

Book Review

English in Malaysia: Current Use and Status. (Series: Studies in language, cognition and culture). Edited by Toshiko Yamaguchi and David Deterding. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

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This book provides a good overview of the status of the English language in modern-day Malaysia, a topic that has been the centre of numerous debates among politicians, academics and the public. Even members of royalty who normally refrain from commenting on any issue deemed controversial as befitting a constitutional monarchy have entered the fray with the recent pronouncements advocating English by one of the Malaysian sultans.

Focusing on four domains (linguistic features, language attitudes, English in online discourse, and English and language policies) the book begins with a relatively comprehensive introduction by the editors on the development of the English language in Malaysia. Although brief, it gives the reader a good understanding of the position and usage of the language in the complex and diverse linguistic landscape of the country. Of particular interest to me was the section on attitudes towards English in Malaysia. Having lived in the country for a number of years, I am aware of how divisive and fractious this topic can be. The findings of Paolo Coluzzi's study on attitudes towards Malay, English and Chinese among Malaysian students using a matched guise test are rather surprising. He found that English was not ranked as highly as expected in verbal anchors of *intelligence*, *high social class* or *efficient*. He attributes this to a number of reasons including the fact that the subjects were all students in a state university, thus their responses may be influenced by "official and hegemonic concerns". This point illustrates the complex nature of investigating 'real' attitudes towards a language in a country with many underlying ethnic tensions.

This book also has two chapters that focus on the English language in the context of East Malaysia, an often over-looked area in most academic investigations in Malaysia. Both chapters focus on the Bidayuh people in the state of Sarawak. One chapter studies their attitude towards English while another investigates the use of English and other languages in online discussions. As not much have been written about the use and status of the English language in the East Malaysian context, these two chapters provide useful insights to a relatively unexplored area of investigation but it would be even more illuminating if the subjects were extended to beyond the Bidayuh community.

Although this book is a scholarly one meant specially for researchers in the field of linguistics, education and public policy, the wide variety of language aspects that are investigated and the rather direct way most of the chapters are written may mean that it can be of interest to those beyond the realm of academia too. It is an invaluable addition to anyone who is interested in the story of how a language that was a legacy of the colonial masters have shaped and will continue to shape a nation with conflicting views towards this 'legacy'.