

Foreword

It is both ironic and relevant that I am reading this monograph while travelling within China. And as I write this foreword, I am in the former Chinese capital of Nanjing, having spent the previous week in the current capital of Beijing. As the high-speed bullet train whisks me from one city to the next, announcements over the system are bilingual, first in Mandarin and then English. At my hotels – the Holiday Inn and Sheraton, respectively – I surf my television channels for the news. For much of the time, I toggle between BBC and CNN, noticing the news anchors speak in either British or American accents, even though both news outlets have foreign correspondents who report in an Indian English, Filipino English accent, among other things. Within each city, I commute on the modern subway system. Again, announcements are made in both Mandarin and English as the train approaches each station; the English announcements, I observe, have been Anglicized, perhaps in order to allow the non-Chinese speaking commuter to match the pronunciation with the Pinyin version of the stop on the subway map found on the wall.

Accents matter, I am reminded. And this reminder is stark when I notice the huge Disney English poster at the mall where I have my lunch. On the poster is a white male teacher looking caringly at his young Chinese student. Which accent is being taught at the Disney English school on the seventh floor of this mall? I assume that it is an American accent that is used for instruction. The image on the poster literally indexes whiteness and conjures a widely circulated belief of who constitutes an educated speaker of English. The accent is thus the icing on the cake, but, as we all know, how a cake is iced will determine the level of buyer interest. Within the context of this book, which is based on the Global Englishes (GE) paradigm, Fan (Gabriel) Fang alerts us to how the object of purchase, English, is taken up by Chinese university students and teachers as he explores their perceptions of their own English accents and that of ours.

Invoking second language acquisition (SLA) constructs of attitude, motivation and identity and applying them to a GE framework, Fang attempts to bring together the two subfields of SLA and GE, much in keeping with recent work by other applied linguists such as De Costa and Crowther (2018), who have examined ways to bridge the gap between these subfields. Importantly, he explores this gap against the evolving linguistic backdrop of China. Commenting on this

context, Fang notes in Chapter 3, ‘The situation of English in China is complex and is not simply a linguistic debate; instead, it is more embedded in the socio-cultural, socio-political and ideological differences between the English language and Chinese culture and identity.’ Thus, language use (a focus of GE scholars) and language learning (a focus of SLA scholars) take on a socio-political and ideological dimension, and the reader is presented with the ideological tensions experienced by Fang’s study participants. These tensions exist as a result of the complex identity negotiations in which his participants engage. Both the students and teachers in his mixed methods study appear to have a love–hate relationship with their own accents – while they continue to aspire towards native English accents themselves, they also seem to have a growing acceptance of other accents, as result of contact different varieties of English. Herein lies the conundrum as native accents are equated with international intelligibility and local accents discounted.

Given the complexities surrounding accent perception and his participants’ enduring embrace of a standard English ideology (De Costa, 2010), Fang’s book highlights the growing need to examine the intersection between identity and ideology (De Costa, 2016) as individuals shuttle between seeing themselves as users and learners of English. The Teaching Pronunciation for Intercultural Communication (ToPIC) approach, which is based on a GE-oriented framework that promotes interculturally responsive language pedagogy (IRLP), proposes (1) revisiting teaching contexts, models and norms; (2) raising teachers’ and students’ language awareness; and (3) reinforcing accent exposure and fostering communication strategy. Of the three proposals, the third highlights the need for a practice-based approach that promotes linguistic and cultural accommodation. In that respect, pedagogically, this approach aligns with recent innovations espoused by critical applied linguists who support culturally responsive (Paris & Alim, 2016) and translanguaging (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2016) pedagogies that honour the resources that students bring with them to the classroom. It would have been nice, however, to have seen a greater discussion of how accent perception is in fact coloured by race (Rosa, 2019) and the ways in which neoliberalism and coloniality (Tupas, *in press*) influence how and why some accents are ratified and others denigrated. These discussions are perhaps topics for different books in this book series by Routledge.

Like its sibling subfields of TESOL, SLA and Bilingual Education (May, 2014), GE needs to acknowledge the multilingual turn in applied linguistics. The days of strong English linguistic assimilation are fast becoming outnumbered, but we also need to be aware that old habits die hard – many learners and users of English outside the core English countries continue to cling onto native English accents as models. And even though political phenomena such as Brexit threaten to undermine the status of English and the geopolitical retreat of the United States on the world stage has ostensibly begun, the allure of the native English model continues to be strong. The ToPIC approach discussed in Fang’s book is one way to break away from a postcolonial mentality, and learners and users in China appear to be well positioned for this change. As Pan and Seargeant (2012) note, Chinese learners do not see English as a threat to their Chinese identity. By the same token,

such learners should not view a Chinese accent as impeding their ability to establish themselves as global citizens. I remain confident that with the emergence of progressive and culturally sensitive teaching approaches such as ToPIC recommended by Fang, new inroads can be made into developing a wider appreciation of different English accents. And my faith is buoyed by what I see on Chinese television as I click on my remote in my Beijing and Nanjing hotel room. The English delivery of news by non-centre agencies such as CCTV (China) and ChannelNewsAsia (Singapore) in non-native English accents offers hope in this regard.

Peter I. De Costa
Michigan State University
June 2019, China

References

- De Costa, P.I. (2010). Language ideologies and standard English language policy in Singapore: Responses of a 'designer immigrant' student. *Language Policy*, 9(3), 217–239.
- De Costa, P.I. (2016). *The power of identity and ideology in language learning: Designer immigrants learning English in Singapore*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- De Costa, P.I., & Crowther, D. (2018). Second language acquisition and World Englishes: Dialogue and engagement. *World Englishes*, 37(1), 19–33.
- García, O., Johnson, S.I., & Seltzer, K. (2016). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon.
- May, S. (ed.) (2013). *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education*. New York: Routledge.
- Pan, L., & Seargeant, P. (2012). Is English a threat to Chinese language and culture? *English Today*, 28(3), 60–66.
- Paris, D., & Alim, S. (eds) (2016). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Rosa, J. (2019). *Looking like a language, sounding like a race: Raciolinguistic ideologies and the learning of Latinidad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tupas, R. (in press). The coloniality of neoliberal education and language learning. *Multilingua*.

Re-Positioning Accent Attitude in the Global Englishes Paradigm

A Critical Phenomenological Case Study in
the Chinese Context

Fan (Gabriel) Fang