

Book Review

Brunei English: A New Variety in a Multilingual Society. David Deterding & Salbrina Sharbawi. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013. xii + 170 pp. ISBN 978-94-007-6346-3.

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Brunei English: A New Variety in a Multilingual Society may be the first official work published that provides an academic examination on the English language in Brunei Darussalam, a small Islamic sultanate on the north-western coast of Borneo. Here, English functions as an important and significant second language among the country's predominantly Brunei Malay speaking population. Although there have been an increasing number of independent studies carried out on specific features of the English language used by Bruneian speakers, this book gives a categorical compilation of features of English used by its speakers, covering the major aspects of language: pronunciation, morphology, syntax and discourse.

The authors began by providing a brief but accurate background to the history of the country, its population and languages spoken. Although there was a brief discussion about the question of whether one could talk about Brunei English or English in Brunei, I felt that more could be said about this subject, especially since Brunei English is the focus of the book. Additionally, the development of English in Brunei and its place in the society today could also be expanded upon. Furthermore, a whole chapter devoted to education in the country and the pedagogical implications of Brunei English in the last part of the book appears to skew it towards the educator and teacher audience. As a reader, I felt a little misled, given that the title suggests the work to include English use and users in Brunei society from a sociolinguistic perspective.

The data for the book were mainly taken from three sources: reading of a passage, individual interviews between the authors and participants who were students from the local university and texts from the two national newspapers in the country, namely *The Brunei Times* and *Borneo Bulletin*. These methods of data collection have enabled the authors to carry out a detailed and objective examination of the features of English in Brunei to highlight the distinctions between Brunei English and standard English. This was shown in the two excellent chapters on pronunciation and syntax of Brunei English. However, I felt that the book fell short in its ability to capture how particular features of English are used by Bruneian speakers in everyday contexts and conversations. Thus, while the chapters on pronunciation and morphology and syntax were excellent, the chapters on discourse, lexis and code mixing were less illuminating.

The chapter on discourse of Brunei English contains a highly academic study of the features such as discourse particles, reduplication of lexical items, tautology and sentence complexity and helps tease out the distinctiveness of English used in Brunei. However, I would have liked to see more of the unique uses and meanings of English by Bruneian speakers in everyday discourse, in the way "I catch no ball" is used by Singlish speakers in a uniquely Singaporean way, for example. In all fairness, the authors did touch on these aspects under shifts in meaning and shifted connotations in the chapter on lexis of Brunei English. Here, there was discussion about how words like "take", "bring" and "send" take on new meanings in Brunei, but as rightly pointed out by them, these are not exclusive to

Brunei English speakers. I thought that more could be offered in this chapter if data gathered under naturally occurring conditions were made available.

The discussion in the chapter on language mixing was not as thoroughly explored, also partly due to the limitations of the data collection method. The chapter contains an exposition of the code-switched items in various genres. However, it is not very illuminating in terms of the role(s) that code-switching plays in Brunei English, in the way it has become an established feature in Singapore English, for example. Also, not much was said about the impact of language mixing on the local community and language acquisition. A detailed examination of code-switching could be possible by capturing stretches of speech by speakers in their daily lives.

One observation that was omitted in the book but worth noting is the impact and influence of Americanism in the speech behavior of Bruneian speakers, particularly the younger speakers. I felt that this should have been included in the book as the issue of the influence of another variety of English on the speech of Bruneians further complicates the claim that there is a variety called Brunei English.

In conclusion, the book is less convincing in its argument that English in Brunei is at the third stage of “nativization” as claimed by the authors, or if indeed that there is such a phenomenon called Brunei English, mainly because of the limited conditions under which data was collected. Ultimately, I think the test for claiming that there is a variety called Brunei English, one would have to listen to a Bruneian English speaker and say with certainty that she or he is a Bruneian. However, what this book does, and does very well, is that it highlights the distinction between English used in Brunei and standard English in an objective manner. It is a diligent piece of work that provides a detailed academic study of the linguistic features that differentiates between the two. As such, it serves as a valuable reference book for researchers and students in the field of language variation and World Englishes.