
China English or Chinese English

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Reviewing the China English movement through the Kachruvian lens

Introduction

In the last 20 years, the term ‘China English’ has been advanced as the most appropriate name for the variety of English that better expresses Chinese sociocultural realities and distinguishes the variety from the pejoratively perceived ‘Chinese English’ or ‘Chinglish’ (Du & Jiang, 2003; Jiang & Du, 2003; Meilin & Xiaoqiong, 2006). The demarcation between ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’, it is argued (Wang, 1991; Li, 1993; He & Li, 2009), is necessary if English as used by Chinese speakers is to gain recognition as something other than ‘bad’ English. Although no consensus regarding the definition of China English has yet formed among those who argue for the adoption of ‘China English’, characteristics of the variety can be inferred and the characteristics are used to confirm that ‘China English’ as a legitimate variety does exist, that it exhibits features of linguistic creativity rather than interference, suggesting a nativized educated variety (Berns, 2011). However, in my view, arguments in favor of a new term, ‘China English’, have more to do with renaming and rebranding and less with providing new insights into the nature of this English.

In this paper, I present the development of the debate surrounding the suitability of ‘China English’ over ‘Chinese English’ by reviewing various definitions that have been offered for the conceptualization of this variety. Moreover, I will lay out an analysis of the proposals behind each term. I also urge skepticism regarding the broader implications of the replacing of one term with the other, as well as a closer critical look at the proposals in terms of their problematic rhetoric and rationales. Furthermore, I suggest that the appropriate term for the Chinese variety of English is ‘Chinese English’ due to the following: its consistency with the sociolinguistic realities as outlined in the Kachruvian approach; its status as

a performance variety with restricted functional allocation; its unique features that display the Chineseness that results from the nativization of English in the broader Chinese sociocultural context; and its further decomposition into sub-varieties determined by the range and depth of nativization for distinct groups of users and uses under the broader umbrella term Chinese English.

Historical context of China English movement

In a recently published work, Xu (2017) presents the historical development of the promotion of the Chinese English variety that is the China English movement. Xu (2017: 290) argues that China English is ‘a developing variety of English characterized by the transfer of Chinese linguistic and cultural norms at varying levels of language [and] subject to ongoing codification and normalization processes’ and concludes that there are four periods of time for the development of research into Chinese English as a variety (Table 1):



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Table 1: Time periods for the development of research into Chinese English

	Time	Characterization	Description
First period	1980–1997	The Enlightenment Period (p. 235)	Ge’s (1980) initiation and Wang’s (1991) definition instigate the debate over China English.
Second period	1998–2001	The Great Leap Forward Period (p. 235)	There is noticeably more interest in researching China English and its definitions.
Third period	Not specified	The Renaissance Period (p. 236)	The range of the research into China English is broadened especially by research examining the incorporation of Chinese culture into ELT.
Fourth period	Not specified	The Open Door Period (p. 236)	The world Englishes approach becomes the primary theoretical paradigm for conceptualizing China English.

According to Xu, the movement of promoting China English can be dated to the 1970s when researchers were attempting to differentiate China English and Chinglish due to the derogatory connotation of the term Chinglish. Afterwards, the movement begins to evolve and it generates several key issues and topics that are essential to the discussions and debates of the Chinese English variety: the existence of China English, the terminology and the definition of China English, the differentiation between China English and Chinglish, the ‘acceptability of China English’ (p. 248), functions of China English, and formal features of China English. These issues and topics inspired research of the Chinese English variety to become a stampede in which many Chinese scholars in linguistics as well as TESOL published their work in Chinese academic publications, especially in the early period (Xu, 2010). Hence the origin of the China English movement, in terms of its rhetoric and motivation, is not unmasked to the majority of western readership. Amongst those topics and issues, the most frequently discussed is the definition of China English (He & Li, 2009). I shall provide a closer examination regarding several of the most influential definitions of China English and reveal the problematic rhetoric and rationales that were hidden behind the arguments for the promotion of China English.

Definitions of China English

Wang’s (1991) definition of China English

The conceptualization of China English was initiated by Ge (1980) and further theorized by various scholars (Wang, 1991; Li, 1993; Xie, 1995; Jia & Xiang, 1997; Jin, 2002) over the

next two decades. Their contributions are recognized by the world Englishes community mostly for their definitions of China English, among which Wang’s (1991) definition is acknowledged as the first (Jiang, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Zhichang, 2002; He & Li, 2009). It was presented in Wang’s volume *Zhongguo Yingyu Shi Keguan Cunzai De (China English is an Objective Reality)*, in which the term was defined as ‘The English used by the Chinese people in China, being based on Standard English and having Chinese characteristics.’ (Wang, 1991: 3). Wang further characterized China English as a neutral medium of communication. This definition established three main components that set the tone for future theorization of China English: first, it intends to identify the users and uses of China English; second, it hypothesizes the core of China English as standard English; third, it describes the features that indicate the processes of Chinese nativization.

Wang argues that the users and uses of China English emphasize the localized context, within which the functional domains are extended to anyone ‘who use[s] English under Chinese sociocultural context’ (1991: 3). This means that the nationality of its users does not matter as long as they are using English in a communicative setting where the content is uniquely about China. Therefore, China English can be the variety used by an American L1 English speaker in talking about Chinese poetry. For the concept of ‘standard English’, Wang claims it is ‘neither the authentic British English nor is it the authentic American English’ (1991: 2) or any other recognized variety. He adopts Strevens’s (1981) notion of standard English as a dialect that is used for all

communicational spectrums and has no apparent variants. However, Wang later contradicts himself by stating that such a standard English exists only in a theoretical sense and cannot be found in real-world communicative practices because every English user would present some sort of variant caused by geographic influences. Therefore, it is difficult to gain a clear understanding of what 'standard English' is to Wang, or what exactly China English is based upon, or how China English is associated with the concept of standard English in its nativization.

Li's (1993) definition of China English

Another influential definition of China English, proposed by Li (1993), is an extended version of Wang. For Li, China English is:

a variety with normative English as its core, but with Chinese characteristics at the levels of lexis, syntax and discourse; it is free from cross-linguistic influence from the Chinese language, and is employed to express content ideas specific to Chinese culture by means of transliteration, borrowing and semantic transfer. (1993: 19)

This definition is based on Li's comparisons between China English, a standardized form of English used for international and intranational communication, and Chinglish, a deviant form of English. In this comparison Li descriptively expands the concept of the nativization of English in China by focusing on the linguistic aspects of China English and reiterating the objective existence of China English. Moreover, Chinese English and Chinglish seem interchangeable in Li's argument.

Although basing his definition on Wang (1991), Li claims that Wang's definition is problematic and thus justifies the necessity of the extended version through his critiques. First, Li argues that restricting the uses and users of China English within the borders of China narrows the functional domains of China English; he points out that many lexical borrowings, such as 'kowtow' and 'Great Cultural Revolution' (1993: 19), are mostly used by non-Chinese speakers while more 'extreme' cases, such as 'Little Red Book' or 'Communist China' (1993: 19), are formulated outside China and later added to the linguistic resources of China English. According to Li, these cases belong to the linguistic repertoire of China English and therefore are evidence that China English is used both internationally and intranationally. Second, although Li remains

skeptical regarding the existence of the notion of standard English, he does recognize an English norm that can be universally 'applied in communications across all Inner Circle nations' (1993: 21).

Among Li's contributions to the conceptualization of China English are his descriptive accounts of the linguistic (lexical, syntactic, semantic) and even rhetorical (discourse) features of China English. Most of his examples are valuable in illustrating the Chineseness of China English. This illustration of the nativeness revealed through the process of nativization of English in China seems consistent with the Kachruvian approach. Li does not specifically acknowledge the framework he is using to describe China English's nativization. Li does, none the less, adapt Kachru (1983) by borrowing his notion of the localization of English once it is nativized in new contexts (1993: 22).

Jia and Xiang's (1997) definition of China English

The third influential definition is from Jia and Xiang's (1997) *Wei Zhongguo Yingyu Yi Bian (In Defense of Chinese English)*. In their attempt to defend the legitimacy of China English, they defined it as 'a variety of English which is used by Chinese native speakers with normative English as its core, which unavoidably manifests Chinese characteristics or helps transmit Chinese culture (1997: 11)'.¹ However, instead of making the case to justify the linguistic features of China English, Jia and Xiang focus on revising Wang's definition with their grasp of the sociolinguistic realities of English in China and their understanding of how China English is acquired by its users.

They first acknowledged the importance of Wang's emphasis on the users and the Chinese characteristics of China English; however, they argue that the Chinese characteristics were brought about by using China English under the 'Chinese way of thinking' (1997: 11) and that the Chinese way of thinking is acquired through learning the Chinese language. Hence, Jia and Xiang, unlike Li, believe that the users of China English must be 'native speakers of Chinese' (1997: 11).² In the meantime, no conceptualization of normative English is found in their arguments, which makes it difficult to fully understand this particular English variety (a variety that has normative English as its core featuring with Chinese characteristics) especially its functional domains.

After nearly 20 years of proposing and arguing for the establishment of China English, there is still no consensus on its definition, its formal and functional characteristics, or the identity of its

users. Yet features of China English can be gathered. Xiaoxia, an advocate of the term of 'China English', has offered the following conceptualization of China English and its seven characteristic features:

It is a living entity or organism that grows in the global community, [. . .] like any other language, it is interactive; it is a variety of English with Chinese characteristics and thoughts; holding Standard English as its core, China English can be used for communication without the interference of Chinese; it is an effective and beneficial means of reflecting China's rich culture, traditions, and civilization; it is a variant of Standard English, and is accepted and recognized by linguists and lexicographers; it can be understood by native speakers of English and is significant in terms of how it can be learned and how it can be used both nationally and internationally. (2006: 41)

The ideological irrelevancies

Despite general dissatisfaction with these conceptualizations of China English, what cloud the understanding of China English are the distracting irrelevancies embedded within the conceptualizations. These irrelevancies are caused mainly by the ideological dispositions of the authors. For instance, in Wang's work, it is not difficult to detect his eagerness to rebrand China English and divorce it from the negative connotations associated with the terms Chinglish and Sinicized English. As one of the early proponents, Li (1993) also argued that Chinese English or Sinicized English both generate linguistic and social stigmatizations for the users. Hence, the new term, China English, would serve to establish the English of China as legitimate to the world. Yet, Li is uncertain about whether the term 'China English' could be a safe choice for avoiding negative connotations because he fears that the construction 'noun + English is a way of naming such inferior and deviant varieties as Hong Kong English' (1993: 19). To him 'prestigious varieties are often named following the construction adjective + English, as in British English, American English and Australian English' (1993: 19). This position reveals an ideology that views different varieties of English in a hierarchical sense. That is, Inner Circle varieties are perceived as more prestigious than other varieties of English. Understanding this ideology is critical for diagnosing the motivation of theorizing and differentiating China English. Meanwhile, Li's view of English

varieties as inferior and superior is completely opposed to the premises of world Englishes.

Jia and Xiang's insistence on using the term China English also showcases this type of irrelevancy. When they promote the value of proving the existence of China English, they state that:

We, the descendants of our Chinese ancestors, can be gathered together by China English in the circumstances where English is the communication medium, just like using dialect to find the people who come from the same place of your hometown.³ (1997: 12)

While it is hard to locate the sociolinguistic relevancy in the rationale for promoting China English, it is easy to infer ideological naiveté from the sentiment driving advocacy because their argument suggests that it is not enough for Chinese to share a common first language, but also are in need of a unified foreign language to strengthen national identity. Unfortunately, the ideological irrelevancy in Jia and Xiang's argument does not stop there; their idealized view of the pedagogical impacts of China English contradicts their argument of the objective existence of China English:

By recognizing the objective existence of China English and analyzing the nativization of China English, we can be sure about the Chinese characteristics that are unavoidable to Chinese students so that we no longer need to emphasize on the unavoidable, but to focus on the avoidable in our teaching and learning; we can also be sure about the Chinese characteristics that are good for spreading Chinese culture so that we can teach our students to carry them forward to the world.⁴ (1997: 12)

This learner-adjustable feature of China English shows that Jia and Xiang do not actually think that China English is an English variety with an objective existence rather than a manageable device that can be taught to spread the value of Chinese culture.

The China English movement

If the conceptualizations of China English discussed so far represent a movement to establish this term as the best label to represent and symbolize the socio-cultural elements of nativization of English in China, this movement is likely to fail because of five critical flaws. First, it fails to completely and unambiguously differentiate China English from Chinese English; second, it does

not identify the actual functional domains in which China English is used; third, it disregards the differences between users and learners of English; fourth, it ignores the variations within Chinese English varieties; and, fifth, it intends to establish this variety under the ideology that views English varieties in a hegemonic order.

Linguistically or functionally, China English, as theorized above, refers to an established variety that exists solely as an abstraction accompanied with questionable and irrelevant ideologies. The China English movement has gradually revealed itself rather more as a complex propaganda tool that is not merely about the striving for a better perception of a legitimate Chinese variety of English, but also re-imprinting itself and thus disassociating Chinese realizations of English from the original stigmatization associated with the terms Chinglish or Sinicized English. Motivated by ideological bias against Outer circle and Expanding circle English varieties, this movement has proceeded with no perceptible intention to be attached to mainstream world Englishes research. Furthermore, by advocating for the replacement of the term Chinese English with the purposefully manufactured term China English, the movement attempts to obtain the linguistic power that would come with the recognition of a new brand.

Cheng (1992: 174) observes that 'English in China largely reflects the sociopolitical situation there. The pattern of the Chinese varieties of English are clear; when China is inward-looking, the English there acquires more Chinese elements; when China is outward-searching, English there is more like the norm in the west'. The China English movement began almost simultaneously with the 'open policy' initiated by the Chinese government since the early 1980s and has flourished since the Chinese economy started to develop and grow strong. In fact, the context of globalization and the economic situation are constantly mentioned by contributors to the China English movement. For instance, Xiaoxia (2006) explicitly states the correlation between the rise of the Chinese economy and China English:

Globalization has led to China taking part in various kinds of international cooperation and exchange. [...] Indeed, China English now plays a significant role in increasing international understanding and cooperation within the WTO and in the whole world. (43)

Eaves (2011) also does not doubt that China English is a result of social and economic

development. She asserts that English will be continuously extended by Chinese, 'as China develops socially and opens economically over the next decade [...] and it will become an established Expanding Circle World English' (70). Therefore, the question becomes what would an established variety of China English bring. Xiaoqing, who argues that China English will gradually evolve into a source of national pride, has certain appreciation of at least some aspects of the world Englishes paradigm, states that:

... we reach a point when Chinese people take a pride in what will have become their second national language. [...] to become a standard variety, it is obvious that official support is called for. This is not the case at present. (2005: 38)

It is not difficult to infer the nationalistic motivation from this aspiration, which shows a strong desire to bring linguistic power to those who claim the institutionalization of China English. Kachru is correct on this point when he argues that:

... linguistic power may emerge in the codification of linguistic behavior in one or more of the following ways: [...] by adding a code to the linguistic repertoire of a speech community or a speech fellowship. This may be accomplished through persuading, regulating, inducing and forcing. [...] by the suppression of a particular language variety and the elevation of another variety. Noted that the arms of suppression need not be very obvious. (1985b: 155)

The China English movement wishes to codify the linguistic repertoire of China English users by instilling a normative English variety of China English while claiming nativized linguistic features. This is desired despite the fact that the codification of this normative or standard English is only hypothetical, which makes the convictions of this movement even more puzzling. Moreover, the degradation of the terms Chinglish (or Chinese English) and Sinicized English, while prescribing the legitimacy of China English, shows the man-made suppression of less favorable varieties and purposeful elevation of China English.

Restoration of Chinese English

After taking a critical stance on previous works that define and conceptualize China English, I propose that the conceptualization of a Chinese English variety should return to the trajectory described within the Kachruvian paradigm for better capturing the sociolinguistic realities of English in

China. And the appropriate terminology for the Chinese variety of English would be Chinese English. In *The Other Tongue* Kachru (1982) uses the term Chinese English for the first time to refer to the variety of English associated with China. Even though Kachru does not provide any explanation for the adoption of this term, it seems that it would not lead to any pejorative attitudes because it is aligned with most ‘adjective + noun’ formulations for naming the English varieties. This practice is followed by most world Englishes researchers and scholars when naming new varieties (e.g., Nigerian English, Indian English, etc.). However, the term Chinese English has not gained favor among the proponents of China English (Wang, 1991; Li, 1993; Jia & Xiang, 1997; Jin, 2002; He & Li, 2009) and has been gradually interpreted as a Chinese version of English that should be dissociated from the formal English variety that the proponents of China English want to be the symbol of the Chinese context (He & Li, 2009).

Eliminating linguistic stigmatization

Bolton (2002, 2003) adopts a historical approach to his reexamination of the concept and the phenomenon of Chinese Englishes, and argues that the history of China’s contact with English in the past two centuries plays a significant role. Furthermore, Bolton suggests two essential components of WE paradigm that are relevant to the Chinese context: the pluralism and ‘universalism’ (p. 196) in the Kachruvian paradigm. In Bolton’s argument, the pluralism of Kachruvian theory is the key for reshaping the discourses of the Chinese English variety and the notion of universalism – which is the WE-ness of the Kachruvian paradigm – would inevitably draw animosity due to political controversy in the past hundreds of years of Chinese history in regard to the contact with English.

To restore the term of Chinese English to represent the Chinese variety, I argue that one of the main benefits of this conceptualization is that it avoids the linguistic stigmatization that triggered the movement for a terminological replacement. It is important to emphasize the linguistic and functional nature of an Expanding Circle variety and clarify that the institutionalization of English is not yet developed in the localized context and that English is still used as an international language that functions in restricted domains in China. Kachru (1985a) also distinguishes the Outer Circle varieties as norm-developing varieties and Expanding Circle varieties as norm-dependent

varieties, which concerns the issue of the norms and models of Chinese English. The distinctions are critical in illustrating the local context for the function of English in a specific region and for more pragmatic pedagogical planning (Kachru, 1985b). Although the term ‘institutionalized varieties’ is utilized by Kachru to distinguish them from the performance or Expanding Circle varieties, the terms (‘institutionalized’ and ‘performance’) are not intended to prioritize one variety over another, nor should the terms be seen as valorizing any particular variety.

The Expanding Circle is comprised of areas where English functions as an international language and traditionally is regarded as a foreign language (Kachru, 1985a). When emphasizing the role of English in Expanding Circle countries, Kachru (1985a) adds that English is spreading rapidly in multilingual societies of Expanding Circle nations as an additional language or an alternative language. This he identifies as a response to the demands of modernization, ‘as well as by other sociopolitical and sociolinguistic dynamics’ (1985a: 15).

In Kachru’s work on English as an Asian language (1998), he expands the notion of nativization by adding the concepts of the ‘range’ and ‘depth’ of English in Outer and Expanding Circle varieties, in which the concept of ‘range’ refers to the ‘functional repertoire of the language in the regulative function, interpersonal function, instrumental function and imaginative function (1998: 92); the concept of ‘depth’, on the other hand, is about the use of English available to different groups of users in different functional domains. The uses could range from the elite in business and academia to shopkeepers and taxi drivers. Such notions give rise to a dimension to understanding the nativization of English in a localized context. Meanwhile, the distinction of norm-providing mechanisms (Inner Circle varieties), norm-developing mechanisms (Outer Circle varieties) and norm-dependent mechanisms (Expanding Circle varieties) is also crucial to illuminate the fundamental components in the theorization of Chinese English. All these notions are fundamental in defining an Expanding Circle variety. Together these notions provide a definition of Chinese English that looks like this: *Chinese English* is a performance variety of English with restricted functional domains. It has formal linguistic characteristics displaying the Chineseness resulting from the nativization of English in the Chinese sociocultural context. The term captures the different varieties that develop by the users who represent the range and depth of nativization across different levels of society and

that develop within the various contexts of use represented within the functional allocation of English.

Functional domains of Chinese English

The definition of Chinese English outlined above realigns the conceptualization of Chinese English with the Kachruvian paradigm. First, it reiterates that Chinese English is an Expanding Circle variety, and as an Expanding Circle variety, its uses are restricted in different domains. Hence, depicting the functions of English in China for its users becomes necessary in understanding this variety. One practical tool for depicting the functions of English in China is the sociolinguistic profile, which Ferguson (1966) proposed in the form of a mathematical formula to quantitatively present the language situation within a national context. He claimed that this *in situ* understanding of language was a crucial socio-cultural aspect of a nation-state. Kachru (1983) adapted this notion and further developed it into a framework that could illustrate the sociocultural realities of English uses in Outer Circle contexts. Later, Berns (1988, 1990, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) adopted this framework and applied it to address questions that are critical to pedagogical practices and to contextualizing communicative competence in English-using European contexts. Berns' sociolinguistic profiles of English in the Expanding Circle highlights the plurality of realities for English around the world and challenges the adequacy of differentiating ESL and EFL as two separated contexts for English teaching (1990). Afterwards, sociolinguistic profiles of English have been developed by numerous scholars to depict sociocultural realities in various nations of multiple continents such as Europe (Petzold, 1994; Pulcini, 1997; Fonzari, 1999; Dimova, 2005; Reichelt, 2005; Ustinova, 2005; Selvi, 2011; Kasztalska, 2014), Asia (Shim, 1994; Yong & Campbell, 1995; Matsuda, 2000; Gil & Adamson, 2011), South America (Friedrich, 2001; Aguilar-Sanchez, 2005; Nickels, 2005), and Africa (Bamiro, 1991; Schaub, 2000; Michieka, 2005).

Not only did the framework of the sociolinguistic profile facilitate a descriptive account with consistency and comprehensibility for perceiving the Englishes around the world, many scholars have also utilized it for theoretical discussions and conceptualizations. For instance, Yong and Campbell (1995) use the framework to show that both the demographics of English users and the

sociolinguistic realities of English uses in China demonstrate that the main function of English was not in serving as an international language. Friedrich (2001) presents the sociolinguistic profile of English in Brazil to demonstrate the dynamics of English in Expanding Circle countries. She also deploys the profile to challenge the reality of linguistic imperialism (see Phillipson, 1992) in this Expanding Circle context. Aguilar-Sanchez (2005) offers a detailed portrayal of how English in Costa Rica is integrated with both Inner circle and Expanding Circle contexts. In her illustration of English in Puerto Rico from historical and political perspectives, Nickels (2005) argues that coining the term 'Puerto Rican English' can much more accurately capture the sociolinguistic realities of English in Puerto Rico. Selvi (2011) reveals that Turkish English has features of both the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle due to the status of English and its significant instrumental function.

For the language situation of English in China, two sociolinguistic profiles of English in China have been drawn, one by Yong & Campbell (1995) and another by Gil and Adamson (2011), that provide illuminating depictions of English in Chinese culture and society. Yong and Campbell (1995) thoroughly examine the users of Chinese English by using 'educational level' as a tool to both measure and differentiate groups of users and their purposes and motivations for learning and using English. They conclude that the argument of English as an international language, which was previously perceived as the primary function of English in China, is not correct because most users do not learn or use English for international communication, but to gain social capital and better 'social mobility' (1995: 385). Gil and Adamson (2011) provide an exhaustive historical lineage of the status of English in different stages of Chinese history, from when English first was introduced to China in 1637 up to the 21st century. Through the illustration of different historical statuses of English as a foreign language in China, they claim that English has an unprecedented and important status in contemporary Chinese society. Findings in both profiles are informatively relevant and expand knowledge of the sociolinguistic realities of English in China.

The educated variety on the cline of bilingualism

The definition of Chinese English I propose also helps find a place for China English among the

array of Chinese Englishes. The China English movement's fixation on an alternative terminological representation that distinguishes China English, a specialized term, amongst such other designated terms as Chinglish and Sinicised English can be resolved by another Kachruvian notion: the cline of bilingualism (Kachru, 1976). In Berns' (2011) examination of various terms that portray different English varieties in China, she adopts a Kachruvian approach by assigning several established varieties to points on the cline of bilingualism. In this cline, 'the more standard, "native-like" if you will, of these varieties and the less standard, least native-like, would be at opposite ends of the [cline]' (2011: 3). The former would be near the so-called 'ambilingual point' and the latter near the so-called 'zero point'. Varieties closer to the zero point would include those that normally evoke negative attitudes and are regularly 'vilified' (Bolton, 2002: 188) among Chinese English prescriptivists. The variety known as Sinicized English would also be closer to the *zero-point* because it is often associated with 'beginner's English' or 'bad English'. For instance, Li (1993) characterizes Sinicized English as the arbitrary translation that is a form of 'incorrect use of English with Chinese grammar, syntax and tone' (cited in Berns, 2011: 3) caused by direct translation from Chinese expressions. Nearer the ambilingual point is the variety of English that is considered an 'educated variety' (Kachru, 1976). As Berns argues:

... Chinese English – for all intents and purposes – is a neutral identifier of the English language as it is realized in China. Chinese English is thus terminologically comparable to any of the other varieties, for example, German English, Nigerian English, Brazilian English, English English, American English, South African English, Panamanian English, to name just a few. 'Chinese' in this context acknowledges the Chinese-ization of English as a consequence of its contact with Chinese dialects and with the social and cultural milieu in which the language used and learned. (2011: 4)

An advantage of this definition over that of the China English proponents is its recognition of the linguistic varieties and transfers of Chinese that are the results of English nativization in the Chinese context. A particularly rich context for the development and institutionalization of many linguistic variants are realizations of the innovative/imaginative functions of English in Chinese contexts, that is of 'bilingual creativity'

(Kachru, 1983). Literature is the major domain of use for the emergence of linguistic varieties that are primarily contributed by Chinese writers who write in English. Authors such as Ling Yutang, Ha Jin, Amy Tan and Yiyun Li exemplify those whose use of English contextually and linguistically displays features of Chineseness. Another domain of use for the innovative/imaginative function of English is Chinese social media, where the function is achieved primarily through code-mixing. Through participant observation, Zhang found that the Chinese netizens' code-mixing uses are mostly in 'three domains that are government administration, pop culture and social interaction.' (2012: 40) Her findings yield the potential of how Chinese English could be developed via the increasing mixing practices and, more importantly, how these practices are perceived in a neutral way. That is, the attitude toward these mixed uses are neither as a symbol of prestige nor as a deficient use of language.

Conclusions

The China English movement's conceptualizations of China English and its endeavor to introduce China English as the replacement (both in label and definition) of Chinese English and other frequently used terminologies are a reaction to long term linguistic stigmatization brought about by the old terms. These new conceptualizations attempt to provide a theoretical basis for the establishment of the new term as the official name for a Chinese variety of English with legitimacy. However, from a closer examination, it turns out that this terminological replacement is not the outcome of a straightforward sociolinguistic or linguistic exploration, but rather a movement submerged with ideology that mirrors contemporary sociopolitical conditions. These irrelevancies, in my view, undermine the tenability of the concept of China English and the integrity of the very work of conceptualizing the linguistic and sociolinguistic features of China English. To dissociate these irrelevancies, this paper urges skepticism regarding the broader implications of this terminology replacement and argues for the restoration of Chinese English as the cover term to identify the Englishes of China.

To better understand English in China, it is important for world Englishes research to be dissociated from the mentality of inferiority and the ideologies of nationalism. The problematic

mindset of viewing institutionalized varieties as more prestigious than performance varieties is implied in the China English movement. Admittedly, the terminologies of ‘institutionalized’, ‘Inner Circle varieties’, ‘Expanding Circle varieties’, do trigger a sense of hierarchy in terms of the relationships amongst different English varieties. However, instead of intensifying and heightening the mistaken interpretations and references of these terms, it would be more constructive to put effort into enhancing the intelligibility of the abstruse terminological conceptualizations. Recognizing China English as a sub-variety within Chinese English varieties, would be such a constructive move.

Notes

- 1 The quote is translated from Chinese by the author.
- 2 The quote is translated from Chinese by the author.
- 3 The quote is translated from Chinese by the author.
- 4 The quote is translated from Chinese by the author.

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