Unequal Englishes

Also by Ruanni Tupas

LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND NATION-BUILDING

Assimilation and Shift in Southeast Asia (*co-edited*)

(RE)MAKING SOCIETY

The Politics of Language, Discourse and Identity in the Philippines (*sole-edited*)

Unequal Englishes

The Politics of Englishes Today

Edited by

Ruanni Tupas

National Institute of Education, Singapore

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*FOR MILD, RUSH, RAM, AND RAIN—my inspiration,
my real world*

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Foreword

At last a book that grasps the *thuththiri*¹ of our unequally globalized Englishes problem without being defensive or apologizing for itself! I'm proud to be associated, even in so small a way, with this radical academic-interventionist enterprise that examines a wide range of key issues and implications surrounding the systemic and extra-systemic inequalities enforced against non-dominant Englishes. All credit to Ruanni Tupas who has succeeded in bringing together a remarkably diverse yet cohesive set of studies, which take as their starting point the unequal exchange between linguistic centers and peripheries.

More importantly, perhaps, the scholarship here not only documents such 'inequality', it also identifies and demonstrates local resistance to the various inter-connected strands of dominance and hegemony that non-elite users must face—locally, sub-nationally, nationally, regionally, internationally, globally—every day, whether in China, Cuba, Hawai'i, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, or elsewhere. Moreover, pre-empting the inevitable quasi-scholarly attempts at ghettoization that these are *merely* empirical and/or 'special cases' of no more than nuisance value, broader conceptual studies complement these filigreed accounts from the ground.

The conceptual problems created by over a century of colonialist and neo-colonialist 'scholarship' in Applied Linguistics, whose not-so-hidden agendas are given great license even today in ESL 'studies', are so pervasive and entrenched that counter-hegemonic analyses such as these are forced to re-present the ubiquitous as exceptions. Hence, though we all know that every linguistic context is multilingual, and all spaces are unequal, in order to be heard we must present ourselves as speaking to non-typical and fundamentally non-normative *case studies*.

Elsewhere, I diffidently propose the notion of 'extra-linguistic value' attached to [White] English (and other contextually dominant languages/varieties) as a means of explaining the hegemony it enjoys, as well as to understand as (hidden) resistance the plethora of persistent 'errors' and 'deviations' that characterize non-elite use. The attempt is to theorize a more inclusive yet nuanced (anti-)paradigm than the

binary between 'individual' and 'community' language use (and, of course, national/international/global vs. local/specific) which Ives so brilliantly unravels here.

The 'local' neither replaces nor reinvents (nor even seriously questions) the 'global', but is appropriated within it in the most troubling ways. Thus, celebrating our special difference is one way of validating (by default and non-contestation) the old hegemonies in language. Yet, we must, in the grossly unequal spaces we occupy, establish (over and over again) that the 'local' is even worthy of study, and that we're not doing this only because we happen to belong there.

For my own work, even 'local' has become too broad a category, and it is in sub-local (anti-)language use and abuse that I am beginning to recognize complex resistance as a form of subaltern agency which is viable only when misrecognized as imitation gone wrong. Subalternity that is characterized as the prevalence of 'dominance without hegemony' has become for me the space where 'dominance is (deliberately) misrepresented as hegemony' by recalcitrant users. This insight has been reinforced for me by the essays in this book that demonstrate the subtlety and suppleness with which ordinary bi/multi-lingual users of English stake and re-stake their claims in defiance of real-world consequences, and by the essays that advocate the fundamental questioning of cherished first-worldist paradigms in favor of a more inclusive understanding that has greater explanatory power.

The first part of the challenge is, therefore, to continue to demonstrate that there is radical difference alive and well in the interstices of the everyday *outside* of the mainstream (whether this be locational, classed, historical, ethnicized, gendered, age-based, or more likely in combinations of these demographics). It seems that only then will we be taken seriously when we argue that the same problematic obtains *inside* the mothership(s) of English. Ours are not special cases, but better gauges of how language works as a site of the heterogeneous struggles of class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, region/location, sexual orientation etc., because such struggles take place before our eyes and ears now, refusing to be covered over as in the past.²

This larger battle remains unwaged as yet, but it is worth reminding ourselves that the opposition to even such localized critique is that *they*/we know what's ultimately at stake here.

Arjuna Parakrama
Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Notes

1. If you as reader are unfamiliar with this term and this worries you, please look it up, check it out, research it, spend time discovering what it is, feeling just a little annoyed (and I hope abashed too), just as you would when looking up an obscure Old English word or an unfamiliar White-English expression. When we are able to treat all such words as equal, irrespective of their origin, then we have begun travelling the impossible road to addressing linguistic inequality.
2. I use the phrase 'fast-forward change, but which takes place in slow-motion' to attempt to capture the paradox where hitherto long-drawn out changes in/of language are accelerated through (post)colonial language-contact, but at the same time since different stakeholders are more articulate than before, these changes are also tangibly contested at each stage. Thus, the gradual transformations that took place in England over a 500-year period can be seen to take place in post-colonial Englishes in 50 years, and hidden struggles that we can only speculate upon in the former case are fought out in public in the former colonies!

Acknowledgments

Figure 8.1—Bus stop 200' makai. Reproduced with permission of Toshiaki Furukawa

Figure 8.3—Keiki menu. Reproduced with permission of Bill Tobin

Figure 8.4—Sterile puka sheet. Reproduced with permission of Marissa Hanada

Figure 8.6—No get my back, no get my vote. Reproduced with permission of Fellen Kelemente

We thank Gujarat State Board of Textbooks for the use of pages from English textbooks used in Gujarati-medium classes.

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