

Xu, Zhichang, Deyuan He, and David Deterding, editors. *Researching Chinese English: The State of the Art*. Springer International Publishing AG, 2017. 282 pages.

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As globalisation has spread and become prevalent in the world so has English established itself as the bearer of knowledge which has been included in the teaching curriculum of many, if not all, countries. Such is the case of China, where English is viewed nowadays as an instrument to achieve professional goals and its teaching and learning has been endlessly promoted. Thus, researching Chinese English, defining it and establishing it has been the focus of scholars in the past decades. As its title well indicates, the volume *Researching Chinese English: The State of the Art* presents a detailed portrait of the status of the current research on Chinese English as well as its future.

The volume comprises a preface and seventeen articles whose underlying theme is the situation of Chinese English (henceforth CE) in China. The preface presents the readers with a brief summary of the current concerns in CE research, its status in the country and its use in education and the media. In the first introductory article, the editors give a detailed description of the main topics covered, which range from whether this variety should be named Chinese or China English; its nativisation in China; its place as a variety of English within the World Englishes family; where and how it is used; how its speakers perceive it, and the context of English language teaching (henceforth ELT) in China. Besides outlining the themes of the book, the editors also provide an overview of each of the five parts within the volume. Each article is preceded by an abstract that gives the reader essential information on the topic discussed and they are poised as an example of what is currently being done in a particular research area of CE. Beyond these introductory pages, each of those five parts deals with a specific aspect of linguistic research, beginning with some of its smaller features and expanding towards wider and, sometimes, multidisciplinary aspects. Thus, Part I focuses its two chapters on segmental aspects of language such as pronunciation and

syllable structure of CE; Part II includes five chapters whose topics range from pragmatics to lexis and grammar; Part III is formed by five chapters that deal with attitudes and reactions towards CE; Part IV moves towards cultural conceptualisations on CE with two illustrative articles, and Part V presents two chapters where one provides information about previous research on CE and the other one outlines the future lines of investigation on the topic.

Part I begins with an article by David Deterding where he focuses on the phonemes produced by a group of students in interviews which, based on his own perception, caused misinterpretations of the originally intended message. The author concludes that there are few misunderstandings which might be due to the researcher's very own expertise, as he is most likely used to understanding CE accents. Despite this, it would be advisable to have more researchers carrying out interviews and comparing their analyses. Besides, he recognises the need for greater corpora that covers other regions of the country for two main reasons, namely (1) to make it possible to define CE phonetic features more precisely and (2) in order to check whether there is some degree of regional variation regarding some specific phonetic features as seen in Ao and Low (31). In the second chapter, Lian-Hee Wee deals with the syllable structure of Hong Kong English (henceforth HKE). He uses a rather innovative task on a homogenous group of speakers of this variety to obtain this structure. The subjects were trained to reorganise the segments in several Cantonese monosyllabic and disyllabic words backwards and then, they were asked to do the same in HKE. The researcher concludes by providing a prototype of the HKE syllable structure but adds that such variety is still unstable and calls for further testing.

Part II presents five articles whose topics cover syntactic, lexical and pragmatic aspects of CE. The common denominator of all five is the fact that they show evidence that CE is becoming nativised and thus, evolving into its own variety. The authors try to prove this either by confirming that there are certain syntactic structures unique to CE; that there are specific collocations whose meaning is distinctive or has been modified, or by displaying co-occurrences of collocations that are exclusive to this variety. The first study in this section focuses on the lexis-grammar relation in the ditransitive verb *give* in CE. The

researchers conclude that this verb has been nativised and that the patterns found are distinctive of CE in comparison with similar structures from Inner and Outer Circle varieties. The data used to reach these conclusions is taken from an online discussion forum as the authors fittingly argue that this type of source produces more spontaneous and natural language. Interestingly, such data was compiled in a corpus which is also a common element in the following studies. Despite tackling lexical and syntactic aspects respectively, the second and third chapters in Part II also use corpora to investigate their main hypotheses. On the one hand, Liang and Li use the Chinese English Corpus, which they employ to find borrowings from Chinese and collocations with new meanings in CE, and the written part of the British National Corpus by way of comparison. Among the results, the authors indicate that the NP “all-round way” is CE specific and that “all-round” has acquired a distinctive meaning when collocating with a noun. On the other hand, Liu, Fang and Wei use the Chinese Media English Corpus (henceforth CMEC) and the British Media English Corpus for comparison purposes. The authors discovered that in the CMEC, nominalisation structures are more complex, which could be due to the compressed nature of Chinese reflected on CE or to the process of colloquialisation that BrE is undergoing in media language.

As stated above, the two chapters use corpora which include written language that comes from the media, academic journals or government documents (Xia et al. 419-421). Some authors in the book defend that CE is more frequently used in university settings which is why they argue that data from advanced users in universities should be taken into consideration, collected and included so as to show a greater, more realistic perspective. Such is the case of the fourth and fifth articles in Part II which introduce corpora compiled by the authors in university settings, i.e. compositions written by users of CE. The fourth study focuses on the position of subordinate clauses with connectors *although*, *if*, *when* and *because* in writings of graduate students. In this case, the data are not directly compared with any similar corpus, but Jiang uses Quirk et al. (1997, 1037) and Biber et al. (1994) as reference. The results show that the graduate students tend to place the subordinators *although*, *if* and *when* in initial position. Their equivalents in modern standard Chinese appear more often in this

position as well, so the author considers this an example of transfer and nativisation of CE. Regarding the methodology, the researcher states that the data gathered were written by advanced users of English but the only parameter that they take into account to measure the proficiency of the subjects is the fact that they have been studying English for 10 years. While devoting time to learning a language is essential to achieve a certain degree of fluency, there are many other factors to take into consideration when evaluating language proficiency (Moyer 72). Thus, the number of years of study may not be enough of a metric to determine whether the subjects are advanced users or not. In comparison, Ren uses the results of an exam to divide students into two groups: those who are highly proficient and those who are low proficient. This is crucial since the study deals with pragmatic aspects in students' thank-you emails towards university professors, as Ren claims that "even among competent L2 users, their linguistic and/or pragmatic performances differ considerably" (110). He determines that there is no significant difference between the two groups insofar as the strategies used and that text length was greater in the highly proficient group. The most frequent strategies to show gratitude among the students are thanking the professor at the beginning or at the end. Ren also highlights "promising hard work in the future" as a strategy in Chinese culture which it is considered an example of transfer.

For Parts III and IV the topic shifts towards ELT and, as in previous chapters, universities become the focal point under research. Teachers and students are the subjects of study in perceptual and attitudinal investigations in the four chapters that form Part III. The challenge to the current model of ELT in China is presented as a foundational idea. Most scholars state that such model is based on native speaker (henceforth NS) varieties such as AmE or BrE. They add that, as a result, attitudes towards a CE variety are negative, speakers see their own accents as insufficiently good and they struggle with their language identity. The chapters share similar methodologies, such as focused interviews, questionnaires and matched-guise tests. Deyuan He's study uses a mixed method of a matched-guise test and a focused interview with a smaller group of the initial participants. He elicits responses about CE accents and the NS teaching model in China from a wide group of students and their

teachers from four universities. In the matched-guise test, subjects are asked to rate with a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which an accented voice matched one of sixteen traits. Despite the skewed proportion between fourteen positive and two negative traits, the expected outcome seems not to have been affected, although a more balanced distribution may have rendered different results. Overall, subjects tend to associate positive ideas with a near-native accent followed closely in ratings by CE and in turn, CE slightly surpassed in punctuation in the negative traits. As for the focused interviews, they centre around the ELT model in China and it is concluded that most of the interviewees prefer a mixed model with proper codification of CE features taught by local teachers and qualified NS. Such perception and ideas also appear in the results of the questionnaire and interviews carried out by Fang in the next chapter. The scope is narrower as the respondents are students from one university in China. They rate their attitudes towards their own English accent, which shows that they feel unsatisfied as most strived for a native or near-native accent and few prefer to achieve intelligibility. This brings about a question of identity that is marginally mentioned in this study. Many subjects want to sound native but at the same time they do not want to lose their identity as Chinese speakers. Moreover, the majority think that having both local and native teachers is the optimal option. It would be interesting to study further such dichotomies so as to observe how their perceptions evolve.

Since the focus of Part III is the ELT classroom, Joel Heng Hartse also studies English language teachers' acceptability judgements. He evaluates seven essays written by university students taken from the Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners. The researcher considers that there are two main categories of judgement: semantic and syntactic. Whereas semantic elements such as borrowings and loan translations are understood as idiosyncrasies of CE by most, semantic shifts in expressions such as "the alarm clock is open" instead of "on" are widely rejected. Besides, many parts marked as "unacceptable" are considered syntactic features of spoken CE. Some of the teachers, who come from different career and national backgrounds, are later interviewed and those who are NS seem to hold more biased views about specific loan expressions. In its conclusions, the study argues that those judgements of CE features as

mistakes could be due to CE not being fully nativised in China and not being widely recognised as a variety. Although this chapter does not draw explicit conclusions about a change in the ELT model, it shows that both local and native perspectives from teachers could complete each other in the classroom. Such attitudes are more clearly reflected in the fourth chapter, by Marlina, who gathers classroom observations, interviews and students' writings of four graduate English language student-teachers. The subjects consider the NS model to be disempowering towards Chinese identities and advocate for the destigmatisation of CE in Chinese classrooms. Despite it being a rather simple study in its scope, it provides a sample of the shift in perspective that is happening among English language teachers in China and opens the possibility of researching the topic further. In closing the chapter, the author suggests changes in the theory and practice of teaching Chinese English, as well as different requirements for hiring English teachers and involving parents in language education.

Finally, the last chapter in Part III functions as an overview of the main topic of the previous four and presents the status of CE across most linguistic research fields. It also informs readers about what is happening in the four main functional areas of language and focuses those on the context of World Englishes and, especially, in the Chinese context. Within that context the ELT polymodel in China seems to be the most appropriate one according to Qing Ma and Zhichang Xu, who tie it all with the slow process of nativisation of English in China.

In Part IV, the editors include two complementary articles on broader topics: the first one that deals with cultural conceptualisations from the perspective of cultural linguistics, while the second one that deals with the negotiation of identity through English as a second language. In the first one, Xu and Farzad Sharifian explain that there are not many studies of this kind, especially from a CE research standpoint. They use several sources of data such as newspapers, online media and government articles, literary works, textbooks and three interviews with CE speakers. The examples found in the data are classified into four core categories within the cultural conceptualisations framework. There are cultural schemas, cultural

categories, cultural metaphors and cultural blends. The researchers imply that teaching cultural aspects of language in the ELT classroom would help students become more aware and appreciative of their own variety as culturally significant and reflective of their identity as speakers of CE. Despite its limitations, it presents an innovative study that could become a trailblazer in the research of CE culture and open the conversation about a shift in perspectives in ELT. The chapter by Fong delves into how CE student-speakers negotiate their own national identity as Chinese in the context of globalisation. Such background is explained through the history of English in China and the concept of *Chinese essence*. This strong Chinese national identity is challenged by the incoming cultural knowledge that is acquired while people are learning English. The participants are asked eleven questions regarding this but only responses to three are presented. From their answers, Fong gathers that they view English as a tool to obtain better job opportunities and, consequently, more economic growth. Respondents also perceive themselves as global citizens since they can communicate through English with non-Chinese people. This leads the author to conclude that learning English is not seen as a threat to Chinese identity but rather has become part of that *essence*. It would be interesting to do follow-up interviews with the students so as to see how their perspectives evolve.

The last part of the volume comprises two chapters which fit perfectly together in summarising and closing the book's main arguments. The first one, by Xu, is a great in-depth summary of the research that has been written in Chinese about CE which helps those who do not understand Chinese to obtain a clearer picture on the topic. In order to do this, the author selects 100 articles published between 1980 and 2013 that he considers to be representative. A notable portion of the chapter is devoted to explaining the three to four different periods in which most scholars divide the history of CE research since its beginnings in the 1960s. In turn, such stages coincide in some areas with past themes that dominated the field such as the existence of CE, its name, its definition and its features. It also includes two subsections on attitudes towards CE and its implications for ELT that could be complementary. The information presented in the chapter could be regarded as an appropriate complement to the introduction, especially if the reader wishes to

dive deeper into the topic beforehand. Conversely, Andy Kirkpatrick's chapter is presented as an outline of the future of the field where each section tackles on one of the fields of research within the book, i.e. phonology, morphosyntax, linguistic attitudes, cultural conceptualisations, rhetoric and identities. Thus, the author simultaneously navigates through each topic and explains in broad terms to where those ideas could be carried. He states that more research into the intelligibility of CE is necessary and that it is important to investigate stakeholders' attitudes towards CE including people with more diverse backgrounds. Consequently, the researcher suggests that updated corpora-based studies are needed and that perhaps the core of future investigations lies in the practical use of CE as it is becoming part of that *Chinese essence*. Therefore, these two chapters act as a look at both the past and the future of CE research. They also work together as the conclusions to the previous fifteen chapters in the book and offer an overview on the research on CE and its future in ELT.

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