

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Percillier. 2016. *World Englishes and Second Language Acquisition: Insights from Southeast Asian Englishes*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. xviii + 205 pp. EUR 95.00. ISBN 978-90-272-4918-0. doi:10.1075/veaw.g58

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Bridging the paradigm gap between World Englishes and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has been one of the issues most prominently discussed among World Englishes scholars in recent years. In his monograph, Michael Percillier therefore contributes to an important and topical research trend. What makes the contribution even more worthwhile is that the three corpus-based case studies on English as used in Singapore (SgE), Malaysia (MalE), and Indonesia (IndonE)¹ allow him to compare an interesting constellation of varieties. What these Englishes have in common is that at least segments of their speakers share Malay as a first language (L1), i.e. the contact scenario between English and L1 Malay is highly similar. What is more, the comparison comprises two varieties which have emerged as the products of British colonization (SgE and MalE) and a non-postcolonial type of English (IndonE).² Percillier's work thus offers valuable, highly relevant insights for the field of World Englishes research since, as the author himself states in the introduction, "[in] addition to providing insights into the differences between ESL [English as a second language] and EFL [English as a foreign language] forms of English, this type of analysis can shed light on the genesis of postcolonial varieties of English" especially when comparing "countries sharing a substrate language but which have different colonial backgrounds" (p. 1).

After introducing the aims and the structure of the study at hand (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 provides a brief but informative "Historical overview" of Southeast Asia in general, and Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia in particular, spanning the pre-colonial period to the present day, with a special focus on the colonial period and independence.

1. I use the abbreviation "X English" rather than "English in X" for all three varieties for reasons of economy and uniformity; I do not intend to imply anything about the status of these Englishes but use the labels as a neutral means of indication that English is spoken in the countries as an additional language.

2. Another such constellation can be found when comparing Cyprus and Greece (see Buschfeld *fc.*).

In Chapter 3, Percillier looks into language policies and the role and functions of “English in postcolonial Southeast Asia”. He outlines and compares the linguistic ecologies of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, with a special focus on the development of English and Malay. Subsequently, he offers a brief state of the art review of previous accounts of English in the three regions, focusing on the linguistic characteristics attested for the three varieties under investigation.

In Chapter 4, the author devotes his attention to the more theoretical aspects of his study, looking into “Theories and models for a comparative study of second-language varieties and learner Englishes”. He sketches the most prominent models currently used to classify World Englishes (the ENL-ESL-EFL distinction, Kachru’s Three Circles, and Schneider’s Dynamic Model), briefly discusses their strengths and weaknesses and rightly identifies the lack of an account capturing both ESL and EFL. Subsequently, he outlines some earlier attempts at bridging the paradigm gap between World Englishes and SLA research and establishes a potential theoretical and methodological framework for his own approach. However, his suggestion to treat EFL varieties as a hypothetical “stage 0” addition to Schneider’s (2007) Dynamic Model (p. 28) remains unclear. How can a form of English be at stage 0 if English has already been introduced to the country (which is true for all non-postcolonial countries even if to varying degrees)?

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological framework of the study. The author draws on existing corpus data, i.e. the National Institute of Education Corpus of Spoken Singapore English (Deterding and Low 2001) and the Grammar of Spoken Singapore English Corpus (Lim 2001; Lim and Foley 2004) for the Singapore part of the study, parts of the spoken component / dialogue / private / direct conversations component of ICE-Malaysia, as well as on his own spoken data collected for the Indonesian part of the study. Despite the high academic value of the data and the comparison at hand, it has to be noted that the overall data set is very heterogeneous (especially in terms of register) and not exactly balanced (especially in terms of ethnicity and speaker numbers). In addition, speaker age, a very important factor especially when looking into English as spoken in non-postcolonial contexts, is not taken into consideration at all. What is more, the phonological analysis is merely auditory even though some of the features described would certainly lend themselves to acoustic methods, primarily when dealing with vowel qualities and quantities.

Chapter 6 provides a very detailed and interesting overview and description of the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and discourse (including code-mixing and code-switching) features identified for the three varieties, and gives normalized and relative frequencies, comparing the varieties with each other. It offers a very elaborate account of realization options / variants within a variety but also across the varieties, and of similarities and differences between the three Englishes. The results are illustrated by a wealth of examples, comprehensively summarized

and compared in table format, and illustrated by means of bar charts and other graphs; to validate the findings of his study, Percillier conducted significance tests. A summarizing section gives an informative overview of major trends observed in the data. For example, the author shows how the range of different realizations of the same variable varies from one variety to another, with IndonE being the most heterogeneous system and SgE the variety which shows the lowest range of internal variation.

In Chapter 7, Percillier discusses the origins of the features he identifies in Chapter 6 as well as aspects of register variation, L1 influences, and learner proficiency. Again, he offers a very detailed discussion and documentation. He measures proficiency by years of learning English. However, this strategy does not appear to be a completely reliable approach – as the author himself concedes – as there are other, in fact more important factors that might influence the learning outcome and proficiency level of a speaker (e.g. the learner's motivation, type of learning / exposure to English such as immersive versus classroom based, etc.). In addition, the procedure of measuring and comparing proficiencies runs counter to the aim of bridging the paradigm gap between World Englishes and SLA research. Expecting higher overall proficiency levels for the ESL varieties may be an established but still questionable line of thinking.

In Chapter 8, Percillier outlines and discusses the “Implications for postcolonial Englishes and the ESL / EFL distinction” brought about by his investigation, especially with respect to the role of second language acquisition in the genesis and development of postcolonial Englishes, the ESL / EFL distinction, as well as postcolonial developments in his three case studies. The chapter offers some interesting considerations on what features are selected and precisely how they are selected. Percillier's general conclusions on the ESL / EFL distinction (see also Chapter 9), however – and the same is true for at least some parts of the theoretical and methodological framework the author employs and the questions he asks – are not entirely new and have already been repeatedly discussed (e.g. Laporte 2012; Buschfeld 2013; Edwards 2016). This does not render his work less valuable, but it would have been adequate to more explicitly place it within the theoretical and methodological framework of such earlier findings. When “Revisiting the ESL / EFL distinction” (Chapter 8.2), Percillier expects that a comparative analysis of the two ESL varieties and IndonE “can shed light on the accuracy of the ESL / EFL labels”, “by verifying to what extent the two ESL varieties are alike, and to what extent they differ from the learner variety” (p. 183). His investigation, however, yields a rather heterogeneous picture as it reveals contrary results for the different levels of linguistic description. He reports a relatively high similarity between SgE and MalE, especially on the syntactic level but also in terms of morphology, and a clear difference between the two ESL varieties and IndonE. This similarity,

however, does not hold for the domain of phonology, as the distinction between the ESLs and IndonE is much less prominent here: MalE shows the highest frequency of phonological features while IndonE is to be located between formal and informal SgE. Still, I would refrain from drawing too strong and static conclusions from these differences, especially the idea to uphold the ESL / EFL distinction on the basis of the grammatical differences between the ESL varieties and IndonE. When thinking about the status of a variety as either ESL or EFL, and likewise the differences between the two types, one should take into consideration a whole set of interacting linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. What the heterogeneity of the results reinforces from a more general perspective is precisely the idea that the distinction between ESL and EFL is a fuzzy one. When it comes to an interpretation of the different feature frequencies on the grammatical and phonological levels, an explanation from SLA theory might be helpful: for example, native-like proficiency is most difficult to achieve for pronunciation, which is why the frequency of transfer-induced phonological features is highest in all three varieties. This, in turn, once more shows that the SLA and World Englishes paradigms indeed should work more closely together. In addition to that, it is found that Indonesian learners might show greater homogeneity between those who speak Chinese as their L1 and those of L1 Malay origin (p. 188) than the same L1 groups in the ESL contexts. Percillier here offers two conceivable attempts at explanation, one demographic and the other sociolinguistic in nature. However, he does not take into account possible effects of formal schooling. Taking into consideration SLA theorizing here again, teachers may be more aware of certain structures of an L2 and differences between L1 and L2 than of others, and these are then taught more explicitly. Fine-grained phonological differences between L1 and L2, for example, are often even below the consciousness of language teachers and are very hard to cast off. Therefore, these differences are seldom taught at school and L1-influenced pronunciation may be part of the input the students receive from their teachers. It is therefore more likely that such “errors” are part of the students’ linguistic repertoires than characteristics of the students’ interlanguage repeatedly corrected by the teacher.

Chapter 9 offers a short conclusion in which the author summarizes and briefly discusses the main findings of his study.

From a formal perspective, the monograph is well-edited – with only very few minor slips of the pen. It offers a key for abbreviations, a detailed overview of maps, figures and tables, as well as a helpful subject index at the end of the book.

As regards content, the scientific value of the monograph cannot be denied. Especially the comparison of the three different Englishes, all sharing a similar L1 background, offers unprecedented insights, e.g. the finding that heterogeneity declines with the developmental stage of a system. IndonE systematically employs a wider range of realizations of a linguistic feature than MalE, which in turn is more

heterogeneous than SgE. This empirically corroborates earlier assumptions about linguistic nativization and how one could account for it in terms of systematicity of feature realization and use (e.g. Buschfeld 2013; Schneider 2007).

In general, the theoretical part of the monograph (Chapters 4 and 8) appears rather short (with 13 and 10 pages, respectively) and remains too superficial given the main title of the book, which promises a very strong and profound theoretical focus. In line with the above comments, some of Percillier's conclusions remain rather vague and the data's potential is not always fully exploited in all its explanatory power. A detailed account of the role proficiency plays in interaction with the speakers' age, the role of identity construction and the desire of the local population to express local identity by linguistic means, and some more detailed, more solidly grounded explanations from SLA theory would have added valuable details to the theoretical part of the study.

Furthermore, some categorizations and explanations appear too static and Percillier sometimes seems to be led by too strong a wish for clear-cut, ready-made explanations. For example, he characterizes SgE as an ESL variety and IndonE as learner English, obviously on the basis of the historical criterion of colonization, without really looking into sociolinguistic realities and their linguistic effects on an empirical basis (even though he himself notes that "[t]his historical distinction [...] may not necessarily reflect linguistic reality" [p. 183]). The same applies to the discussion of feature origins. It is certainly interesting and scientifically enlightening to look into whether substrate influence can be used as an explanation for the occurrence of a specific feature, though I do not see why it should be unsatisfactory (p. 131) that one often cannot precisely determine a given feature's origin when more than one explanation seems possible. Quite to the contrary, it seems safe to assume that in very many cases feature occurrence must be multicausal with several factors reinforcing the selection and use of a specific feature over others.

All in all, the monograph is a valuable contribution to the field of World Englishes. Even though the general findings are not all that new, the results clearly add highly relevant perspectives to the ongoing debate about the accuracy of the ESL / EFL distinction, clearly reinforcing the idea that such a dichotomy does not reflect current linguistic realities. Especially the comparison of the three different Englishes, all sharing a similar L1 background, is very interesting and offers unprecedented insights into the overall discussion of the relationship between ESL and EFL.

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