

# *The Handbook of* **Asian Englishes**



*Edited by*  
**Kingsley Bolton, Werner Botha,  
and Andy Kirkpatrick**

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# The Handbook of Asian Englishes

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*The Handbook of Asian Englishes*

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# Notes on Contributors

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**Lynda Achren** is an independent consultant with a 25 year engagement with the Lao PDR working on international development projects and conducting research. When in Australia, she develops resources, delivers workshops, and conducts research in the field of adult language, literacy, and culture. She has also lectured in language teaching methodology at Melbourne University, La Trobe University, and Victoria University and is a member of the editorial committee of *Fine Print: A journal of adult English language and literacy education*. Her publications include *Middle way to Lao modernity: A cultural analysis of development and aid in Laos* (2009).

**Khin Khin Aye** has been with Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak, Malaysia, since 2009. Her research interests and publications have focused on language policies, world Englishes, and contact linguistics. Her publications include “Singapore Bazaar Malay” in *The survey of pidgin and creole languages, volume III* and a co-authored chapter on Bazaar Malay in the book *Pidgins and creoles in Asia*.

**Azirah Hashim** is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Malaya. Her research interests include English as a lingua franca in ASEAN, language contact in Southeast Asia, language and law, and higher education in ASEAN. Some of her publications include co-edited volumes such as *Communicating with Asia: The future of English as a global language* (2016) and *International arbitration discourse and practices in Asia* (2018), and articles in journals such as *Discourse Studies*, *English Today*, and *Multilingua*.

**John Bacon-Shone** is Professor at The University of Hong Kong and Director of the Social Sciences Research Centre. He is an applied statistician, and his research interests include biostatistics, compositional data, data archiving, gambling, privacy, open data, sociolinguistics, statistical computing, survey methodology, and policy research.

**Tobias Bernaisch** is Senior Lecturer in English Linguistics at Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany. His research interests include corpus linguistics, world Englishes with a special emphasis on South Asian Englishes, language attitudes, language and gender, and variational pragmatics.

**Kingsley Bolton** is Professor Emeritus in the Department of English at Stockholm University, Sweden, and Honorary Professor in the Social Sciences Research Centre of The University of Hong Kong. He has published widely on English in the Asian region, language and globalization, sociolinguistics, and world Englishes. He is co-editor of the journal *World Englishes*, and series editor of the Routledge book series, *Multilingual Asia*.

**Werner Botha** is Senior Lecturer in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University, Australia. His research interests include the use of English in Asian higher education, language variation, multilingualism, and sociolinguistics, with particular reference to the Asian region.

**Suksiri Bounchan** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the Institute of Foreign Languages, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where she has been involved in the Teacher Training Program (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) for more than 20 years. Her areas of interest are academic writing, educational psychology, and literature studies.

**Francesco Cavallaro** is Associate Professor of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies and the Director of the Centre for Modern Languages, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests are in sociolinguistics and the social aspects of bilingualism, especially of minority groups in multilingual contexts. He has published on language maintenance and shift, the demographics of the Italian community in Australia, language attitudes in Singapore, and minority groups in Southeast Asia. He is the author of the book *Transgenerational language shift: From Sicilian and Italian to Australian English*.

**Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew** is Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She was Fulbright Visiting Professor at Harvard University in 2010, as well as Leverhulme Visiting Professor to the UK in 2012. She is the project advisor for *Instep*, a textbook and audio-visual series used in Singapore schools. Her academic publications include *Emergent lingua franca* (2009), *A sociolinguistic history of early identities* (2013), and *Muslim education in the 21st century: Asian perspectives* (2014).

**Alexander R. Coupe** is Associate Professor of Linguistics in the School of Humanities at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is a leading authority on the languages of Northeast India and is the author of *A grammar of Mongsen Ao* (2007). His fieldwork-driven research focuses on the documentation and grammatical description of the minority languages of South Asia and Mainland Southeast Asia, feeding his broader interests in the development of complexity in the grammars of the world's languages, grammaticalization theory, language contact, and linguistic typology and prehistory.

**David Deterding** is Professor at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei, where he teaches advanced phonetics, forensic linguistics, introductory linguistics, history of English, Malay-English translation, and research methods in linguistics. His research has focused on the measurement of rhythm, the pronunciation of English

in Brunei, Singapore, Hong Kong, and China, the pronunciation of the indigenous languages of Brunei, and the intelligibility of English as a lingua franca (ELF). His most recent books are on *Misunderstandings in ELF, Brunei English*, and an edited volume, *The use and status of language in Brunei Darussalam*.

**Tanya N. I. Ekanayaka** is a Sri Lankan-British concert composer-pianist as well as a linguist, musicologist, and record producer. She has been contracted by Naxos Records as a composer, recording artiste, and producer since 2014, and has taught at The University of Edinburgh since 2007. She holds an Honours degree in English literature and linguistics from the University of Peradeniya and an MSc and PhD (the latter for cross-disciplinary research in linguistics and musicology) from Edinburgh University, as well as advanced professional qualifications in music.

**Ishamina Athirah Gardiner** is Lecturer at the Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei. Her research interests include intelligibility of interactions in English as a lingua franca, describing Brunei English, pronunciation teaching, and the pronunciation of the indigenous languages of Brunei. She has recently published papers in the *Routledge handbook of contemporary English pronunciation*, the *Routledge handbook of English as a lingua franca*, and *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*.

**Ram Ashish Giri**, PhD, is an academic at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, where he has been teaching since 2009. He was educated in Nepal, the USA, and Australia. His research interests include TESOL, language testing, and language (education) policy. He has published in international journals, written book chapters, and published edited books. His next co-edited book, entitled *Functional variations in English: Theoretical considerations and practical challenges*, is due in early 2020.

**Weihsin Gui** is Associate Professor of English and a member of the Southeast Asian Studies program at the University of California-Riverside, USA. He is the author of *National consciousness and literary cosmopolitanism: Postcolonial literature in a global moment* (2013), editor of *Common lines and city spaces: A critical anthology on Arthur Yap* (2014), and co-editor of a 2016 special issue of the journal *Interventions on Singaporean Literature and Culture and Neoliberalism*.

**M. Obaidul Hamid**, PhD, is Senior Lecturer in TESOL Education at the University of Queensland, Australia. His research and teaching focus on the policy and practice of TESOL education in developing societies. He is co-editor of *Language planning for medium of instruction in Asia* (2014). He has published his works in a number of journals, including *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *ELT Journal*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *Language Problems and Language Planning*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *World Englishes*. He is on the editorial boards of *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, and *Journal of Asia TEFL*.

**Sawitri Pechapan-Hammond** is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand. She holds a PhD in English studies (intercultural communication) from

the University of Nottingham, UK. She is co-author of *Reading skills* and *English for tourism*. Her research interests include English for specific purposes, intercultural communication, and world Englishes.

**Md. Mahmudul Hasan** holds an English and comparative literature PhD from Portsmouth, UK, and currently teaches English and postcolonial literatures at the International Islamic University Malaysia. His research interests include South Asian literature, diasporic literature, and postcolonial feminist literature. Among his co-edited books are *A feminist foremother: Critical essays on Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* (2017), *Displaced & forgotten: Memoirs of refugees* (2017) and *Bangladeshi literature in English* (forthcoming).

**Andy Kirkpatrick** is Professor in Linguistics in the Department of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences at Griffith University, Australia, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He is the author of *World Englishes: Implications for ELT and international communication* and *English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: A multilingual model*, and editor of the *Routledge handbook of world Englishes*. His most recent books include *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (co-edited with Anthony Liddicoat).

**Daravone Kittiphanh** is the Acting Permanent Secretary in the Permanent Secretary Office in the Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR. She is a Fulbright Scholar, an Australian Leadership Award Fellow, and an Australian Leadership Award Scholar. Her key publications include *English for Lao government officials*, *Teaching competency standards in the Lao PDR*, *Intercultural metaphors: Leadership perspective from Southeast Asia*, and *Challenges for developing educational leadership in the Lao PDR*.

**Peter Iori Kobayashi** is Lecturer in the Faculty of International Studies at Niigata University of International and Information Studies, Japan. His main areas of interest include Asian Englishes, language policy and planning in Southeast Asia, and the Chinese diaspora. He studied at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, National Chengchi University in Taiwan, and the University of Hull in the UK.

**František Kratochvíl** is Assistant Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Asian Studies at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. He specializes in the grammatical description of Papuan and Austronesian languages of Indonesia. He authored *A grammar of Abui* (2007) and has published on topics related to anthropological linguistics, discourse structure, historical linguistics, and morphology. He is interested in the processes that led to the current linguistic diversity in Southeast Asia.

**James Lambert** is former Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. His academic interests include lexicography and world Englishes, with specific focus on Asian Englishes. He has worked as a professional lexicographer for over 15 years with Macquarie Dictionary Publishers, Sydney, Australia, and has taught English in Hong Kong, Japan, and Turkey. He has edited dictionaries

and created corpora of various varieties of Asian Englishes, including Indian English, Malaysian English, Philippine English, and Singapore English.

**Allan F. Lauder** received his Bachelor's degree in the arts and humanities at Auckland University, New Zealand (1980). He was the recipient of a Post-Graduate Research Scholarship in Japanese Language, at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Tokyo Gaigo Dai), Japan, 1982–1984. He received his Master's degree in linguistics at the National University of Singapore (1991) and his Doctorate in corpus linguistics at Atma Jaya University in Jakarta, Indonesia (2009). He has been a guest lecturer and researcher in the Department of Linguistics, Humanities Faculty, at Universitas Indonesia for more than two decades.

**Jamie Shinhee Lee** is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, USA, and co-editor of *World Englishes in pop culture* (with Yamuna Kachru) and *English in Asian popular culture* (with Andrew Moody). Her research interests include bilingualism, globalization and education policy, Korean pragmatics/discourse analysis, language and popular culture, and world Englishes. Her articles have appeared in *Asian Englishes*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *English Today*, *English World-Wide*, *Journal of Creative Communications*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Language in Society*, *Language Research*, and *World Englishes* as well as in several edited collections.

**Siu-lun Lee** is Senior Lecturer in the Yale-China Chinese Language Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests include applied linguistics, Cantonese studies, Chinese linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language teaching pedagogy.

**Anthony J. Liddicoat** is Professor in the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, UK, and Adjunct Professor in the School of Creative Industries at the University of South Australia. His research interests include the teaching and learning of intercultural capabilities in language education, and language policy and planning. He is executive editor of *Current Issues in Language Planning*. His recent books include *Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (2019) and *Language policy and planning in universities: Teaching, research and administration* (2017).

**Shirley Geok-lin Lim**, Distinguished Professor Emerita at University of California, Santa Barbara, USA, is recipient of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, two American Book Awards, the Multiethnic Literatures of the United States Lifetime Achievement Award, the UCSB Faculty Research Lecture Award, and two Distinguished Professor Fulbright awards. She has served as UCSB Chair of Women's Studies, English Chair Professor at The University of Hong Kong, Ngee Ann Endowed Visiting Professor at the National University of Singapore, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at City University of Hong Kong.

**Ee-Ling Low** is Dean of Teacher Education and Professor of Applied Linguistics and Teacher Learning at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. She obtained her BA (with Direct

Honours) from the National University of Singapore (NUS), and an MPhil and a PhD in linguistics from the University of Cambridge, UK, under the NIE, NTU Overseas Graduate Scholarship. Professor Low is currently the President of the Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics and the series editor for the Routledge-SAAL series for world Englishes.

**Kang Kwong Luke** is President's Chair Professor of Linguistics and Chair of the School of Humanities at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His teaching and research are in the area of talk and social interaction using an Ethnomethodological and Conversation Analytic approach. His publications include *Utterance particles in Cantonese conversation* (1990), *Telephone calls: Unity and diversity in the structure of telephone conversations across languages and cultures* (2002), and thematic special issues on "Turns and increments" (*Discourse Processes*, 2012) and "Affiliation and alignment in responding actions" (*Journal of Pragmatics*, 2016).

**Isabel Pefianco Martin** is Professor at the Department of English and the Department of Education of the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. She is the incoming Vice President and President-Elect of the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE). Professor Martin has published widely on such topics as English language education, forensic linguistics, language policy, language and law, Philippine English, sociolinguistics, and world Englishes. In addition, she has held leadership positions in various national organizations concerned with language education in the Philippines.

**James McLellan** is Senior Assistant Professor in English Studies at the University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei. He has taught at secondary and tertiary levels in Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Brunei, France, Malaysia, and the UK. He received his PhD from Curtin University of Technology, Australia, in 2005. His research fields include language alternation, multilingual education, Southeast Asian Englishes, and Borneo indigenous languages. He is co-editor of *The use and status of language in Brunei Darussalam: A kingdom of unexpected linguistic diversity* (2016) and *Codeswitching in university English-medium classes: Asian perspectives* (2014).

**Andrew Moody** is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Macau and an authority on the forms, functions, and status of English within the territory. His primary research and publications concern the role of English in popular culture and sociolinguistic methods appropriate to the study of popular culture. He and Jamie Shinhee Lee have edited a volume of essays entitled *English in Asian popular culture* (2011), a volume that defines examination of this field. He is currently the editor of the journal *English Today*.

**Stephen H. Moore** is Associate Professor in the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. He has worked in the fields of English language teaching and teacher education, English for specific purposes, discourse analysis, and language assessment for 30 years, including extended periods in Cambodia. He has published widely about Cambodia and on the English language in Cambodia.



**Joybrato Mukherjee** is Full Professor of English Linguistics at Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany. His research focuses on applied and corpus linguistics, English lexicogrammar and syntax, South Asian varieties of English, and, more generally, world Englishes, including learner Englishes.

**Bee Chin Ng** works in the area of bilingualism and multilingualism with a focus on the impact of language contact on individuals and the community they live in. Her research approach is to explore both cognitive and social aspects of language use. Currently, she is working on language and emotion in multilinguals, language attitudes, identity and social categorization, and communicative aspects of aging. She is currently the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

**Xuan Nhat Chi Mai Nguyen** is Lecturer in TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the Department of Languages, Information and Communications, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Her research and teaching interests include critical issues surrounding teaching English as an international language, second language teacher education and development, and second language teaching methodologies. She has taught English and trained second language teachers in various contexts, including in Vietnam, Australia, and the UK. Her recent publications have appeared in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *TESOL Journal*, and *RELC Journal*, among others.

**Christopher B. Patterson** (PhD, University of Washington) is Assistant Professor in the Social Justice Institute at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He is the author of *Transitive cultures: Anglophone literature of the transpacific* (2018) and *Open world empire: Race, erotics, and the global rise of video games* (2020).

**Richard Powell** is Professor at Nihon University in Tokyo, Japan, where he teaches business English and the sociolinguistics of human rights. In addition to linguistics, he has a background in history, Japanese studies and law, and political science, and he has published books, chapters, and articles on comparative legal culture, cross-cultural pragmatics, forensic linguistics, language planning, and legal education. He is particularly interested in South and Southeast Asia and recently authored *Language choice in postcolonial law* (2020). He is a director of the Japan Law and Language Association and the Book Review Editor of *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*.

**Tariq Rahman** has two doctoral degrees, PhD (1985) and DLitt (2014), from the University of Sheffield, UK. He was the first Pakistani to be honored by one of Germany's highest awards for academic research, the Humboldt Research Award. The President of Pakistan conferred upon him the Pride of Performance in 2004 and the Sitara-i-Imtiaz in 2013.

**Mario Saraceni** is a Reader in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Portsmouth, UK. He previously taught at Assumption University, in Bangkok, Thailand. His main academic interest is in the area of the ideologies, representations, and roles of English in the world. He published extensively in this field, and

his publications include *The relocation of English* (2010) and *World Englishes: A critical analysis* (2015, winner of the 2016 BAAL Book Prize). Mario is currently editing a three-volume series on world Englishes.

**Philip Seargeant** is Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the Open University. He is the author of several books, including *Exploring world Englishes* and *The idea of English in Japan*, and editor of, among other things, *English in the world*, *English in Japan in the era of globalization*, the *Handbook of English language studies*, and *The language of social media*.

**S. N. Sridhar** is SUNY Distinguished Service Professor and Professor of Linguistics and India Studies in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Stony Brook University, New York, USA. He has published widely on the descriptive grammar, morphology, and syntax of Kannada and Indian English; the pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and syntax of bilingual code-mixing; language contact, convergence, and spread; the uses of world Englishes in multilingual societies; and implications for theories of second language acquisition and teaching. He is the author of *Kannada: A descriptive grammar* and *Cognition and sentence production*, and co-editor of *Language and society in South Asia*. He is the current President of the International Association of World Englishes (IAWE).

**Peter Sundkvist** is Reader at Stockholm University, Sweden. He received his PhD in English linguistics from Stockholm University and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Yale University, USA. His research interests include dialectology, phonetics, and phonology relating to varieties of English and Germanic languages generally. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in the Shetland Islands and was Principal Investigator of a project on Shetland Scots funded by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. He has published on Asian Englishes, accent stereotypes, pulmonic ingressive speech, and co-authored the Routledge textbook *World Englishes* (3rd ed.).

**Ying-Ying Tan** is Associate Professor of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Besides writing on language planning and policy, she is also a socio-phonetician who has published on accents, prosody, and intelligibility. She works primarily on languages in Singapore. Her work has appeared in journals such as *English World-Wide*, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, and *World Englishes*.

**Y-Dang Troeung** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literatures at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She specializes in transnational Asian literatures, critical refugee studies, and global south studies. Her work has a specific focus on genealogies of colonialism, war, and militarism in Southeast Asia and its diasporas. She is currently completing a book manuscript on the afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia. Her published academic articles appear in the journals *Interventions*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Canadian Literature*, *MELUS*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Concentric*, *ARIEL*, and *Topia*.

**Wei Zhang**, PhD (Columbia University) is Professor of Linguistics in the English Department at Peking University, China. She has published internationally on topics including Chinese English, language and gender, and multilingual and digital literacy in journals such as *English Today*, *Discourse & Society*, *Journal of Language and Politics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, and *World Englishes*. In 2015, her monograph, *Assessing the digital literacy of college English students* (2013), received the Higher Education Outstanding Scientific Research Achievements Award from the Ministry of Education in China. She currently serves on the editorial boards of *Computers & Composition*, *Linguistic Research*, and *World Englishes*.



# 1 Asian Englishes Today

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KINGSLEY BOLTON, WERNER BOTHA,  
AND ANDY KIRKPATRICK

## Introduction

As is well known, from the 1980s onward, Braj B. Kachru proposed an approach to scholarship on English worldwide based on the “Three Circles” model, which included the Inner Circle (countries where English is the “first language” of a majority of the population, for example, the UK, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand); the Outer Circle (where English is regarded as a “second language,” for example, India or the Philippines); and the Expanding Circle (where English has typically had the status of a “foreign language,” for example, China or Japan). In this context, Kachru argued for a paradigm shift in English studies, which would recognize pluralism at the levels of both theory and application:

First, a paradigm shift in research, teaching, and application of sociolinguistic realities to the functions of English. Second, a shift from frameworks and theories which are essentially appropriate only to monolingual countries. It is indeed essential to recognise that world Englishes represent certain linguistic, cultural and pragmatic realities and pluralism, and that pluralism is now an integral part of world Englishes and literatures written in Englishes. The pluralism of English must be reflected in the approaches, both theoretical and applied, we adopt for understanding this unprecedented linguistic phenomenon. (Kachru, 1992, p. 11)

Kachru’s advocacy of a “socially realistic” approach to world Englishes (WE; 1992) enabled him to establish a rich theoretical framework for his WE research, which included such constructs as the “Three Circles of English”; “norms”; “variables of intelligibility”; “bilingual creativity”; “multi-canons”; and the “power and politics” of the English language. The recent publication of the *Collected works of B. B. Kachru* shows the breadth of his vision, which connected the WE enterprise to research

and scholarship on such issues as bilingualism, code-mixing, cultural contact, language policy, linguistic creativity, literary expression, multilingualism and multiculturalism, the politics of language, linguistic standards, and much else (Kachru, 2015). The effects of this paradigm shift in English studies have been felt across a range of language studies, including applied linguistics, descriptive linguistics, English language teaching, and sociolinguistics. Today, the world Englishes approach to English studies finds expression at the conferences of the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE), as well as through publications in such international journals as *Asian Englishes*, *English Today*, *English World-Wide*, and *World Englishes*. Courses on world Englishes are now part of the curriculum in many of the world's leading universities (which was not the case in the 1980s, when the WE project was first launched), and there is a strong case for asserting that world Englishes has now clearly established its own disciplinary credentials (Seargeant, 2012).

### **Braj Kachru and Asian Englishes**

For many reasons, Braj B. Kachru can be seen as the leading pioneer of the study of Asian Englishes, given his early engagement with this field at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This resulted in the completion of a PhD thesis entitled *An analysis of some features of Indian English: A study of linguistic method*, which was supervised at Edinburgh University by John C. Catford and Michael A. K. Halliday. Following the acceptance of his thesis, one of his first publications was an article in the journal *Word* on "The Indianness in Indian English." In this essay, Kachru quotes Rao on the bilingual creativity of Indian writers in English, where Rao asserted that "We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English [...] Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish and American" (Rao, 1938, pp. 9–10, cited in Kachru, 1965, p. 397). In the 1980s, Kachru went on to publish a number of book-length studies dealing with Indian English and Asian Englishes, including *The other tongue: English across cultures* (1982), *The Indianization of English: The English language in India* (1983), and *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non-native Englishes* (1986). Research on Asian Englishes also gained greater recognition from 1985 onward, when Braj Kachru and Larry Smith became co-editors of the journal *World Englishes*. Through such work, Braj Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Larry Smith played a major role in establishing Asian Englishes as an important field of study, not only through the WE journal, but also by encouraging many other Asian researchers in this field. Initially, his focus was very much concerned with the status, functions, and features of Indian English (Kachru, 1987, 1994), but by the late 1990s he also published a number of key articles discussing the spread of English throughout Asia in more comprehensive fashion.

Writing on the topic of "English as an Asian language," Kachru (1998) noted that, in recent decades, the total English-using population of Asia had grown

remarkably, and drew an important distinction between genetic versus functional nativeness. While the English language could not claim genetic nativeness in the Asian region, he asserted, there was, however, strong evidence that English had become functionally native in many Asian societies, as attested to by the diverse contexts – attitudinal, creative, formal, functional, historical, and sociocultural – in which English was used. More specifically, Kachru argued that “Asia’s English must be viewed in terms of that [functional] nativeness,” which includes uses of English (i) “across distinctive linguistic and cultural groups”; (ii) “as a medium for articulating local identities”; (iii) “as one of the pan-Asian languages of creativity”; (iv) as a language with “its own subvarieties indicating penetration at various levels”; and (v) as a language “that continues to elicit a unique love-hate relationship that, nevertheless, has not seriously impeded its spread, functions, and prestige” (Kachru, 1998, p. 103).

Kachru also makes the case for English as a “liberating language,” highlighting the importance of literary creativity, and the “multi canons” of English literature visible in the Asian context, so much so that:

The architects of each tradition, each strand, have moulded, reshaped, acculturated, redesigned, and – by doing so – enriched what was a Western medium. The result is a liberated English which contains vitality, innovation, linguistic mix, and cultural identity. And, it is not the creativity of the monolingual and the monocultural – this creativity has rejuvenated the medium from ‘exhaustion’ and has ‘liberated’ it in many ways. (Kachru, 1998, p. 106)

In a later book-length study, Kachru discussed the Asian experience of English in its full complexity, in the Hong Kong University Press volume on *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon* (2005). In this important publication, Kachru tackles a wide range of subtopics linked to the issue of the English language in the Asian region, and the volume has a total of 10 substantive chapters dealing with multiple aspects in this context. These include the description of Asian Englishes, South Asian Englishes, English in Japan (“The Japanese agony”), the Englishization of Asian languages, language policies, creativity and standards, English as a “killer language,” issues of pedagogy and identity, and the future prospects for English in Asia. Ultimately, in the Asian context, Kachru argues, one has to understand the centrality of the pluralism of English worldwide, which can be seen in the metalanguage of our discussion, so that:

[T]he appropriate modifier-noun relationship is *Asian Englishes*, not *Asian English*, and *world Englishes*, not *world English*, or *global English*, or *international English*. This contextually appropriate hybridization and adaptation has been the fate of most human languages, particularly those that have crossed their historical boundaries and were planted in other linguistic and cultural ecologies. The English language, as any other present or earlier transplanted language, is facing its ecological karma, and is woven into the nativized webs of language structure and its functional appropriateness. (Kachru, 2005, pp. 255–256, our emphasis)

## Asian Englishes today

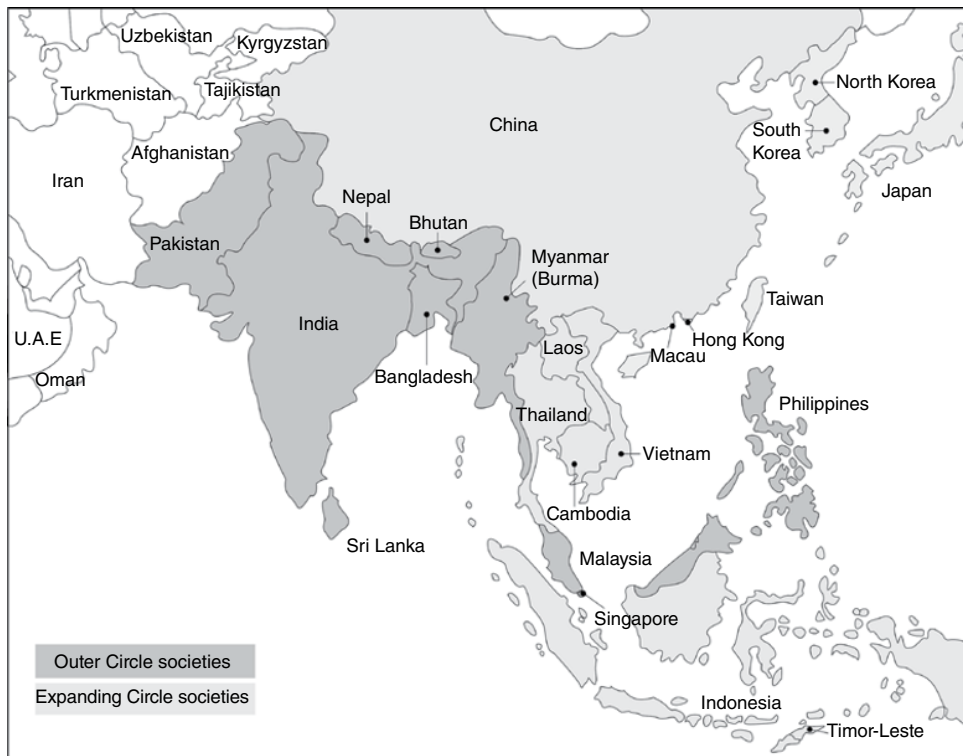
Since the 1980s, the study of English in the Asian region has developed and expanded, and linguists have been very active in describing the status, functions, and features of various Asian Englishes, including Indian English(es), Malaysian English, Singapore English, Brunei English, Hong Kong English, and Philippine English. At a linguistic level, much of the descriptive work of linguists has been concerned to identify and to highlight the distinctive features of individual varieties in terms of phonology (accent), lexis (vocabulary), and grammar (morphology and syntax), and today there is a considerable body of published research on the phonology, lexis, and grammars of Asian Englishes (Bolton, 2012). However, as indicated earlier, “areal” or “features-based” studies of Asian Englishes account for only part of the agenda. Many of the research articles in the field are concerned with such other topics as applied linguistics, bilingual creativity, code-switching and mixing, critical linguistics, discourse analysis, intelligibility, language attitudes, lexicography, linguistic landscapes, popular culture, sociolinguistics, and much else (Bolton & Davis, 2006; Bolton, 2017, 2018). In the case of Outer Circle Asian societies, it is notable that all of these are former colonies of Anglophone powers (either the UK or the US), and in many senses, these may be regarded as “postcolonial Englishes” (Schneider, 2007). At the same time, however, the spread of English in the Asian region in recent years – in both Outer and Expanding Circle contexts – has been shaped by a number of sociopolitical dynamics, including economic, educational, historical, social, and technological factors (Graddol, 2006). Interestingly, with reference to historical factors, Graddol also highlights the role of “modernity,” which typically involves the shift from village to town, from illiteracy to literacy and education, and to “modern life,” however defined. Indeed, in recent years, Asia has seen an astonishing growth of the middle classes in China, India, and elsewhere, together with growing urbanization and the emergence of the new Asian middle classes. In this context, English also plays a role, as Graddol has noted, given that “[t]he world is rapidly becoming more urban and more middle class – both of which are encouraging the adoption of English [...] an increasingly urban language, associated with growing middle classes, metropolitan workplaces and city lifestyles” (Graddol, 2006, p. 50).

With reference to a number of these factors, one is struck by the immense variation across the Asian region. Societies such as Hong Kong, Macau, and Singapore might be judged, in percentage terms, to be 100% urban, whereas, at the other end of the scale, urbanization is clearly much lower for societies such as Sri Lanka (18.5%), Nepal (19.4%), Cambodia (21.2%), India (33.5%), Vietnam (34.9%), and Myanmar (35.2%), based on the analyses of *The World Factbook* (2018) and *Worldometers* (2018). Similarly, there is a great variation in the wealth of societies across the Asian region, with Macau registering a gross domestic product (GDP) of around US\$114,400, Singapore US\$90,500, and Brunei US\$76,700, compared with the three poorest societies in the region, with a GDP per capita income of US\$4,000 for Cambodia, US\$2,700 for Nepal, and US\$1,700 for North Korea (*World Factbook*, 2018). A third and final point relates directly to languages, and the distinctively multilingual character of



many Asian societies. If we examine data from Ethnologue (2019), which is generally believed to be one of the most reliable sources for this type of information, one is impressed by the remarkable multilingualism of many Asian societies. Based on this data, we can see that eight of the societies in the region (Indonesia, India, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Nepal, Myanmar, and Vietnam) currently have more than 100 recognized languages; while 11 societies have between 15 and 83 languages (Brunei, Japan, East Timor, Bhutan, Singapore, Taiwan, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Pakistan, and Laos); and that only five societies have fewer than 10 languages (Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Macau, South Korea, and North Korea).

Given these and many other differences between individual Asian societies, it might be appreciated that the task of compiling a handbook detailing the spread of English and the status, functions, and features of Asian Englishes is one of considerable complexity, where, in the final analysis, one needs to give careful consideration to the particular linguistic ecologies and specific sociolinguistic realities of individual societies throughout the region. However, some generalizations may be useful, and in this context, we have drawn on Kachru's model of the Three Circles of English in order to organize our discussion throughout the volume. This model is illustrated by Figure 1.1. Here, however, it is important to note that, at least in a number of cases,



**Figure 1.1** Outer Circle and Expanding Circle societies in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

there is a somewhat blurred status between the category of Outer and Expanding Circle, as with the cases of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Nepal, which might all be regarded as societies where English has traditionally been a “foreign language” rather than “second language.” Our argument here, however, is that all three of these societies came under the influence of British colonialism in South Asia, and from this perspective, have had a long history of contact with English, and thus can be regarded as Outer Circle societies from an historical perspective.

Our use of the Three Circles model throughout the volume, however, does not imply that we would argue that all Outer Circle societies are overwhelmingly similar, or, conversely, that all Expanding Circle societies are all the same. Quite the opposite, given that what has become very obvious in compiling this volume is the striking differences between individual societies, where particular and often unique linguistic ecologies have determined the precise details of English acquisition and use within such societies. Nevertheless, we would argue, at least in moderate terms, that the Outer versus Expanding Circle distinction is broadly useful in distinguishing between these two broad types of jurisdictions, where English is acquired and used. At the same time, however, it should also be noted that our approach to Asian Englishes is not only restricted to a geographically based approach. Whereas Parts II and III of this Handbook are concerned with areal studies of Asian Englishes, grouped according to the Outer Circle versus Expanding Circle distinction, Parts I and IV of the Handbook are concerned with sociolinguistic issues that traverse the Asian region. With reference to the areal coverage of the volume, we must admit, from the outset, that we have not been able to cover all areas and regions of Asia, and obvious omissions include the ‘-stan’ countries of Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as such lesser-known contexts as Bhutan, Mongolia, Tibet, and Timor-Leste. Hopefully, some of these omissions will be remedied in later editions of the Handbook, but we would hope that the current volume succeeds at least in opening up some new areas for research among interested scholars in the field.

## *The Handbook of Asian Englishes*

The volume is divided into four main parts, and each section comprises thematically appropriate chapters relevant to each section. Part I contains chapters focusing on “the history and the development of Asian Englishes.” Part II includes chapters dealing with Englishes in Outer Circle Asian societies, and Part III deals with Englishes in Expanding Circle Asian societies. Finally, Part IV deals with “new frontiers of research,” with chapters on a wide range of topics of relevance to many English-using societies.

### *Part I: The History and Development Asian Englishes*

The eight chapters that make up Part I (chapters 2–9) discuss various aspects of the macro-sociolinguistic dynamics of English across the Asian region. Chapter 2 from

Coupe and Kratochvíl provides an historical account of the Asian linguistic landscape before the arrival of English (and other European languages), by describing the linguistic history of the region prior to the arrival of European traders and missionaries in the sixteenth century. Chapter 3 by Bolton and Bacon-Shone attempts to answer questions relating to the numbers of English speakers/users in the Asian region, as well as questions relating to the comparative proficiency levels of English language users from different Asian societies. Chapter 4 by Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat discusses the official language policies across the region, with particular reference to language and education. Chapter 5 by Low focuses on the status and teaching of English in primary and secondary schools across Asia. Chapter 6 from Bolton and Botha provides an overview of the use of English in Asian higher education, and the increasing spread of English-medium instruction (or EMI) throughout the region. In Chapter 7, Botha and Bernaisch adopt a functional-typological approach in describing the morphosyntactical features of Asian Englishes, with reference to both Outer and Expanding Circle varieties of the language. In Chapter 8, Gardiner and Deterding describe the phonological features of Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes in the region, while, finally in Part I, Chapter 9, by Lambert, discusses the lexicography of Asian Englishes with reference to the history of dictionaries covering Asian varieties of English.

## ***Part II: English in Outer Circle Asian Societies***

The selection of 11 chapters (10–20) that comprise the second section of this volume provide areal descriptions of English in the Outer Circle societies of the Asian region. Chapter 10 by S. N. Sridhar provides an account of the development of Indian English, while Chapter 11 from Rahman discusses the status and functions of English in Pakistan society. Chapter 12 by Hamid and Hasan discusses Bangladeshi English, followed by Chapter 13 from Giri on Nepali English, Chapter 14 by Ekanayaka on English in Sri Lanka, and Chapter 15 by Aye on English in Myanmar. Chapter 16 by Azirah discusses Malaysian English, while Chapter 17 by McLellan provides an overview of English in Brunei. Chapter 18 by Cavallaro, Ng, and Tan discusses standardized versus colloquial Englishes in the Singapore context, while Chapter 19 from Bolton, Bacon-Shone, and Luke discusses contemporary Hong Kong English. Finally in Part II, Chapter 20 from Martin provides an overview of the sociolinguistics of Philippine English in the context of a diverse multilingual society.

## ***Part III: English in Asia's Expanding Circle Societies***

The chapters in Part III comprise reports on 10 Asian Expanding Circle contexts, where we have clustered the chapters according to the categories of East (21–25) and Southeast Asia (26–30). Chapter 21 by Bolton, Botha, and Zhang discusses English in contemporary China, while Chapter 22 by Botha and Moody surveys the status and functions of English in Macau, and Chapter 23 by Kobayashi describes the use of English in contemporary Taiwan. Chapter 24 from Seargeant

reviews the role of English in Japan, and Chapter 25 by Lee considers the issue of English in Korea. Chapter 26 by Lauder surveys the status and functions of English in Indonesia, while Chapter 27 by Pechapan-Hammond deals with English in Thailand, followed by Chapter 28 from Moore and Bounchan on English in Cambodia, Chapter 29 by Achren and Kittiphanh on Laos, and Chapter 30 by Sundkvist and Nguyen on Vietnam.

### ***Part IV: New Frontiers of Research***

The final section of the volume comprises eight chapters (31–38) on various aspects of current research on English in the Asian region. Chapter 31 by Saraceni tackles the issue of globalization and Asian Englishes, while Chapter 32 from Kirkpatrick discusses English as a lingua franca in the Asian region. Chapter 33 from Mukherjee and Bernaisch deals with corpus linguistics and Asian Englishes, followed by Chapter 34 on English and popular culture by Moody, and a detailed and theoretically rich account of Asian literature in English by Lim, Patterson, Troeung, and Gui in Chapter 35. This is followed by Chapter 36 on English and Asian religions by Chew, Chapter 37 on English in Asian linguistic landscapes by Bolton, Botha, and Lee, and Chapter 38 on English in Asian legal systems by Powell.

## **Future directions in the study of Asian Englishes**

In many respects the spread of English across the Asian region over recent decades has been quite remarkable. One might have expected that with the end of British colonialism in South and Southeast Asia, there might have been a reaction against, and a rejection of the language of the former colonial power. However, as McArthur noted in a 2003 article on English in Asia, the language has spread rapidly in the region, partly because education systems in Asia have retained English-medium education and/or strengthened English language teaching programs, and partly because of the high level of demand for the language from Asian parents on behalf of their children. In addition, McArthur commented that “[i]n at least eleven South and South-East Asian territories (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Hong Kong), English may not be a mother tongue for more than a tiny minority, but it has long been the key ‘other tongue’ of millions” (McArthur, 2003, p. 21). After surveying the growing use of English in a number of other Asian societies, McArthur concluded that:

English is the lingua franca that Asians now share with one another and with the rest of the world. One should add however that this English is now also manifestly an Asian language in its own right. It has been thoroughly indigenised. One might consequently say that whereas the centre of gravity of English as a native language continues to be the North Atlantic (in insular Europe and continental North America), the centre of gravity of English as a second language or lingua franca is manifestly Asian (especially in the South and East). (McArthur, 2003, p. 22)

Some 15 years later, McArthur's predictions about the spread of English as an Asian language appear to have been justified. As many of the chapters in this Handbook testify, a command of the English language is now a sought-after skill in many societies throughout the Asian region, although it should also be acknowledged that the spread of the language has not been unproblematic, and in many Asian societies there are concerns about the impact of the language on public education systems as well as the wider ecology of languages within such communities.

In an even earlier article on the "agony and ecstasy" of world Englishes, Kachru (1996) commented on the "ecstasy" of the language operating on multiple dimensions, including the attitudinal, demographic, ideological, and societal, but also pointedly noted that:

Whatever reactions one might have toward the diffusion and uses of English, one must, however, admit that we now have a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic universal language. [...] This demographic distribution of English surpasses that of Latin in the medieval period, that of Sanskrit in what was traditional South Asia, and of Spanish, Arabic, and French. And now no competing languages are in the field – not French, and not artificial languages such as Esperanto. In other words, English continues to alter the linguistic behavior of people across the globe, and it is now the major instrument of initiating large-scale bilingualism around the world – being a bilingual now essentially means knowing English and using English as an additional language, as a language of wider communication, with one or more languages from one's region. (Kachru, 1996, p. 138)

Once again, Kachru's description of the global vitality of English is as true now as it was more than 20 years ago. Today, the forces propelling English worldwide have intensified not diminished if one considers the effects of the digital media, global connectivity, the Internet, popular culture, and so on, trends which were in their infancy in the mid-1990s.

The "agony" of English in Kachru's (1996) discussion was essentially concerned with its imperialist legacy, and concerns about the power and politics of the language. The emotional response to such agony was illustrated by a quotation from Ngũgĩ, who described the English language as a "cultural bomb," whose effect was "to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment," and "makes them want to identify with that which is farthest removed from themselves, for instance, with other people's languages, rather than their own" (Ngũgĩ, 1986, cited in Kachru, 1996, p. 144). For many critical linguists, the power of English worldwide is associated with the worst aspects of Anglo-American politics, neoliberalism, the threat of English to cultural and linguistic diversity, and the perceived inequality of languages and Englishes worldwide (Tupas, 2014).

One recurrent issue in this context is whether "globalization" is primarily a euphemism for "Americanization," given the economic and political power of the US. Globalization has also been a factor in the spread of particular forms of English in the Asian region in recent years. For example, in the BPO (business

process outsourcing) industries of India and the Philippines, there has often been a heavy emphasis on training call center agents to speak with an Americanized pronunciation, and the effects of American media and pop culture have been felt in almost all Asian societies. It is not clear that British English still serves as the major reference variety for former British colonies across Asia, given the current popularity of US media, and one might expect an increasing popularity of US-inflected (or at least US-influenced) Englishes in the coming years across all such societies. What does seem clear in this context, however, is that whatever the diverse forms Asian Englishes may take in future, the popularity of English is unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future. Various factors are at play here, related to both globalization and regionalization, given the adoption by ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) of English as its official language (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Another important dynamic in this context is the internationalization of global education and the growing popularity of EMI, particularly within higher education systems across Asia. The current trend toward EMI is visible at multiple levels of education, not least including higher education, where many of the regions' universities are promoting English-medium courses in order to increase their position in world university rankings. Research on the spread of EMI has implications not only for language in education, but also for many other issues as well, including code-mixing and code-switching in educational settings, the language practices of university students inside and outside the classroom, and the use of languages on the Internet for academic purposes as well as entertainment, global contact, and recreation (Bolton, 2019).

The chapters in this Handbook attempt to come to grips with both the agony and the ecstasy of Asian Englishes in the discussion of what are very often complex multilingual settings. Once again, however, it might be emphasized that the sociolinguistic realities of English in Asian societies differ greatly from one society to the next; whatever the similarities and differences that may be identified across the Asian region, the dynamics of Asian languages, and languages in contact, vary greatly from country to country. The academic interest in Asian Englishes has grown substantially over the past three decades, and it is sincerely hoped that this volume will serve as an important benchmark reference for future research on the Englishes of the region for many years to come.

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