

BOOK REVIEW

Malaysian English: Language Contact and Change, Siew Imm Tan. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013, xvii + 241 pp. ISBN 978-3-631-63700-5.

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The main thrust of this book is the evolution of Malaysian English (ME), a localised variety of English which is considered as a new variety of English within the World Englishes (WEs) framework. Evolutionary theories of new Englishes suggest that local varieties of English are the outcome of evolutionary processes that the English language experiences from the time it was transplanted until the present due to various local sociocultural and political factors. This is Tan's point of departure in investigating how ME has evolved within the Malaysian diverse cultural and linguistic scenery. The book analyses selected features of contemporary ME using a contact linguistics approach which takes into consideration the historical, linguistic, political and cultural factors that influenced the evolution of English in Malaysia throughout the period of colonial Malaya until the present. With this approach Tan argues that the evolutionary changes in ME can be observed, not just as linguistic outcomes of the contact between English and the languages of the local community, but also importantly as "manifestations of the sociohistorical aspects of the contact situation" (p. 1).

The book comprises six chapters beginning with an introductory chapter which sets the background for the book's overall aim to study contemporary ME and how it has evolved due to its contact with two major speech communities in Malaysia, namely Malay and Chinese. This is achieved by examining three categories of linguistic features in ME, namely lexical borrowings, lexical creations and syntactic and lexical variation which have emerged in ME due to various linguistic factors. The second chapter is a solid discussion of the history of Malaysian English beginning with a description of the feature pool of ME. This and a geo-historical account of the Malay Peninsula which follows help to set the background for the language contact situation in British Malaya until the present. The third chapter titled "The Malaysian English Newspaper Corpus" is essentially the methodology chapter. As with many current studies on New Englishes, Tan's study used language corpora (5-million-word corpus of Malaysian English) to obtain data required for a systematic analysis of variation and change in the ME linguistic system. This chapter is similar to a thesis methodology chapter in terms of format and content. In chapters four and five, Tan discusses the findings of her study, focusing first on lexical borrowing and creation that are essentially deliberate innovations by efficient Malaysian

bilinguals and then on group Second Language Acquisition (SLA) which involves an analysis of "how group SLA has influenced the syntactic and lexical structures of ME" (p. 101). In the final chapter, a theoretical model of contact-induced change in Malaysian English is proposed. In general the overall presentation, content and style of the book are at par with most scholarly publications. However, the one downside of the book is the organisation of its chapters and the inclusion of a methodology chapter (despite its title), which reminds one of the format of an academic dissertation.

Tan's book makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on Malaysian English for two important reasons. First, despite the increase in Malaysian English research in the last three decades, there are very few books that discuss Malaysian English linguistic features in depth. Notable early publications on Singapore and Malaysian English (SME) by Tongue (1974), Platt and Weber (1980), as well as others which were published later such as Lowenberg (1991; 1992), Baskaran (1987; 2005), and Schneider (2007) are important sources of information for recent works on the linguistic features of ME, including Tan's work. However, compared to other similar varieties such as Singapore English, there is still a dearth of resources on the linguistics of ME. Tan's work is therefore a much needed addition to the body of existing work. Secondly and also more importantly is the contact-induced change in ME discussed in Tan's work which takes into account the life-cycle of the language that goes beyond the description of the features alone. It offers a comprehensive examination of the main processes that lead to the incorporation of the features and also importantly "an account of the wider contact phenomena that have shaped" contemporary Malaysian English (p. 15).

Another dimension to Tan's work which is missing in earlier books on ME is the utilisation of real language data derived from a large corpus of Malaysian English in the analysis of its linguistic features. Tan's use of language corpora in her study is in keeping with "the theoretical developments in World Englishes (WEs) as well as the increase in corpus-based studies on a number of WEs" in the description and use of English as a new local variety (Hajar, 2014). Indeed, there is increasing consensus among researchers that the empirical nature of corpora facilitates the analysis and description of a language as it allows the different linguistic aspects (e.g. lexical, syntactic, discourse, pragmatics) to be quantitatively analysed and their patterns to be observed and measured. Such information provides hard evidence for an objective interpretation of language change and evolution. Hence, in employing language corpora in her study, what Tan has been able to achieve in discussing contact-induced change in ME is to use authentic data to analyse lexical borrowing and lexical creation. Focusing on the influence of Malay and Chinese in ME particularly, Tan drew extensive examples of loanwords, loantranslations and compound blends in the two languages from the corpus of study. The data presented in chapters four and five are a useful source of linguistic information for any researcher who is interested

in investigating lexical innovation and distribution pattern in ME. The same corpus also generated data for the analysis of group SLA. As with her analysis of lexical borrowing and lexical creation, Tan provides extensive instances drawn from the corpus to exemplify group SLA in ME with regard to syntactic and lexical variation.

The book culminates in a discussion of a theoretical model for the description and explanation of contact-induced change in ME and also possibly other New Englishes. This model is premised upon two contact-induced phenomena, i.e. language maintenance and group SLA. Tan argues that lexical borrowing and creation are contact-induced processes that are associated with language maintenance while group SLA "results in changes that are similar to those which occur in situations of language shift" (p. 137). The model has yet to be tested in other contexts of New Englishes but as it stands, it does merit recognition as a framework for the analysis of new varieties of English.

The limitation of the study, if there is any, is the corpus of the study comprising a collection of news texts published in two mainstream dailies namely the New Straits Times (NST) and The Star (STAR), which qualify as standard ME. Despite the advantages of using newspaper data, there are limitations when one considers the various other genres of ME, both written and spoken, standard and non-standard. The motivation for focusing on Malay and Chinese influences because they are considered dominant communities is also arguable as Indians are also a major speech community in Malaysia. For instance, the inclusion of other standard ME texts in the corpus of study, such as Malaysian English literature texts, would yield data on the Indian community cultural influences in ME, particularly from the Tamil language.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned shortcomings, Tan's book is a useful addition to the field of Malaysian English studies with regard to the issue of structural nativisation as part of the evolutionary process of ME in particular, and new varieties of English in general. It does not only provide a new perspective as well approach to the study of ME linguistic features, but also documents valuable data on ME, particularly its lexis, that can be an important source of information for researchers. Besides the data in chapters four and five, the appendices on lexical forms borrowed from Malay and Chinese provide detailed information on the words that were generated from the corpus of study including source texts and contexts of occurrence.

Siew Imm Tan's book *Malaysian English: Language Contact and Change* in my opinion, is comparable to some of the best books published on ME in terms of its quality of content and presentation, and its contribution of new theoretical knowledge to the study of new varieties of English, particularly Malaysian English.

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