

Jerry Won Lee
University of Arizona

REVIEW ESSAY:
**CULTURALLY SUSTAINING
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION?**

*English as an International Language in Asia:
Implications for Language Education*
Edited by Andy Kirkpatrick and Roland Sussex
Springer, 2012. 243 pages.

Since the earlier work of Robert Phillipson, Alastair Pennycook and Arjuna Parakrama and others in the 1990s, English language teachers have been more mindful of what Pennycook has called the “cultural politics” of teaching English, particularly in global contexts. The teaching of English affords--in theory anyway--access to cultural, political and economic capital, but how can English be taught without threatening other languages and cultural practices and traditions? In a recent article, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” Django Paris argues for teaching practices that allow students to sustain “the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (95). *English as an International Language in Asia: Implications for Language Education*, edited by Andy Kirkpatrick and Roland Sussex, provides some of the historical and cultural context for the English language in Asia necessary to design and implement English language programs and teaching approaches that are “culturally sustaining.”

Lee, Jerry Won. “Culturally Sustaining English Language Education? Review of *English as an International Language in Asia*, edited by Andy Kirkpatrick and Roland Sussex.” *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 2:1 (2014): pp. 166-169. ISSN 2325-2871.

English as an International Language in Asia is a compilation of papers from the First Macao International Forum, held at the Macao Polytechnic Institute in December of 2010. The Forum, organized by Kirkpatrick and Sussex, was comprised of presentations by 12 scholars with expertise on English in the Asian context. The contributors, in addition to the editors, include Kingsley Bolton, Saran Kaur Gill, Fuad Abdul Hamied, Nobuyuki Hino, Andrew Moody, Joybrato Mukherjee, Duong Thị Hoàng Oanh, Alastair Pennycook, Zoya G. Proshina, and Wen Qiufang. Given the scholarly credentials and reputations of the contributors, readers will have quite high expectations of this book, and it does not disappoint.

The book is divided into five sections. The first section is comprised of an introductory paragraph by Kirkpatrick and Sussex, along with a chapter by Bolton on “World Englishes and Asian Englishes: A Survey of the Field.” What follows is a section on “Education” (four chapters), “Communication and Lingua Francas” (three chapters), “Languages and Cultures in Contact” (two chapters) and “Norms” (three chapters). Due to limitations of space, instead of providing summaries/critiques of all fourteen chapters, I will discuss select chapters that provide readers of *Critical Multilingualism Studies* with a representative sampling of what this collection has to offer.

In Chapter 3, “English as an International Language in Asia: Implications for Language Education,” Kirkpatrick addresses the increased need to learn English within the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) community. Despite the status of English as the working language of ASEAN, Kirkpatrick urges against the impulse to teach English at the expense of local languages. Further, as Kirkpatrick argues, “native speaker proficiency” should not be the target for English language education; instead it should strive to sustain local cultures and literary practices while recognizing the diversity and idiosyncrasies among “their fellow Asian multilingual users of English as a lingua franca” (40).

Chapter 7, “English as a Medium for Russians to Communicate in Russia,” provides an important lesson from the Russian context. As Proshina argues, English language teaching in Russia has traditionally neglected the imperative to learn Asian varieties of English, privileging instead British or US English norms. Given the increased contact between the people of Russia and those of Asia following the lifting of the Iron Curtain, the importance of learning Asian Englishes has increased for Russians. However, Proshina suggests that the

growing imperative to learn Asian Englishes is not unique to the Russian context and should also be considered in other countries as well.

In Chapter 11, “Negotiating Indigenous Values with Anglo-American Cultures in ELT in Japan: A Case of EIL Philosophy in the Expanding Circle,” Nobuyuki Hino further challenges the common assumption that English language varieties in Expanding Circle (countries in which English is used primarily as a “foreign,” rather than a “second” language; see Kachru, 1985) do not possess indigenized traits. Rather than imposing Anglo-English varieties upon students of the Expanding Circle, Hino argues for the “Japanization” of English language teaching, through the development of “methodologies, materials, and models” in order for students to be able to “express their own cultural values” both intranationally and internationally (170).

The final chapter, “A Postscript and a Prolegomenon,” Sussex and Kirkpatrick return to a point suggested in the very beginning of the book: the limitations of the very idea of English as a system-entity-edifice (“SEE”). As they remind us, rather than seeing English as a SEE, we need more work on identifying how conventions within English are disrupted and reconfigured by multilingual negotiations. In other words, Lingua Franca English (LFE), in practice, does not always abide by the rules of grammar; it is rather a continuously re-emergent means of communication (see Canagarajah, 2007). Nonetheless, Sussex and Kirkpatrick conclude by insisting that it’s not about teaching English as a system or about teaching the means to negotiate lingua franca communicative resources. In other words, it’s not an “either/or,” because moving forward, “successful communicators will have to acquire and skillfully exercise a number of capacities” (230).

My primary reservation has perhaps less to do with the book itself than with the continued need to draw on the geopolitical category of “Asia,” which is of course an ideological construct. Perhaps one could make the argument that one thing Asian people have in common is their strained and complicated relationship to English: people of Asian heritage, regardless of where they live, continue to have to earn the right to be considered a “native” speaker. Undoubtedly, Pennycook’s chapter, which reminds us that lingua franca communication is an “emergent collection of local language practices” (152) helps us to reconsider the effects of ideologies that shape our views on who we imagine to be the owners of a language.

For readers who are interested in developing a heightened awareness of English within the broad geopolitical context of Asia, along with the *implications* for English language teaching (as the title suggests), this collection will serve as an invaluable resource.