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INTRODUCTION



Introduction to the special issue: multilingual and multicultural English education in Asia

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This special issue of *Asian Englishes* carries the theme ‘Multilingual and Multicultural English Education in Asia.’ In the development of ideas on languages and language learning, educational linguists have always promoted the benefits of embracing first languages in educational policies and practices. In the 1953 report of a meeting of language specialists in Paris, entitled ‘The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education,’ UNESCO (1953) declared that ‘it is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother language’ (p. 11). However, the report also recognizes that various forces that include political, sociocultural, economic, and even linguistic factors complicate the delivery of multilingual education. The result is the predominance of a monolingual mindset that constrains educational practices to one language, usually a prestige language such as English. This is the case in Asia, where English arrived as either a transplanted language brought by colonizers or a foreign language desired because of the perceived stature it bestows upon its speakers.

Of late, paradigms and mindsets have shifted to what we now know as the ‘multilingual turn,’ a term first used in two separate works in 2014 (May, 2014; Conteh & Meier, 2014). The multilingual turn is described by Meier 2017 as ‘a critical movement in education’ (Meier, 2017, p. 131) that may be associated with the following ideas: languages are resources for learning; languages afford status and power; language learners are diverse multilinguals; and learning is a multilingual social practice. The contributions in this special issue tackle these ideas.

This special issue presents works from the Philippines, Malaysia, and India – three Outer Circle Asian countries – as well as works from the Expanding Circle countries of Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Each article examines a different aspect of English language education, with a particular emphasis on the local or regional factors that influence language education practices and policies, all in the contexts of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The issue opens with Marianne Perfecto’s article entitled ‘Situated and Localised Learning: Examining the Case of two English Language Teachers in Multilingual Settings in the Philippines During the COVID–19 Pandemic.’ Perfecto explores the teaching practices of English language teachers in the Philippines during the COVID–19 pandemic,

analyzing the extent to which the teachers localized the teaching of English. The article discusses the teachers' use of local content and strategies, as well as their consideration of language accessibility for students. The implications for curriculum design and teacher development are also discussed.

Wei Keong Too's work on Malaysian English language teachers' perceptions of translanguaging argues for the adoption of a translanguaging lens in Malaysian English language classrooms. Too investigates the views and practices of English language teachers regarding the integration of students' home languages in language learning. The study proposes adopting translanguaging practices as scaffolding tools to assist in teaching and learning English.

Sagi Nathan exposes the existence of a 'multilingualism of unequals' in his analysis of the linguistic and educational vulnerabilities of Indian migrant school children. Nathan describes the neglect of the cultural and linguistic resources of these school children in educational policies in India. His article focuses on the educational marginalization and monolingualization of these children. He proposes an inclusive policy of 'education through English' to address the migrant children's needs and their socioeconomic advancement. The study advocates for an inclusive language policy alongside the rhetoric of 'education for all.'

Aiden Yeh's work on Taiwan focuses on the country's language policy and its role in the Bilingual Nation 2030 initiative, which aims to improve English language proficiency. Yeh analyzes the aims and measures of the policy, its impact on native languages, and its economic underpinnings. The study highlights the importance of considering the broader national development plan and the multicultural and multilingual landscape of Taiwan.

For English education in Japan, Peter Iori Kobayashi explores the controversies surrounding the Japanese government's policy to strengthen English education. In his article entitled 'From a Foreign Language to own Language: Resolving Conflicts Over English Education in Japan,' he discusses the arguments from proponents who emphasize the economic competitiveness of Japan and catching up with neighboring countries. He also exposes opposition from both the 'right' and 'left' sides of the political spectrum, with concerns about the impact on Japanese culture and accusations of neoliberal interests. Kobayashi suggests adopting a multilingual view of language to resolve conflicts related to the English education policy in Japan.

Nguyen Quang Tien, who examines high school English textbooks in Vietnam, presents how interculturalism and multiculturalism are reflected in these materials. Tien conducts a cultural content analysis to assess the inclusion of cultural knowledge and skills related to intercultural communicative competence. The findings highlight the presence of intercultural and multicultural elements in the textbooks, with suggestions for improving English language teaching materials in the context of interculturalism and multiculturalism.

Finally, for English language education in Indonesia, Didi Sukyadi investigates the use of the Indonesian language (L1) in English learning materials and how teachers perceive its incorporation. The article analyzes textbooks and modules, conducts interviews with authors, and collects data through a questionnaire distributed to English teachers. The findings reveal that L1 is used in the delivery approach of English learning materials, primarily in the front matter, and occasionally in the principal texts for introducing new meanings. The use of L1 aims to facilitate student

understanding and comply with government regulations. The authors and participants generally view the use of L1 in English learning materials as positive and helpful for students.

Clearly, these studies on multilingual and multicultural education in Asia have wide-ranging implications not only for educational policies and curriculum development, but also for inclusivity and connectivity in this multifaceted world. For one, Asia's linguistic diversity poses challenges to English language education. For example, issues about English-medium instruction, or the role of the first language in English language learning, plague many teachers and policy-makers in Asia. Research in this area will thus help us in Asia build our understanding of what strategies and policies may be implemented so that there is space for both the tasks of learning English and acknowledging and respecting the students' identities, first languages, and cultures.

Secondly, the global spread of English and its use in various domains such as business, science, technology, and even tourism has made proficiency in English important. Studies on multilingual and multicultural education are useful in developing effective pedagogical approaches to foster intercultural communication, and to create inclusive and culturally sensitive environments, thus paving the way for effective communication and international dialogue across cultures.

Finally, teachers, policy-makers, and decision-makers in Asia may also benefit from research on multilingual and multicultural education as this may provide insights to designing effective language policies and implementing inclusive educational practices that meet the diverse needs of multilingual students. In the same way, such research may shed light on the experiences of marginalized communities, such as immigrants, indigenous people, or ethnic minorities, and the educational challenges they face, especially in learning the English language. How might they be provided with equitable learning experiences? What research-driven interventions might be implemented so that these communities may be empowered, and social justice in education may be promoted?

All of these articles on multilingual and multicultural English education in Asia underlie the important works of the founder of *Asian Englishes*, Nobuyuki Honna, who recently passed away in October 2022. As a tribute to Honna sensei's valuable contributions to research on Englishes in Asia, this special issue culminates in a review of Honna's last book entitled *Introduction to Indian English for Japanese – Language, Culture and Customs*. Hiroko Miyake, in her review of this book, highlights Honna sensei's emphasis on 'familiarity' in intercultural communication in English, and quotes four excerpts that underscore the importance of familiarity with varieties of English. With familiarity, one is less likely to pay attention to the differences among the varieties of English. Honna sensei's last book shows the possibility of 'multilingual turn' in developing inclusivity in English language education. This book review is a fitting culmination to the collection of works in this special issue on multilingual and multicultural English education in Asia.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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