

Accounting for emerging features of Asian Englishes on three levels of scale

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Abstract

Asian Englishes constitute an established set of language varieties (cf. Bolton, Botha & Kirkpatrick 2020), with distinctive, often innovative structural properties of their own, either specific to select regions or localities or shared more widely (cf. Mesthrie 2013, or the electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English project; ewave-atlas.org). An obvious core question for linguistics is how to explain the origin of such emerging features. The frameworks for such investigations have been offered by decades of insightful research on language change and language contact. Studies of language change have tended to focus on the impact of internal versus external, and more recently also cognitive, causative factors (most comprehensively in Labov 1994-2010). Structural features of Asian Englishes have often successfully been shown to derive from contact effects from indigenous languages (e.g. Bao 2015).

In this presentation I highlight three lesser-known structural features of specific Asian Englishes, and I propose a novel explanatory perspective (supplementing existing and established theories of change and contact, and not mutually exclusive) based on the notion of levels of scale, i.e. how proximal and simple as opposed to generic and fundamental an account operates. The three sample structures and explanatory approaches are as follows:

(1) Predicative *as*, found mainly in Indian English (e.g. *The Temple is called as Rang Mahal*), is accounted for by immediate "local adjacency", the copying of a behavioral pattern across semantically similar words.

(2) The complementation of *look forward to* by a plain infinitive rather than a verbal *-ing* form (*I look forward to meet you*), documented to have spread in India and elsewhere, is argued to result from broader "systemic parallelism", a cognitive transfer of system-internal relations from one context to another.

(3) Completive *finish* (as in *I eat finish*), for which I present evidence from a study of Singapore child language and a new analysis of the "Corpus of Singaporean English Messages", is related to the notion of "fundamental evolution", showing basic properties typical of Complex Dynamic Systems (which I argue varieties of English to be components of; Schneider 2025).

In each case I describe and exemplify the pattern, present facts, earlier findings, and pertinent observations, and expound the respective explanatory account.

References

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Keywords

Asian Englishes; language change; language contact; structural innovation; Complex Dynamic Systems