet the ELF protagonists vehemently reject accusations of prescriptivism, arguing that it is precisely “the polymorphous nature of the English language” (Seidlhofer, 42) that is of interest, or that an ELF approach “closely approximates. Kachru’s idea of a ‘polymodel’ approach to the teaching of English” (Kirkpatrick, 81). This can be explained at one level by an emphasis on description rather than prescription: As Seidlhofer insists, she is interested in the former rather than the latter, in “trying to understand as far as possible *emically*, from participants’ perspectives, what they do when they negotiate meaning in these encounters” (44). Jennifer Jenkins’s concern that “if the policy of pluricentricity is pursued unchecked,” mutual comprehension may be impeded (35), and her goal for ELF descriptions to “safeguard mutual phonological intelligibility” (36), are not, she insists, an attempt “to impose a monolithic pronunciation model on ELF users” (36). Indeed, Jenkins and Seidlhofer also insist that it is not a “model.” And while Kirkpatrick does talk in terms of an ELF model, his interest in the tools people use to communicate has more in common with Tan et al. and Canagarajah’s interest in how communication is achieved, and thus might be categorized as an ELF ideology rather than a linguistic model.

Given the primary ideological focus on diversity in the WE framework, it is not surprising that Braj Kachru is critical of the naming of English as a lingua franca, though this is largely on the grounds that it does not fit the original use of the term. Tan et al., meanwhile, argue that it would be better if the notion of ELF were more like its original sense of a nonstandardized, negotiated code. The authors of *WEAC* are clearer than *AEBC* on this point, juxtaposing world Englishes with terms such as “world English” (Brutt Griffler 2002), “English as an International Language” (Jenkins 2000), and “English as a Lingua Franca” (Seidlhofer 2001), since all of these “idealize a monolithic entity called ‘English’ and neglect the inclusive and plural character of the world-wide phenomenon” (2). Here, then, we get to the nub of one of the arguments: Which of the two approaches to understanding the global spread of English – WE or ELF – favors diversity to the greater degree? In order to address such questions, we need to get beyond questions only of pluralization (English vs. Englishes), since they leave unexamined questions of scale and ideology. It is interesting to note, for example, that both *WEAC* and *AEBC* generally talk of South Asian English but Asian (East Asian, etc.) Englishes. Why is one pluralized and not the other? This raises the question of whether diversity in fact can be sought in the countability of world Englishes rather than the non-countability of ELF, or whether we need a more complex understanding here.

At one level, therefore, there is an important distinction between a WE approach, with its centrifugal focus on local variation, and an ELF approach, with its centripetal focus on the development of regional varieties (European and Asian English); at another level, however, this is a matter only of relative scale. While studies of Indian English, for example, would fall into the first camp, it is also clear that Indian English is more chimerical than this terminology allows. As Krishnaswamy & Burde (1998: 63) observe, “Like Indian nationalism, ‘Indian English’ is ‘fundamentally insecure’ since the notion ‘nation-India’ is insecure.” Given the diversity of Indian languages and regions and the need to see India not so much as an imagined community but rather as an unimaginable community, it is unclear why Indian English itself should not be viewed as a lingua franca. And surely to discuss an entity called “South Asian English,” which comprises varieties across India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, is to talk in terms of a monolithic lingua franca English. While Kachru and others have long acknowledged the diversity within the supposed entities (see, e.g., the inclusion of AAVE in *WEAC*), this misses the point that the castigating of others for promoting monolithic English rather than diversity has to be done in more complex ways than mere pluralization. Thus, when Braj Kachru focuses on “educated South Asian English” rather than “Broken English” (39) he is surely open to the same critiques that he levels at the purveyors of ELF. Thus, as Parakrama (1995:25–26) argues, “The smoothing out of struggle within and without language is replicated in the homogenizing of the varieties of English on the basis of ‘upper-class’ forms. Kachru is thus able to theorize on the nature of a monolithic Indian English.” Similarly, Canagarajah (1999:180) observes that in Kachru’s “attempt to systematize the periphery variants, he has to standardize the language himself, leaving out many eccentric, hybrid forms of local Englishes as too unsystematic. In this, the Kachruvian paradigm follows the logic of the prescriptive and elitist tendencies of the center linguists.”

By characterizing and dismissing the ELF approach as monolithic and non-pluralist, critics fails to engage with the implications of different positions that may fall under this rubric. If an ELF approach is concerned only with devising an alternative NNS rather than NS standard, even if it is doing this as a pedagogical response to the need for something other than NS and WE models, it is certainly open to this criticism. If, on the other hand, it is trying to capture the pluricentricity of ongoing negotiated English – or, as we might call it, the *MULTILITHIC* as opposed to monolithic character of English, since an ELF approach may posit no centers at all – it may be more pluricentric than WE. As Rubdy & Saraceni put it in their introduction:

In the end, the validity of the EIL/ELF proposal will probably depend upon whether or not it chooses to embrace a polymodel approach to the teaching of English or a monolithic one, whether it leads to the establishing and promoting of a single (or a limited form of) Lingua Franca Core for common use

among speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles, possibly stripped of any cultural influences, or whether it will be flexible enough to manifest the cultural norms of all those who use it along with the rich tapestry of linguistic variation in which they are embedded. (13)

The problem for both frameworks, of course, is the impossibility of describing in any comprehensive fashion the ongoing negotiation of language. Descriptions of language, in this sense, have always been impossible, and have always relied on abstractions. The heart of the question therefore is this: Once we get beyond the accusations of monocentric and pluricentric models, in what ways is the research committed to a vision of diversity and in what ways to an attempt to systematize?

The lack of clarity on these issues is not helped by the fact that while Braj Kachru is always insistent on pluralization, it is often unclear what he is against. *AEBC* concludes by suggesting there are three “constructs of Asian Englishes” (255): the “kettle of fish” attitude, by which he means a conservative position on creativity and nativization (where to talk of Englishes is to open up a kettle of fish); the “guilt-ridden ‘victimology’ attitude of the ‘owners’ of the language,” which, according to the list on pp. 237–38, includes anything from Gauri Viswanathan 1989 on the role of English literature in South Asia, through Randolph Quirk 1985 on standardization and Robert Phillipson 1992 on the politics and hegemony of English, to Suresh Canagarajah 1999 on marginalization and more (by and large, a list of both conservative and critical positions on global English); and “genealogies of traditional linguistically pluralistic societies that are assimilative, absorbing and increasingly hybridized” (255), by which he means a world Englishes perspective. It is also unclear how Braj Kachru is able to accommodate both his support for Phillipson’s critique of the homogenizing tendencies of the term “ELF” (222) and his own view that such accusations of homogenization are also examples of victimology. The problem here, then, is that on the one hand we have a focus centrally and singularly on hybridity, which falls into the trap of bad postcolonial theory, where hybridity becomes the be-all and end-all of analysis. As Zuberi (2001:239–40) cautions, “the notion of the ‘hybrid’ can become as fixed a category as its essentialist nemesis.” On the other hand, Braj Kachru lumps together under the label “victimology” arrays of scholars with very different perspectives. It is also interesting to note that the discussion of *eikaiwa* ideology proposes as strong a version of ideological duping as any of the writers Kachru criticizes. Thus Canagarajah’s nuanced arguments for an approach that combines both an understanding of the politics and hybridity of English is lumped together with many others under the “victimology” label. In order to understand these issues better, we need a clearer explanation of what is at stake here. It is ironic that Braj Kachru’s emphasis on diversity does not seem to extend to intellectual diversity, since all frameworks other than WE – from Quirk’s nuclear English

to Phillipson's linguistic imperialism, from Viswanathan's focus on the literary canon to Canagarajah's interest in local knowledge – are dismissed as “victimology.”

What, then, do we need to take this further? First, it is worth noting that support for some form of diversity appears to be a given in these debates: From Seidlhofer to Canagarajah, from Braj Kachru to Phillipson, all seem to favor diversity. The question is not, therefore, whether one is in favor of monolithic or multilithic English, but what language ideologies underlie the visions of plurality. Discussions of English as an Asian lingua franca or “educated South Asian English” or the Asianness of Asian Englishes do not in themselves represent pluralist or non-pluralist stances, and indeed a strong case can be made that the last two may offer a more restricted vision of variety than the former. Second, to the extent that the WE framework has been very useful in dealing with outer-circle Englishes, but much less sure of what to do with the expanding circle, a case can be made for WE to stick to the outer circle, and for ELF approaches to develop descriptions of ongoing negotiations of English beyond the national boundaries that so hamper the WE framework. By focusing centrally on the development of new national Englishes, the world Englishes approach reproduces the very linguistics it needs to escape. The challenge posed by Canagarajah's, Tan et al.'s, and Kirkpatrick's emphasis on understanding how people get on with things and negotiate English in their lives suggests that WE needs to move beyond its background in states-centric views of language, and move into a 21st-century understanding of language and globalization (see Pennycook 2007). Otherwise, it will remain open to the critique that it is “a 20th century construct that has outlived its usefulness” (Bruthiaux 2003:161).

This presents another challenge, however: how on the one hand to actually describe ongoing negotiation of meaning without reinscribing it into systematized models, and on the other what this might mean pedagogically for how educators can work to prepare students for a world of code negotiation. These are ultimately questions of ideology, not of models or methodology. And finally, none of this work on models of English makes much sense without a good grasp of the political contexts in which English operates. Too much of the discussion here of negotiation, appropriation, or nativization occurs in a social, economic, and political vacuum. As Tupas warns, while WE and ELF models “may have legitimized different cultures and local users of English around the world . . . the issue of *who* among the speakers and/or learners of English in their respective localities have access to any of these Standard Englishes in the first place is still not adequately addressed” (169). Both approaches offer “alternative standards access to which will still be largely determined by one's proximity to education and, for that matter, all other related symbolic goods in the social market” (180). This is not, as Braj Kachru would have it, victimology, but rather a basic understanding of inequality. We need not just multilithic Englishes but a firm understanding of who has access to them, to negotiation, to claim a space of difference.

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