

REVIEWS

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Kingsley Bolton, *Chinese Englishes: a sociolinguistic history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xviii + 338. Hardback £45/\$70, ISBN 0 521 81163 5.

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According to some recent estimates, there are now more than 300 million speakers of English in China. If this figure is accurate, China now has a larger population of English speakers than any other country in the world. Estimates of this kind are, of course, open to interpretation. How frequently, in what situations, and to what degree of proficiency do Chinese people actually speak English? The majority, one would suspect, have learned English at school or privately as adults, but make very little use of it in their daily lives. To leave the matter there, however, would be to ignore the complexity of what it means to be a Chinese speaker of English for a significant minority of these 300 million individuals.

To give an idea of the degree of this complexity, highly competent Chinese speakers of English are now found in a variety of rural and urban regions of China, in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, and in numerous Chinese diaspora communities around the world. In addition, increasing numbers of Chinese, Hong Kong, Macanese, and Taiwanese citizens are travelling overseas for educational and political reasons. A significant number of these emigrants have made careers for themselves as English-language writers and the work of Chinese language authors is becoming increasingly well-known internationally through English-language translations. The exponential growth of English in mainland China and the rise to prominence of Chinese writing in English on European, North American, and Australasian bookshelves are essentially new phenomena. Nevertheless, there are records of Chinese speakers using English dating back almost three centuries and the first published work in English by a Chinese writer appeared at least a century ago. We might also take into account English-language work about China written by non-Chinese authors, which has a history of more than 400 years.

The pluralization in the title of Bolton's *Chinese Englishes* highlights the author's view that, just as there is no single 'English', there is also no single 'Chinese English' in either a synchronic or diachronic sense. Nor, according to Bolton, is Hong Kong English (the most thoroughly treated Chinese English in the book) separable in either of these senses from the phenomenon of English in Chinese contexts as a whole. To capture the complexity of this phenomenon in all its contemporary breadth and historical depth would perhaps require an encyclopaedic scope that Bolton does not aim at. His major thesis, that Hong Kong English has 'a forgotten past' that connects it to the larger reality of contemporary Chinese Englishes, is, however, convincingly argued and supported by a wealth of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and historical data.

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 reviews the literature on the global dimensions of English and establishes the author's theoretical identification with Kachru's 'World Englishes' thesis. Chapter 2 discusses the late colonial history of English in Hong Kong, taking the reader roughly from 1980 up to the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Chapter 3 pushes the historical aspect of the inquiry back further, through an exploration of the roots of Hong Kong English in contacts between English and Chinese in southern China from the early seventeenth century onwards. Chapter 4 offers a closer examination of the formal and pragmatic features of Hong Kong English, and chapter 5 concludes the book with a brief discussion of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of English in mainland Chinese contexts. The chronology of the book reflects Bolton's view that his third chapter represents an 'archaeology' of a forgotten past. Each of the chapters is, however, relatively self-contained and readers who prefer their histories to begin at the beginning are unlikely to suffer unduly by reading chapter 3 before chapter 2.

Bolton's major thesis is first developed through a review of the now extensive body of literature dealing with English as a global phenomenon. His review clearly demonstrates that this literature is both heterogeneous and multidisciplinary, with contributions from the fields of English studies, English corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, pidgin and creole studies, applied linguistics and lexicography. Bolton also discusses the contributions of 'popularizers' such as David Crystal, 'critics' such as Robert Phillipson, and 'futurologists' such as David Graddol. The work of significant authors is reviewed biographically under each of these headings and is conveniently tabulated on pages 46–7 of the book. Adopting a largely historical approach to the discussion of this work, he argues cogently that there has been a significant shift away from the description of the formal linguistic features of localized 'varieties of English' around the world towards a more intense discussion of the political and moral implications of English as a global phenomenon, partly in response to Phillipson's critique of the globalization of English as a form of linguistic imperialism. In the context of this shift, Bolton aligns himself with Kachru's view of 'World Englishes' as a complex multidimensional construct involving pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and literary dimensions, avoiding the simplistic view that each English-using region has its own distinctive 'English' belonging to its inhabitants and describable in terms of formal linguistic variation.

A second theme developed in the literature review concerns the assumption that the phenomenon of World Englishes is essentially 'new'. From the outset, Bolton takes issue with the term 'New Englishes', which was used during the 1980s to describe African, Asian, and Caribbean Englishes, now identified with Kachru's 'outer' and 'expanding' circles of English. The implication of this term, which derived from the use of the term 'New World' to describe the former colonial territories of the Americas and Australasia, was perhaps that these varieties of English were not as new as they seemed to be. Nevertheless, Bolton is in my view substantially correct in pointing to a prevalent assumption that the Englishes of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean emerged *sui generis* from processes of decolonization, or at least that they were disconnected

from any prior history of English in the regions to which they belonged. In this context, the observation that Phillipson's critique has encouraged investigation of the historical dimensions of 'new' varieties of English is an interesting one.

In the context of Hong Kong, the implication of the assumption of 'newness' is that Hong Kong English has largely been viewed as a product of decolonization and of associated processes of identity formation among the Chinese population of the colony between 1980 and 1997. As Bolton shows in his discussion of this period, Hong Kong English has largely been seen as an exponent of new localized identities, in which a sense of cultural separateness from both China and the United Kingdom is at issue. Many doubt that Hong Kong English really exists, however, suggesting that in contrast to, for example, Singapore English, it is little more than the sum of regular patterns of non-native linguistic 'error'. In the course of chapter 2 (and later in chapter 4) Bolton marshals a good deal of evidence to counter this view. But at the same time, the reader may be left with the impression that the debate on whether Hong Kong English does or does not exist has become somewhat sterile. Although Bolton has been one of the major contributors to this debate, it is clear that he now takes the view that the terms of the debate are limited by the perspectives of earlier periods of scholarship and that the more important issues now revolve around the multiple uses of English in Hong Kong and the ways in which they are interwoven with the history of English in southern China from the early seventeenth century onwards.

Chapter 3, which deals with the history of English in China from 1637 to 1949, is in many ways the most interesting in the book. Building his history around key documentary sources, Bolton succeeds in conveying a sense that we are, in fact, faced with a history, rather than a series of unconnected textual events. The history begins with the earliest contacts between English and Chinese, represented by Peter Mundy's 1637 account of the first English voyage to reach Macao and Canton, and proceeds with similar accounts from the eighteenth-century sources. Bolton then documents nineteenth-century descriptions and glossaries of 'pidgin' English, the lingua franca of the 'linguists', or interpreters, who mediated between Chinese and foreign traders at Macao and Canton, which was typically acquired by foreigners on arrival. Although the name 'pidgin' was not used until the mid-nineteenth century, attestations of its use go back to the early eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century, it appears that the use of pidgin was restricted to a small number of professional interpreters who spoke Chinese but were often of non-Chinese origin. By the middle of the nineteenth century, pidgin was evidently used by a much wider range of individuals including Chinese employees and servants of foreign trading houses and shopkeepers of various kinds. By the early twentieth century, it appears to have spread even further and there are reports of its use among Chinese who spoke mutually incomprehensible dialects of Chinese, notably among officers in the Republican armed forces. English language schools were established as early as the 1840s in Hong Kong, however, leading to the development of an English-speaking class who were often contemptuous of pidgin.

One of the strengths of Bolton's treatment of this period lies in the way that he carefully compares and evaluates the extant sources on pidgin in China. Especially

useful is his discussion of two Chinese-language texts designed to teach English: the 'Redhaired Glossary' of c. 1835 and the 'Chinese and English Instructor' of 1862. Although these texts have been described elsewhere by pidgin scholars, Bolton is the first to place them side by side in the context of a broader history of English in China. The 'Chinese and English Instructor', which is described as the major source on Chinese pidgin English, is of particular interest because it includes for certain words separate English and pidgin pronunciations, presumably in order to help learners of the former to avoid the latter. On the basis of the somewhat scanty, and almost entirely second-hand, evidence available to us, however, it is difficult to judge how stable Chinese pidgin English was over the course of its history of 200 years or more. The term 'pidgin English' came into use around the middle of the eighteenth century and we may question whether it applies in the same way to the lingua franca of the eighteenth century and to the broader efforts of Chinese speakers to use English in the early twentieth century. What Bolton makes clear is that there are certainly common elements in early pidgin and twentieth-century Chinese Englishes, but that the latter developed primarily through English-language education over a relatively long period in which they overlapped with and ultimately replaced pidgin.

In chapter 4, Bolton returns to modern times with a discussion of the status, functions, and features of English in present-day Hong Kong. Readers who expect to discover that the importance of English has declined in Hong Kong since the resumption of sovereignty will perhaps be surprised by this chapter, which reveals not only a persistent concern with 'standards' of English, but also new dimensions of creativity involving the English language. There has for example been a remarkable growth in literary writing in English over the past decade and Bolton provides an especially interesting extract from an online chat session between two university students which reveals a fascinating combination of generic and localized features.

The final chapter of the book deals briefly, and rather tantalizingly, in view of the detailed discussion of historical issues in the formation of Hong Kong English, with the history of English in China. Bolton begins this history with the establishment of English missionary schools in Hong Kong, from which a number of graduates went on to occupy high office in China. He then describes how similar schools and colleges were set up in the main cities of China and how, in the work of writers such as Lin Yutang, ideologies of republicanism, modernism, and anti-imperialism were often tied up with knowledge and use of English. It is primarily within the complex roles of English in the formation of China's pre-1949 'colonial modernity', Bolton suggests, that links between Hong Kong English and other Chinese Englishes are to be found. The chapter also discusses the suppression of English during the period from 1949 up to the later years of the Cultural Revolution and its resurgence in recent years, which is primarily dealt with through a discussion of Li Yang's 'Crazy English' movement.

The focus of the book as a whole falls upon the English of southern China, justifiably so in view of Bolton's aim of recovering the 'forgotten history' of Hong Kong English. In recovering this aspect of the history of Chinese Englishes, however, it also opens a number of questions about other aspects of that history that stand in need of deeper

investigation. The choice of 1637 as the historical starting point for English in China, for example, raises questions about the role of earlier English-language texts concerned with China. Mundy's 1637 text is selected because it is the earliest known text to be written originally in English by a writer who had actually set foot in China. Mundy's account was not published in its own era, however, and it was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that a substantial body of English writing on China began to emerge. Bolton focuses on travellers' accounts of Canton largely because they furnish evidence of the use of English *in* China. But as Bolton notes, Mundy's journal was preceded by a number of works by European authors, notably Mendoza's *History of the Great and Mighty China*, which was printed in Spanish in 1585 and in English translation in 1588. More importantly, by the turn of the nineteenth century a considerable number of scholarly European works on China had been translated into English and it seems likely that it was largely through this body of translation that the English language acquired a lexicon for the description of China and 'things Chinese'.

A second aspect of the textual history of English in China that deserves deeper investigation is the body of English-language translations of classical Chinese literature produced by European sinologists in the late nineteenth century, which established words such as 'face' and 'filial piety' as quintessentially 'Chinese'. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the phenomenon of Chinese Englishes, however, is the sheer quantity of published scholarly and creative work on China produced by twentieth-century Chinese authors writing in English. In order to understand the language of this work, we need to know far more about the ways in which western writers have appropriated Chinese concepts and words in their writings on China and the ways in which Chinese English-language writers have reappropriated this work in the twentieth century.

Bolton's *Chinese Englishes* presents us with a detailed and insightful account of English in Hong Kong and southern China from linguistic, sociolinguistic, and historical perspectives. In this respect, it is a unique contribution to the literature on World Englishes, which has so far largely ignored the historical dimensions of varieties of English around the world. It is clearly a book that anyone interested in this area of research should own, not least because it is likely to become the standard source of reference for future research on the English of China. At the same time, it should be of considerable interest to others in the field of World Englishes for the comprehensive and radically historical approach that it takes to its subject matter.

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