

Christiane Meierkord, Bebwa Isingoma and Saudah Namyalo. eds.
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Descriptions of national varieties of English have increased considerably in the last decade. Important to point out is not only this increase but also especially the encompassing perspectives adopted which depart significantly from the *deviation* explorations of the 1980s–1990s (see Kachru 1986; Quirk 1990; Bamgbose 1998), the *indigenisation* or *nativisation* perspectives of the 1990s–2000s (see Mufwene 2001; Kortmann et al. 2004; Schneider et al. 2004), or the strictly *postcolonialist* discourses of the 2000s and 2010s (see Schneider 2007). In the volume under review, a clear attempt is made at keeping pace with the state of the art, and successfully too when one looks at the inclusion of a paper on pragmatics (“Speech acts in Ugandan English social letters” by Christiane Meierkord) – a sub-discipline still hugely under-studied in African Englishes – and on intra-national varieties (“A social history of English(es) in Uganda” by Christiane Meierkord) and ethno-varieties (“Indian English in Uganda” by Claudia Rathore-Nigsch and Daniel Schreier) of Ugandan English (UgE) – a sign that the language has been adequately indigenised into its current ecology. Following this line of thinking, Bebwa Isingoma and Christiane Meierkord clearly state in the introduction that “this volume aims at describing the sociolinguistic structure and use of English in Uganda in its own right and from a strictly descriptive perspective that is largely rooted in variational linguistics and the World Englishes paradigm” (p. 2).

This edited volume consists of eleven papers grouped into four parts. The parts in themselves tell the story of English in Uganda: Part I lays out the context, ecology, and history of Uganda and how English fits into it. Part II goes a step further to outline the functions of English in contemporary multilingual Uganda. Part III, relying on these functions, identifies the linguistic features of UgE, while Part IV explores its instantiation at ethnolectal level within the Indian community in Uganda. I will now focus on each of the chapters and how they contribute to the evolution of UgE plotted out in the parts.

In the introduction, Bebwa Isingoma and Christiane Meierkord recount in brief the history of English in Uganda from the time it became a British Protectorate in 1900. Noting the paucity of linguistic research on the variety in the past, they

acknowledge that “[i]n more recent years, research activity in Uganda has developed fast at the country’s various universities, which are quickly catching up with international standards” (p. 3). This chapter also evaluates the applicability of various theories and models in world Englishes research to the complex linguistic ecology of Uganda. The discussion here is an *avant-goût* of the diverse theoretical perspectives used in the different papers collected in the volume.

Part I, entitled “Context”, is made up of two papers. The first by Saudah Namyalo, Bebwa Isingoma, and Christiane Meierkord describes the sociolinguistic situation of English in Uganda with special focus on language attitudes and beliefs. The detailed account of the relationship between English and other Ugandan languages, its status as official language, and its encroachment into domains formerly dominated by indigenous Ugandan languages is similar to accounts of the status of English in other former British colonies. This gives credit to theories and models that plot postcolonial communities on a continuum of similarity and evolution, for instance, Mufwene’s (2001) competition and selection hypothesis, Schneider’s (2007) dynamic model of postcolonial Englishes, and Anchimbe and Janney’s (2011) postcolonial pragmatics framework. The second paper in this part by Christiane Meierkord traces the social history of English(es) in Uganda, and has as overall objective to “contribute to the further refinement of models such as Kachru’s (1985) Three Circles model, Schneider’s (2007) Dynamic Model and Meierkord’s (2012) Interactions across Englishes model” (p. 53). The social history plotted out here includes contacts with British explorers, missionaries, the Imperial British East Africa Company, Protectorate personnel, European and Asian traders and settlers ranging from the 13th century to independence. Such a complex social history certainly proves challenging for theories and models in World Englishes. However, Meierkord’s model, the author says, is best suited for UgE.

Part II, “Functions of English in multilingual Uganda today”, comprises two papers. Judith Nakayiza examines attitudes towards, and beliefs about, English within the sociolinguistic set up of Uganda. Empowered as the official language, hence the *de facto* national language, English enjoys a higher social status than the indigenous languages, some of which are more widespread than English, and is often generally identified with upward social mobility “because of its perceived ability to fulfil a wide range of functions including facilitating the speaker to acquire a good job” (p. 92). The same could be said of other former British colonies. Moving the discussion further, Medadi E. Ssentanda investigates tensions between English and indigenous languages caused by the language-in-education policy which stipulates that the first few years of primary education be taught in a mother tongue and thereafter in English. This paper shows the difficulties faced by children during this transition to English especially in the rural areas where English is less spread.

Part III, “Features of Ugandan English”, focuses on the indigenisation of English in Uganda but adopts a differentional-contrastive approach similar to those of the 1990s which entails identifying “how UgE differs from the major standard varieties, British and American English [...] and from other L2 varieties of English” (p. 10). Such an approach somehow limits the freedom of investigating UgE “in its own right” stated as the aim of this volume (p. 2). With five papers, Part II is by far the largest part of the volume. In order to establish whether diphthongs in UgE are substrate influence from Luganda or the outcome of interaction across ethnic Englishes, Christiane Meierkord tracked the use of various diphthongs by speakers from three ethnic groups. Her findings contradict the generally claimed Luganda substrate influence and rather suggest that “UgE reveals characteristics of a learner language at the level of phonetics and phonology” (p. 143). In the following chapter, Bebwa Isingoma explores the types and processes of lexical borrowing and calques in UgE. Uganda’s indigenous languages, like in many other contexts of language transplantation, have contributed several words to UgE. But as opposed to many of these contexts, in Uganda, these “borrowings and calques [...] have a national character [because they] are routinely used in national fora (e.g. parliament) and national newspapers (i.e. newspapers written in English)” (p. 169). How substantial this claim could be when confronted with facts raised in this volume about the limited use of, and literacy in, English in Uganda, is open to question.

The chapter by Jude Ssemuuma, Bebwa Isingoma, and Christiane Meierkord takes on the use of progressive in UgE paying attention to the impact of substrate influence and other Englishes in Uganda. In order to accentuate this substrate influence, the authors describe the progressive in three major Ugandan languages: Luganda, Runyankole-Rukiga, and Acholi-Lango, also languages spoken by the three sets of informants who provided the oral data for the study. While variation exists among these L1 speakers in the use of progressives, the overall “finding seems to indicate substrate influence in UgE” (p. 195). At the level of syntax, Bebwa Isingoma carries out a contrastive study of the use of ditransitive constructions between UgE and Standard British and American Englishes. Using data from local newspapers, elicitation tests, and students and teachers of English in focus group discussions, the author discovers that “despite the strong waves of nativisation, which disprefers the DOC [double object construction] ordering of benefactive verbs, some of them have relically retained the DOC ordering in UgE” (p. 217). However, other uses of ditransive constructions have undergone indigenisation in line with other L2 varieties. The last paper in this part, written by Christiane Meierkord, is situated in pragmatics and studies requests, a directive speech act, in UgE social letters, collected from the ICE-Uganda component of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE). The data is analysed using Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989)

cross-cultural comparison of speech act realisation (CCSARP) model. The results show that “[c]ontrary to L1 varieties [in monocultural western societies], requests [in UgE social letters] are not realised as conventionally indirect interrogatives”. Reason for this, Meierkord explains, could be found in the local cultures and languages where “[d]irectness is considered appropriate and not impolite” (p. 245).

Part IV, “Ugandan English and beyond”, has only one paper. Here, Claudia Rathore-Nigsch and Daniel Schreier trace the sociolinguistic history of the Indian community in Uganda from pre-colonial times through colonial times to the post-independence period. Of salience in this history is the three dimensional linguistic contact between Indian and African languages and English. In spite of this contact, the authors explain that the Indian community maintained features of Indian English, possibly due to two factors: “the transmission of English via India-born teachers in predominantly Indian schools and the use of Kiswahili as a lingua franca with Africans” (p. 271). A further evolution of the variety was abruptly interrupted when Idi Amin, upon seizing power, expelled Indians from Uganda.

Overall, this volume succeeds in establishing that, in spite of certain specificities, the sociolinguistics, structure, status, uses, and evolution of UgE share profound similarities with other postcolonial Englishes not only in Africa but also in Asia and beyond. This statement holds true irrespective of the authors’ adamant separation of Uganda from the East African English category it has often been lumped into along with Kenya and Tanzania. By placing extensive focus on features of UgE and analysing them from an L1 versus L2 perspective, the volume replicates some binaries that such contrastive analyses often implicitly evoke. Nevertheless, through the inclusion of pragmatics and intra-variety variation in the discussion, the book adds an innovative and novel dimension that should be investigated in future research. For any student and scholar of World Englishes, this volume is a timely addition both as a hands-on companion on a national variety of English and an application of several contemporary theories and models designed with the multilingual nature of ex-colonial contexts in mind.

On a completely different note, as a speaker of an indigenised variety of English myself, this volume offers a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel in relation to their standardisation and acceptance in international academic and scholarly circles. By not editing out (using the almighty native speaker standards) some of the acrolectal UgE stylistic features of some of the contributions in this volume, the editors have given a “voice to UgE not only through describing it, but also by using it” (p. 12). This is highly commendable and moves the World Englishes paradigm several miles ahead.

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