REVIEWS

DAVID DETERDING, *Singapore English* (Dialects of English). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. Pp. 135. ISBN: 978-0-7486-2545-1.
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Singapore English, by David Deterding, does not fail to deliver in the author's usual manner: the strengths for which he is well known are ever present in this slim volume. His treatment of Singapore English (SgE) is systematic, and written in a clear and succinct style. The volume starts with a concise introduction to the history and sociolinguistics of Singapore and the methodological concerns of the study, followed by chapters on phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, discourse and lexis. It closes with an account of recent history and current changes, involving in particular language and educational policies which have a bearing on the development of SgE compared to other New Englishes in Asia. As with many of the author's collections, there is also a useful annotated bibliography; and finally, a full transcript of the data is also appended. This review will primarily concern itself with the phonetics and phonology aspects of the volume.

The phonetics and phonology chapter includes brief descriptions of some of the more characteristic features of SgE segmentals – e.g. the use of alveolar stops or labiodental fricatives for dental fricatives, final consonant cluster simplification, final glottal stop, aspiration, vocalised [l], non-prevocalic [r], labiodental [r], the absence of length distinction in vowel pairs, the merger of vowel contrasts, the monophthongisation of FACE and GOAT vowels, the realisation of POOR and CURE vowels, and of triphthongs, and the occurrence of reduced vowels. Suprasegmentals, including rhythm, stress and intonation are also covered. These are generously illustrated with examples from the Lim Siew Hwee Corpus of Informal Singapore Speech (Deterding & Lim 2005). Altogether the account does a very good job of capturing the essence of the sound system of SgE. In the representation of the monophthongs though, it would perhaps have been more appropriate to use [a] rather than [ʌ] for the symbol for the START/ PALM/ BATH/ STRUT vowel (pp. 13, 26), to better represent a low and central vowel, lower in quality that the British English (BrE) STRUT vowel, as used in Lim (2004a) and adopted by Gupta (2005).

The description is in some sections supported by quantitative measures, such as frequency counts (e.g. the various pronunciations of [θ] in different positions or for various words, pp. 15–16; the incidence of reduced vowels in function words, p. 30), as well as acoustic analyses conducted on the data (e.g. a plot of formant 1 and 2 for monophthongs, p. 24; measurements of fundamental frequencies from pitch tracks to support the description of intonation contours of discourse particles, pp. 67–70). Such quantitative data comprise a most laudable inclusion, as these provide readers with a clearer awareness of which variant(s) are more commonly occurring in SgE, and a more objective, quantitative measure of a qualitative description, and it would have been even better if this was more widely included, in addition to the instances mentioned above. Also accompanying the descriptions at times are suggestions for reasons for the pattern observed (e.g. the more common a word, the greater tendency for a dental fricative to be used rather than alveolar stops, pp. 15–16).

A methodological limitation of the account in the volume is the fact that its primary source of data is a corpus comprising one hour's worth of speech of one ethnically Chinese young female on a single occasion. The author suggests at the outset that this helps solve 'the problems of variation' (p. 6), and allows him to 'describe a coherent variety of the language in some detail' (p. 6). While it is indeed the case that many descriptions of the sound systems

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of language varieties have been based on a single speaker, for the reasons given by the author, in this day and age, with the availability of corpora and the state at which phonetic analyses and research are at, the defence for the single speaker holds less well, and descriptions – in particular if in a monograph – should certainly be based on data from a number of members of a speech community. The author also admits that it is 'unfortunate that almost no data is presented on the speech of Malays or Indians, . . . or from material from casual conversations in truly informal settings' (p. 7) – for this, perhaps some more mention could have been made of other work which does cover these areas, such as the collection of chapters in Lim (2004b), whose descriptions are based on the Grammar of Spoken Singapore English Corpus (GSSEC), constructed from some eight hours of naturally occurring conversations in informal settings of Chinese, Malay and Indian Singaporeans. As a consequence of the limits of the corpus used for the descriptions of morphology, syntax, discourse and lexis, additional data, from the National Institute of Education Corpus of Spoken Singapore English (NIESSEC) and blogs, are called upon because 'examples are lacking for certain features of syntax and lexis' (p. 7). NIESSEC is, however, rather different from the main corpus for this volume, comprising recordings of Singaporean subjects in five-minute interviews conducted by their British lecturer, i.e. data which are brief and targeted at a non-SgE-speaking interlocutor. The author suggests though that the differences are insignificant, apart from NIESSEC being 'rather more formal' (p. 9), with the speech of both corpora considered 'educated Singapore English' used in interviews (p. 9).

Where the description of features is concerned, the preoccupation with BrE-based models and points of comparison was in some cases a little unexpected. For instance, certain aspects of a BrE model of intonation seem to be still adopted in the analysis of SgE, such as rising tone and rise-fall tone (pp. 34–37), even though it has been acknowledged by the author and colleagues in previous work that such models are in fact not so appropriate for SgE. Goh (2005), for example, has suggested that a model of discourse intonation established for BrE needs modifications before it can be applied to the analysis for SgE (p. 35), and the SgE early booster described (pp. 35–36) is said to 'demonstrate once again how a framework designed for the description of intonation in British or American English may not be appropriate for Singapore' (p. 36). One would thus have expected an account that describes the patterns in SgE 'on its own terms' (p. 12) much more than what is found here. Stating that the use of a rise-fall tone in SgE 'to indicate an extra degree of emphasis [is a] pattern . . . quite distinct from the use of a rise-fall tone in British English, often to indicate something suggestive' (p. 37) seems to miss the more crucial point that, in the first place, the realisation of the 'rise-fall' in SgE is substantially different from that in BrE, being more a low/mid tone stepping up to a high tone and then falling. And after all, in other work, such as Lim (2004a), one already finds treatments of SgE intonation which break away from a BrE model and provide a description in terms of, for example, sustained level steps or tones (Lim 2004a: 42–43)

A large number of comparisons are also made with varieties of BrE, perhaps because the volume is published with Edinburgh University Press, and the author and publishers reasonably envisage greater readership in the UK. Many times, though, the references to patterns in BrE seemed to be there for the sake of mentioning patterns in the major 'native' variety (e.g. that 'Londoners as well as some young people from elsewhere in Britain often use [f] and [v] in place of [θ] and [ð]' (p. 17). Again, in speaking of reduced vowels in unstressed syllables of polysyllabic words, the author suggests that we note that this 'is actually also found in the North of England' (p. 29) (Is a connection being suggested?). I concede that identifying the use of such features in BrE varieties can certainly help dispel the misconception by 'native' speakers that such features may be the result of poor or incorrect pronunciation of second-language or 'non-native' speakers, and, conversely, speakers of SgE and other Asian Englishes can also be made aware that some of their features are found more widely in varieties of British or American English; the point is also well made by the author that 'we do need to be careful . . . to determine which ones really are special to this variety of the language and which ones are found quite widely elsewhere' (p. 84). However,

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an additional explanation for why these features occur in SgE – viz. a result of contact with the local languages – would make for an even better understanding and appreciation of the patterns in question (more of this later).

At various points, there is mention of the SgE patterns also occurring in Englishes of Southeast and East Asia (e.g. dental fricatives, p. 17; triphthongs, p. 27; full vs. reduced vowels, p. 30; sentence stress, p. 34) – this is a very welcome inclusion indeed, to compare and contrast with other Englishes in the region, and not just with traditional 'native' varieties. In the section on monophthongisation of the vowels for FACE and GOAT, for example, the author says that 'it also occurs widely in the English spoken in South-East Asia' (p. 25); and for syllable-timed rhythm, the author seems to suggest that this is a pattern that is found in new varieties of English (p. 32). A small problem here is that readers may jump to various conclusions, e.g. that such features are (becoming) areal features, possibly through contact between speakers of the various Englishes in Asia, or that they are features that arise as a result of second language acquisition. In such cases, again, going just one step further would help discern between potential explanations and make a significant difference to readers' appreciation of the patterns – i.e. to mention, even if briefly, that the New Englishes that have emerged in Asia (and Africa) have developed such patterns as a result of contact with the local languages (if that is the case), with many of these languages, which, even while typologically diverse (coming from Sinitic, Austronesian, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, to name the more major families), happen to share common features, for instance, having monophthongs [e] and [o] rather than diphthongs [ei] and [ou] in their vowel inventories, or tending to be more syllable-timed.

A few very brief references are indeed made to contact-induced change as an explanation for the patterns observed, but with the growing body of work in this area, one would have expected more, as this would be more illuminating to readers, both Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans alike. Some explanations based on contact are in fact made in the morphology and syntax chapter (e.g. null subjects, p. 60; topic–comment, p. 62), and, apart from a very short section on influences on SgE intonation (pp. 38–39), more of this would have been welcome in the phonetics and phonology chapter. Work such as Lim (2004a) and Tan (2002) provides a number of systematic explanations for SgE segmentals and suprasegmentals based on contact with local languages, and the description in the volume under review would have benefitted from drawing from that.

It is clear that a large part of the critique in this review stems from a particular area of inquiry, that of contact linguistics. However, if one is to describe and analyse a variety of English which is characterised by its existence and evolution in a multilingual contact environment, to do so without recourse to issues of contact would in a way be to do a disservice to the variety and to the readers wishing to gain a more insightful view of it.

All said, though, the series Dialects of English is meant as 'a starting point for anyone wishing to know more about a particular dialect' (publisher's cover blurb) and in this sense this volume on Singapore English fulfils its purpose, providing a clear, brief, introductory coverage for a beginning linguistics student or intelligent layperson wishing to know something about SgE; the description will certainly meet its goal in stimulating the interest of readers, and the various references and annotated bibliography then point the way to further and deeper reading in the area.

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Singh & Singh's practical textbook of phonetics is both innovative and easily accessible not only to language students, but also to expert phoneticians, especially to those interested in the story of the sounds of American English. Although the science of spoken sounds remains essentially unchanged, it constantly accumulates new resources and there is a growing need of 'capturing the nuances of the many important changes worthy of inclusion' (vii), as the authors aptly put it.

The book is organized into nine chapters. The main body of the text is followed by two appendices and a comprehensive index, which is useful. At the beginning of each section, a list of objectives is offered so as to indicate to the reader what outcomes will be achieved. Each chapter concludes with a reference section, a number of exercises, and a list of selected recommended readings for those who wish to deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Answers to exercises, given throughout the text, are also included.

Chapter 1 gives a successful introduction to the science of speech, familiarizing an inquisitive learner with the main goals set before them. Basic phonetic concepts are gradually introduced, listing the benefits of studying phonetics, as well as relating it to neighbouring scientific areas. The chapter concludes with simple exercises, in the form of cloze tests and multiple choice tests, and a list of recommended readings. The authors clearly aim their book at multiple users: speech-language pathologists and linguists are encouraged to study this material, especially those interested in how General American (GA) works.

After a short introduction to the subject, the book goes on to explain the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and give the rationale behind its formation and evolution. The issue of the sound-to-spelling inconsistencies in the English language, countless efforts to change the spelling system, especially those relating to the United States (N. Webster and A. M. Bell, among others), as well as a brief overview of IPA as seen from the perspective of American English are the topics covered in Chapter 2.

The next two chapters cover the basics of articulatory phonetics, tackling both consonant and vowel sounds. A detailed account of the physiology of speech production opens Chapter 3, accompanied by a large number of extremely helpful illustrations. Speech-language pathologists should find this exhaustive description of the speech apparatus extremely useful. American English consonants and vowels are then classified, using an original selection of distinctive features both from articulatory and acoustic sources. The features used represent an amalgam of Voice, Place and Manner labels, and a simplified version of the Chomsky & Halle (1968) acoustic correlates, all applied to American English. This combination of articulatory and acoustic phonetics naturally leads the reader into the intricate world of the physical properties of the sound wave.

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