Standard English and Borneo

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Standard English is of great importance, despite the difficulty of defining the term. The concept of Standard English is weak in speech, but written Standard English is strikingly uniform around the world, despite the absence of any central controlling body, and despite English being used in so many countries. Standard English is the dominant form of English in all written texts, and is a unifying factor in English.

The web can be used to generate a corpus that attests usage and gives some idea of frequencies. A detailed examination was made of 60 internet texts relating to Borneo, from sites hosted in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia. The standard of English in these texts is high, comparable to similar texts from any country. Analysis of the texts illustrates the dominance of the standard form in written English, shows those areas of English where there is choice within standard English, and indicates where the rare errors are most likely to occur.

The teaching of Standard English is central in the teaching of English. Receptive literacy in Standard English is an important goal for mass education in any country where English is of cultural importance. Correction of errors should be based on actual practice in Standard English, not on its strictest interpretation. Not everyone who goes through school, even in an English-medium, will need to develop enough skill in writing Standard English to be able to edit English texts for public dissemination.

Introduction

Standard English might be hard to define (Trudgill 1999), but it is easy to recognise. I no longer regard there as being multiple Standard Englishes: the differences between regional varieties of Standard English are minor, and not enough to warrant the identification of multiple separate standards. The differences are mostly nothing more than the well-known American/British spelling variants (affecting well under 1% of words in any text), and a small number of regional words, many of them culturally based. There is far more variation within Standard English that cuts across regional differences: differences between different text types

can be substantial, and these differences are international. Nor does Standard English have anything to do with whether its user is a native or a non-native speaker. The majority of native speakers of English in countries such as the USA, UK, or Australia, where ancestral native speakers of English are in the majority, do not have high levels of skill in written Standard English.

What is the Standard English of Borneo like? In this paper, I analyse texts hosted in (and mostly written in) Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and relating to Borneo, to give some indication of the status of Standard English and variation within it. The teaching of English in Southeast Asia is a story of success, and this success is reflected in the written English of Borneo, as it appears on the web. Standard English is not something remote and unattainable for English users in Borneo (or anywhere else). The English they write is not 'near Standard' or 'approaching Standard' but it simply *is*, overwhelmingly, Standard English.

My central arguments are that:

- There is one Standard English.
- Standard English is accessible, visible, and important.
- There is no English-using community in which all users of English can write Standard English.
- The public written English of Borneo is overwhelmingly standard.
- The teaching of English should be realistic.

What is Standard English?

The concept of Standard English applies to written rather than to spoken text. Speech is immediate and responsive to situation. Speakers need to keep the attention of listeners focused on what matters in a live situation. They can be playful with language. They can backtrack and take account of the needs of the hearers. The analysis of speech, especially of unscripted speech in a face to face situation, needs tools quite different from those that apply to the analysis of planned, drafted, and edited written text (see, for example, Carter 2003, 2004). The concept of a standard is hard to apply where there is this level of flexibility.

There is a range of varieties within Standard English. The largest reason for variation is that different text types have different norms and expectations (think of the difference between a newspaper report and a job advertisment). There is also some variation depending on the region of origin of the text and its writer, though variation depending on region is much smaller than variation depending on text type (think of the difference between a Malaysian newspaper report and an Australian newspaper report).

Some linguistic areas are more firmly defined than others. Standard English is most strongly delimited in spelling and inflectional morphology, and most weakly delimited in lexis. New words come into English all the time, and can rapidly find their way into Standard English. Words that have done this recently include *bling*, *wollemi pine*, and *podcast*. As the concept of Standard English refers mainly to the written language, pronunciation is largely irrelevant, and certainly there is no standard accent for English. I do accept, though, that words can be seen as having a correct pronunciation: someone who began the words *church, chaos,* and *chef* with the same sound could reasonably be regarded as having some 'wrong' pronunciations.

Codification follows the consensual usage of an international elite. There has never been a central body that predetermined what was and what was not Standard English. There is no Academy for English, no Dewan Bahasa, no official dictionaries and grammars. Instead, dictionaries and grammars are based on elite usage. It is usage that determines the standard. *Bling*, *wollemi pine* and *podcast* are are now making their way into new dictionaries (as of April 2006 they are not yet in the *Oxford English Dictionary*). This type of codification after practice is not anarchy, nor even democracy, but oligarchy, in which printing houses and 'educated' people all over the world set the standard by their fashions of usage. By a process of regulation that I find impressive and incomprehensible, the outcome is an astonishingly high level of world-wide agreement about what is and what is not standard. This agreement includes a very liberal attitude to new words, and to borrowing from other languages, and a very strict stance of spelling, punctuation and inflectional morphology. It also rather confusingly includes a wide range of practice in syntax combined with a normative, or purist, tradition that attacks common usage and argues for it being wrong.

The whole world of English-users also share conventions about what structures and vocabulary are suitable for particular text types. A classified advertisement selling a car in Kuala Lumpur looks very much like one in Chicago. The linguistic differences associated with different text types can be substantial. Examples from my data illustrate the variation within Standard English associated with text type:

1. That you on the 10th day of June, 1993, at about 1625 hours at House No. 124, Simpang 124, Kampong Delima Satu, Jalan Muara, in Brunei Darussalam in furtherance of your common intention both of you committed robbery of cash amounting to B$3,537.80 and in committing the said robbery caused hurt to DAYANG SUHAILA BTE ABDULLAH, and

that thereby you have committed an offence punishable under section 394 of the Penal Code and read with section 34 of the same.

2. Looking for potential petrol station for sale

3. A beach resort by the South China Sea.. Water sports. Spa. A resort for family vacations, romantic holidays or business. Ideal hotel for high impact meetings and events .

4. Topic: Management of Rheumatoid Arthritis
   Date: 10th April
   Time: 2.00 pm - 4.00 pm

5. *Hi Azmanovic... r u really thai?? I have a few thai friends...*

Texts like these can be found from any English using society, and a similar range of text types is found in all languages. The language of the court judgment (1) is part of the much-analysed and characteristic legal language of English, with its long sentences and distinctive vocabulary (e.g. *furtherance, the said, thereby, of the same*). (2), (3) and (4) are different types of abbreviated English, found in small advertisments (2), promotional literature (3) and notices of events (4). They are characterised by sentence that omit elements (such as subjects and verbs) that would be required in some other text types, and by certain kinds of abbreviations. In (5) we see a very informal type of English, using international spelling conventions associated with isome kinds communication in writing, especially text messaging (SMS) and internet chatrooms and forums.

As we will see, like these five examples, 52 of the 60 texts in my data were in some kind of Standard English of this international sort, rather than in any kind of English that reflected regional origin.

Googling

Several of my most recent papers have explored an aspect of English usage using the web as a corpus (Gupta, 2006a, 2006b, 2006 fthcg). I use a Google search around a string to generate a list of texts, from which I draw a statistical sample (usually every nth url, in order to produce a corpus of a size I can cope with). The string is chosen on the basis of my judgment that this is likely to generate a good enough corpus for my particular needs. I do not preselect the texts because they look interesting: they have been generated for me by statistical methods.

For this paper, my target was 20 English texts hosted in each of the three countries that rule in the island of Borneo: Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia. A website hosted in a place is not necessarily written there, though the vast majority of websites

hosted in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia do in fact originate there. This would be less true of, for example, Tuvalu, which has the domain *.tv,* and therefore hosts many foreign websites relating to television services: Mauritius, thanks to its domain *.mu* has an unusually large number of personal websites of American cats. The string I chose for this paper is "to know", which is a common English string of a type that can be expected to occur in texts of any level of formality. It could not be a word in Malay/Indonesian, the other language most likely to be found in texts from these three countries. I wanted to get texts that related to Borneo, so I added to that search the name of one of the cities of Borneo (Table 1). Because my analysis was to be close, I selected the first substantive paragraph of every text, which produced a corpus of about 2000 words for each of the three countries for more detailed linguistic analysis.

Country	Search string	Number of hits	How sampled	Sites generated	Number of words
Brunei	"bandar seri begawan" "to know" site:.bn	6	All	6	2390
	"BSB" "to know" site:.bn	6	All	6	
	"to know" site:.bn	63	First 8	8 TOT: 20	
Malaysia	kuching "to know" site:.my	270	Last site on each of 1st 20 pages of hits	20	1991
Indonesia	pontianak "to know" site:.id	60	First site, then every 3rd site. Back to beginning for 2 sites to replace failed hits.	20	2351
					6732

Table 1: Source of data

These search strings threw up the required sites, though, due to the smaller number of sites hosted in Brunei, additional searches were needed to get 20 Brunei texts. 51 of the texts at the urls used only English. The rest, all forums, had either Malay or Indonesian alongside English (the first paragraph to include a sentence in English was selected). 58 of the texts referred to Borneo, though not necessarily in the selected paragraph. Brunei is entirely in Borneo. All the Indonesian texts selected referred at some point to the city of Pontianak (none of them referred to ghosts, the meaning of *pontianak* in Malay/Indonesian). All but two of the Malaysian texts

referred to the city of Kuching (those two referred to cats, the meaning of *kuching* in Malay/Indonesian).

	Brunei	Malaysia	Indonesia
Local	10	19	8
Foreign	6	0	2
Unclear or mixed	4	1	10

Table 2: Origins of the authors

It is difficult or impossible to identify a single author for many of these texts, because of the production process, which often involves more than one person. Many of them have a corporate authorship. Whether individual, group, or corporate, authors (where known) were of many origins (Table 2), with Malaysian authors the most likely to be from the host country. The reason for this is probably a combination of Malaysia's greater presence on the web, combined with English being more used among Malaysians than it is among Bruneians and (even more so) Indonesians. Indonesia is what Kachru (for example, Kachru 1992) calls an 'Expanding Circle' country, one where English is used only with foreigners, while Malaysia and Brunei are 'Outer Circle' countries, places where English is predominantly a non-native language, but where English is used internally among citizens, in some domains, including informal ones.

Clearly non-standard features

Where spelling and inflectional morphology are concerned, Standard English is very clear indeed, and it is possible to identify non-standard English with confidence.

Spelling

The number of words affected by the minor differences between the British and American spelling traditions is very small. In this text, as is usual only .4% of all words were words that vary (25 tokens of 14 different words), 19 of which followed the British tradition (*tyres, licence, programme(s), -ise, -our*) and 6 the American tradition (*license, enrollment(s), calipers, -or, -er*). All of these are, of course, Standard English. The US spelling that was used in a Malaysian texts, *calipers*, may have been an error, as, with that exception, the texts hosted in Brunei and Malaysia used British spelling, while the texts hosted in Indonesia used American spelling. However, although it is considered unacceptable to mix British and American

spellings in the same document, it is common for writers to use occasional American spellings in a document that generally uses the British tradition.

Only .5% of all words (32 words) were not spelled as they are in ordinary Standard English (Table 3). 13 of these (oddly, none of them from Brunei) were spellings of a type sometimes called 'sensational', which are used in informal texts and which can be found in good dictionaries as variant spellings. These are deliberately used in certain text types and are not mistakes. There were only 19 spelling mistakes. Some of these were errors, mostly of the sort any writer of English is liable to make (everyone gets confused about *-ant/-ent*), and others were probably typographical errors, caused by hitting a wrong key (such as repeated letters).

Writers spell with care. The rate of spelling error is only .3%. Even sensational spellings are infrequent. Most postings in forums either use Standard spelling or use only one or two common sensational spellings (such as *u*). The vast majority of texts are in entirely Standard English spelling. Punctuation and layout also overwhelmingly follow normal conventions too: there were only about 5 non-standard uses (or absences) of apostrophes; about 8 cases where I would have used commas differently; a missing question mark, a missing space between words, and (in forums) several examples of lower case where normal practice requires capitals.

Type	Brunei	Malaysia	Indonesia	Total
Error	exellent goverment je ne sais qouis transparant VolkWagen	comities complimentary (= *complementary*) moonsoon	cardivascular contac enviromental past (= *passed*) phenomenae	13
Typographical	duriing expert (= *expect*) its (= *is*) lastest	andd One (= *Once*)		6
Sensational		2 (= *to*) da (= *the*) izzit rediculous(?) u (= *you*)	'n (= *and*) Hellow r (= *are*, x2) Thanx til u ur (= *your*)	13
ALL	9	10	13	32
Number of Extracts in 100% standard spelling (/20)	16	16	15	

Table 3: Non-standard spelling

Inflections

These texts used a whole range of the inflexions of Standard English to mark number and case in nouns, and tense and concord in verbs. 53 of the 60 texts used entirely standard inflections.

A tiny number of uses of inflections that might be non-standard (10) can be identified, one of which is deliberate. Most of these involve concord (feature at issue underlined in examples):

Brunei: (1) we should be proud of what those in the Municipal Board <u>has</u> done for beautiful Brunei Darussalam

Malaysia: (2) This <u>include</u> two successful Teach-Ins, a series of CME talks, a public forum and the launching of the Society's Homepage.
(3) The roundabouts <u>has</u> been a bottle-neck for traffic from USJ and also Sunway for a long time.
(4) suddenly da wind direction <u>change</u> so drastic... [*this is the use of informal Malaysian English, and is not an error. Note the sensational spelling* da *in the same text, also reflecting the informality.*]

Indonesia (5) I didn't mean to be funny-considering of what <u>have</u> been going on through out the country
(6) Closing dates for applications for this year's grants <u>is</u> 31 August 2003.
(7) (8) The bad things <u>is</u> there <u>is</u> irresponsible teenagers and parents
(9) in Asia people <u>has</u> more dedication of study
(10) Since they were young they were <u>teach</u> to be responsible

All examples except (4) and (10) might be errors in concord. The writers are responding to something intrinsically difficult in English. In 5 cases, the possible concord error occurs in a clause in which there is a subject and a complement that differ in number (2, 3, 6, 7, 8). Usually (but not always) in Standard English, concord is determined by the number of the subject, a rule which has not been followed in the first four of these. The rule has been followed in (8), where Standard English unusually allows the 'dummy subject' *there* to take on the number of the complement. (1) is an example of concord by proximity: the subject is *those*, but the noun phrase is long, and the writer is distracted by the singular noun *Board*, which comes immediately before the verb. In (5) the pronoun *what* is referential to something conceptually plural (events, perhaps). Conversely, in (9) *people* looks like a singular form (like 'the population', perhaps). Concord errors of this type can be found in unedited texts from all over the English-using world, and are even more common in speech. Grammars based on corpora have attested them for some years (see for example, Quirk et al 1972:360, 368). It is probably better to regard these as

disputed usage within Standard English rather than as clearly non-standard. There is very little concord left in English, and our insecurity about its finer points in sentences like these is a sign of its continuing loss.

The use of *teach* for *taught* (10), however, produces a phrase that is non-standard in form. It seems to be the type of error in inflexions that is associated mainly with less proficient non-native speakers. The last three sentences (7, 8, 9, 10) came from a single text, one of 5 texts (see below) that had an unusually high proportion of errors.

Are the texts standard?

Of the 60 paragraphs that were closely analysed, only one was intentionally written in a non-standard variety of English. This was one of the three extracts from internet forums, and it used Malaysian Colloquial English, which, like similar varieties from Singapore and Brunei, is characterised by a characteristic grammar, including BE deletion, subject deletion, use of a particular set of discourse markers, and optional use of inflectional morphology, annotated on this extract:

> wah [DISC.].......suddenly da wind direction change [INFLECT.] so drastic.... [SUBJ.] wonder why?????
>
> oh [SUBJ.] want me 2 stuff for u izzit[DISC.].???? aiyo [DISC.] mata kuchin a bit....wat[DISC.] ler[DISC.] ....[SUBJ.]prefer iced mocha...hehehehehe
>
> <div align="right">*Malaysia Dog and Puppy Portal.*</div>

The other two extracts not aiming at ordinary Standard English were also from forums (hosted in Indonesia, though note that the poster is in Kuala Lumpur), but used, not a non-standard dialect, but the international form of Standard English associated with such a text type, mostly variant spellings, as in this example, which has a single phrase of Malay (= 'Greetings from KL'):

> Hello.. hello.. Hello all...
>
> Hi Azmanovic... r u really thai?? I have a few thai friends... They r nice 'n love party... I've never been there (thailand) but i really want to visit ur country so bad especially Koh Samui.. MMhhh... Beautiful island, isnt it?
>
> Salam dari KL
>
> <div align="right">*SCTV*</div>

The other 57 texts deliver the spelling and inflectional morphology of Standard English. In terms of the most clearly defined areas of Standard English, then, these texts hosted in Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia, and associated with Borneo, are Standard English. When we come to areas where the delimitation of Standard

English is less clear, and where there is more variation within Standard English it is harder to establish whether texts are entirely in Standard English. However, even in those areas, it is clear that the majority of the texts are entirely in Standard English.

Muzzy areas

Twenty years ago (Gupta 1986) I identified there as being areas of tension within Standard English, where rules for usage are hard to define, and where there is variation. These areas are typically the target of a great deal of pedagogy. One such area, which I do not examine in this paper, but which has been discussed for Sri Lankan English by Herat (2005) relates the choice between *the* and zero determiner. There are some areas of subject-verb concord where there are choices (such as invariable *there is* and concord after mass countables such as *team* or *audience*). In the previous section we saw how difficult areas of concord accounted for most of the features in the texts that might be examples of non-standard inflectional morphology.

Another important area of choice, variation and dispute, is in verb phrase choice where different choices do not give different meanings. I refer here to the choice, for example, between a present perfective or a present tense, or between a present tense and a present continuous, or between a present perfective and a past perfective. The form of all the verb phrases is fixed by the powerfully defined inflectional morphology of Standard English (*has seen, sees, is seeing, had seen, saw, will see, will have seen*, etc.) but the rules governing the choice of which verb phrase to choose in a given context are much less clear.

One such area of variation that I have examined previously (Gupta 2006b) is in the choice of verb phrase in structures like this (in order of frequency):

- This is the first time I <u>have eaten</u> breadfruit. [*present perfective*]
- This is the first time I <u>am eating</u> breadfruit. [*present continuous*]
- This is the first time I <u>eat</u> breadfruit. [*present tense*]
- This is the first time I <u>ate</u> breadfruit. [*past tense*]

It is possible to find examples of all four alternatives from the same place, as in these examples, from websites originating in the USA (verb phrase underlined):

- i think this is the first time i <u>have worn</u> leather shoes since high school graduation.
- This is the first time I <u>am wearing</u> glasses to work, and my colleagues can't stop commenting on how different I look.
- I'VE WORN BLACK-BANDS BEFORE, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I <u>WEAR</u> ONE ONLY KNOWING THIS PERSON BY READING ABOUT HER.
- "This is the first time I <u>wore</u> it all year," Mitchell said. "I just kind of feel like it's a good time to wear it.

Although all four can be found in texts from most English-using locations, there is an order of frequency. There are also differences in frequency from one place to another. For example, the present continuous is the preferred form in texts from India, and texts from the UK are especially likely to favour the perfective: this is in line with a generally higher use of present perfective in the UK than elsewhere in the English-using world (Biber et al 1999:462). It could be argued that all four are Standard, and I am certain that the two most common (present perfective and present continuous) are Standard. The use of the present continuous has been criticised and learners of English are often corrected for using it.

There are many sentences in which there is a choice between *was sitting*, *was sat*, and *was seated* (discussed in more detail in Gupta 1986b). Of these three choices, *was sitting* is the most frequent. *Was seated* is the rarest and gives an air of great formality unless it is a passive (e.g. "I was seated by her side at the head table"). *Was sat* is rare in texts coming from places other than the UK. The following examples, taken from British governmental websites, show how the choice of verb phrase is not motivated by meaning:

- Once, I was sitting on a bus and overheard some individuals from. an opposing party, who had celebrated rather too well, starting to tell how they had done it, not noticing that I was sitting in the corner listening to them. [*Speech by W Ross, MP*]
- I was sitting on a bench on the right as you come in the door, just a few feet away from it. Mrs. Mayer came in and sat down beside me. [*Statement by witness to government enquiry in Scotland*]
- I did not fully understand this until last year when I was sat on a Bill Committee examining what is now the Mental Capacity Act which is how we deliver new protection for those who need it. [*Speech by Liam Byrne, MP*]
- I remember it well; I was sat on a wall in the middle of Ely, in my constituency. [*Speech by Rhodri Morgan, First Minister of Wales*]
- Not long after my conversation with Daniel, I was seated on a plane bound for home following meetings in Washington, DC. [*Editor's note: Ancestry Magazine*]

The use of *was sat* in sentences like this is common in both speech and writing, at all levels of formality, and from writers all over the UK. It is disapproved of by many within the normative tradition, and is regularly identified as one of the most common non-standard features used by British 16 year olds in public examinations (see for example, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1999). *The Times* bans it:

> **sat** is the past tense and the past participle of "to sit". Never write that somebody "was sat" in his car, her living room etc; write "was seated" or "was sitting"

Despite the ban, in the first three months of 2006 The Times (including The Sunday Times) used *was sat* seven times, though four examples were in quotations. This usage is rare outside the UK, so it is regional, but it also ought to be now regarded as Standard English, though disputed.

Sometimes it is possible to see new rules emerging. Idioms are fixed expressions outside the norms of grammar. Over the last ten years or so, two similar grammatical constructions have given rise to a new idiom that cannot be analysed grammatically (the examples below are from US and UK texts). These constructions use clauses such as *the problem is* and *the thing is* to introduce a proposition expressed in a nominal clause (1). When this phrase itself becomes a nominal clause, it becomes the subject of BE before the nominal clause with the problem in it, often giving rise to two forms of BE adjacent to each other (2). .

(1)   The problem <u>was</u> (that I <u>did not understand</u> their language ^{nominal clause})

(2)   (What the problem <u>was</u> ^{nominal clause}) <u>was</u> (that we <u>had to go</u> right away ^{nominal clause}).

These two structures have, for many speakers and some writers, combined, producing a new idiom that cannot be analysed (3):

(3)   (The problem <u>was</u> ^{unanalysable clause}) <u>was</u> (that we really <u>weren't</u> a club band ^{nominal clause}).

The unanalysable clause seems to be a new kind of nominal clause, but this new idiomatic structure has arisen out of the merger of (1) and (2).

I have used these three examples to illustrate what I mean by 'areas of tension' within English. Readers might well have strong personal views about the acceptability of some of the alternatives that I have discussed here. It is precisely because the responses of English-users to structures like these differ that it is difficult to identfy features as non-standard with complete confidence. We do not agree. Learners of English are often marked wrong for writing something that most English speakers find unproblematic (for some examples see Brown 2003). Attacks on structures such as 'split infinitives' and 'prepositions at the end of sentences', and bans on beginning sentences with *and* or *but* are part of the normative tradition of English. Variation of the sort I have discussed in this section should also be seen as part of the kind of variation in English that some people have strong views about. But we are looking at disputed usage here, and teaching should focus on structures that are definitely non-standard. It is only those studying English at university level who need to know about areas of dispute within Standard English.

Probably non-standard features

Due to uncertainties about the identification of a feature as non-standard in these more subtle areas, there is no point in attempting full quantification. Most of the features that I thought might be non-standard are in one of three areas:

- Idioms, including prepositions in idioms: e.g choice between *knowledge on/of*;
- Verb choice;
- Choice between *the* and zero;

Variation of this sort is surely trivial, and occurs in all varieties of English. Any English user from anywhere in the world can illustrate this by asking another user of English from the same place to edit something they have written. Most editing is likely to be in these three areas. The rules are unclear and hard to express. Skilled writers do not agree with each other. In these examples from my data, the feature is underlined and my alternative supplied in parentheses.

Brunei: there was in fact no land to speak of in the Sungai Bera Holding Basin -- just a huge depression in the ground filled with oily mud where the egrets shy [*shied*] away from exploring for food

our school had won [*won*] the first place in skills competition

As recent [*recently*]as 3 years ago

Malaysia: Or perhaps you are disheartened because you fail [*failed*] to win that dream job?

They were received by [*the*] prison's deputy director

Any franchisor interest [*interested*] to have [*in having*] a franchisee in Manjung, Perak ??

Indonesia: [*The*] Department of Social Services of Indonesian Republic year of 2003 had done [*did*] so many researches [*much research*]

The Frame of reference that base the research on [*the research is based on*] is students who have A personality type and B personality type.

adolescent's knowledge on [*of*] their reproductive health is still low

If readers disagree with my judgments on some of these, that is to be expected. I hesitate to label any of these as unequivocally 'non-standard'.

It seems reasonable to say that a text is in Standard English, as a whole, if it is targeted at Standard English, and if it is *dominantly* in a kind of English that

knowledgeable users would agree is Standard. 52 of the 57 texts in which the target was Standard English were either entirely in unremarkable Standard English, or in English which could be described as dominantly Standard.

Examples: entirely Standard

- This visit brings to six the number of ASEAN countries that I have had to opportunity to visit as Philippine President. This is a splendid opportunity on our part to reaffirm the friendship, goodwill, and diplomatic relations between our two countries, as well as our full commitment to the progress of our region.

- Before you proceed any further, you must read the whole of this Agreement to know and understand the terms and conditions governing your access and use of IDBB Internet Banking and the Services provided by IDBB and its Subsidiaries

- **SIBU**: Over 80 shipbuilders from throughout the State attended a Yanmar Marine Sales and Technical Seminar here yesterday to know more about the latest innovations in marine technology

- Welcome to the world of the UNESCO Office, Jakarta. I trust that you will find this is a Report with a difference. That is, you will find this Report tells you a story that, as you read, you will increasingly enjoy.

- Mambo has been developed for the masses. It's licensed under the GNU/GPL license, easy to install and administer and reliable. Mambo doesn't even require the user or administrator of the system to know HTML to operate it once it's up and running.

- With strategic infrastructure development, together with the on-going commitment of the Federal and State Governments to the development and industrialisation of Sarawak, coupled with an encouraging research and development environment, all augurs well for Sarawak.

Examples: dominantly Standard

- On Wednesday, 5th June 2001, the first of the Level 3 competition was held in Tutong. In this round, Hanah and Sundar were asked to participate for an hour where the IT literacy was tested. The following day, all the four students participated in the Level 3 skill competition which took place at MTTSR

- In less than a month when the department enforced the law, your department caught nine people for littering our beautiful peaceful, clean

country.

It is also good to know if, the areas up to the Brunei International Airport are included within this law?

- The faculty made good progress during the year in terms of research. A number of programmes were initiated in Geotechnical Engineering and Telecommunications Engineering.

- Water is a basic need for human life. Its position cannot be replaced by anything else. Are we aware of this? Unfortunately, our attention to drinking water is not up to what it should be

- Like other developing countries in the South East Asian region Indonesia is undergoing an epidemiological transition. Communicable diseases tend to decrease, while non-communicable diseases and accidents tend to increase.

- Eversince they widened the roads leading to it, the volume of traffic has increased while the roundabout is still 2 laned. I would suggest demolishing them and cover up the moonsoon drains so we could install "intelligent traffic lights" to smoothen the traffic flow.

Texts with more error

The five texts which seem to fail to reach a Standard English target rather frequently, and which, perhaps, could be said to include a higher proportion of errors, were all from sites hosted in Indonesia, the only Expanding Circle Country of the three. One would expect that writers based in Brunei and Malaysia would have had more experience of education in the medium of English, and more chance to use English in a range of domains on a daily basis, than would writers in Indonesia. The two examples below are from two of the Indonesian texts that have many errors. One of them is a forum posting from a participant in the Netherlands, another Expanding Circle country. Although he has an Indonesian name, he may not be confident enough in Indonesian to post entirely in Indonesian, hence his use of English alongside Indonesian:

Nama :   D.P. Tick gelar Raja Muda Kuno

Propinsi :   Vlaardingen   **Kota** :   Belanda

Pesan :   L.S.;

I am searching people to exchange dokumentasi sejarah kerajaan2 Kab. Ketapang.Espacualli I like to know more about Pemangku Panembahan Tengku Zainuddin of Sukadana and the chief of dynasty Simpang.

In fact everything interesting for me.

Hormat saya:

D.P. Tick gRMK

secretary Pusat Dokumentasi Kerajaan2 di Indonesia "Pusaka"

Tanggal :   13 Februari 2005, Minggu 11:13

The second is from a research report for an Indonesian governmental body: all authors have Indonesian names:

> The scheme of executive summary from all result of the researches, intentionally to give benefits to all related stakeholders, and also as socialization material, so the dissemination of this book could answer the society's curiosity on research products of Research and Development Center (Puslitbang) UKS. This year researches had brought new shade by involve some of university such as Muhammadiyah Jakarta University, Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta University, and STKS Bandung.

These texts are aimed at Standard English but do contain errors of a sort most associated with less proficient writers of English from the Expanding Circle. The proportion of the population who are proficient writers of Standard English is lower in Expanding Circle countries than it is in places where more people have had their education in English-medium, and where they have the opportunity to use English in daily life. Even though the least standard texts were from Indonesia, it must be remembered that the majority of the texts hosted in Indonesia were in Standard English just as good as those hosted in Brunei and Malaysia.

The Standard of English in Borneo

The sampling of texts associated with Borneo and hosted in one of the three countries of Borneo suggests that the standard of written, publicly available material in English in Borneo is very high indeed. Writers in all three countries use a range of styles of English, appropriate to the text type. There are almost no errors in spelling and inflections, and very few features that could reasonably be regarded as errors of any sort. Only in a quarter of the texts from Indonesia was there a higher density of errors in Standard English.

The objective analysis of written English does not support the much-reiterated complaints that the standard of English has declined. During the conference at which this paper was presented, a number of speakers suggested that a decline in English skills in Brunei was reflected in poorer O-Level results. Similar complaints can be found from all over the world, for example:

- the government outlined its reasons for wanting to lift Spain's low standard of English proficiency . [*Spain, 2005*]

- English language experts interviewed felt that the standard of written and spoken English here had declined in recent years. [*Singapore, 2003*]

- the poor standard of English at all levels, schools and universities [*Sri Lanka, 2003*]

- Although English is our very important second language, our standard of English these days is very disappointing. [*Bangladesh, 2005*]

- Hong Kong is losing out to the mainland because of a **decline in English** standards in recent years [*Hong Kong, 2005*]

- Employers are fed up with young people applying for jobs who cannot spell, add up or speak properly. [*UK, 1995*]

- He said it was an indisputable fact that the standard of English has declined to a level that was too low to cope with the nation's needs. [*Malaysia, 2001*]

Comments like this give a misleading impression and are false. By every reasonable measure there has been an increase in English skills over the last 50 years, almost everywhere in the world, and certainly in the three countries of Borneo. The standard of English in Southeast Asia has risen, and continues to rise. Since the middle of the twentieth century:

- Participation in education has risen.
- More children, and a higher proportion of children, learn English at school.
- More children, and a higher proportion of children, study in English medium schools.
- At every level, more people, and a higher proportion of people, gain qualifications in English.

As a result, more people (and a higher proportion of the population) can use English, and more people (and a higher proportion of the population) can write Standard English extremely well. Complaints of declining standards are based on some sort of idealised past. The performance of the tiny number of elite students who completed secondary education in (say) 1955 might be compared with the performance of a whole cohort of children who completed secondary education in 2005. Any assessment of the standard of English should be based on the performance of the whole population.

The standard of written English in the texts from the three countries is high, comparable to that found in texts from any country. A sample of texts from any English-using country (such as the UK) would throw up a similar range of text types, a similarly low use of non-standard dialects, and a similar low rate of errors in Standard English. The errors, and the areas of disputed usage, would be similar too.

The mythical perfect 'native speaker' should not be held up as a judge, because native speakers are not perfect. Just like the writers of English of Borneo, the public text they produce is generally in Standard English, however.

It is sometimes forgotten that written English for public readership is generally edited: few texts for public distribution are the responsibility of just one individal. The process of writing finished text is a skill like any other, and is not something that all members of a society can be expected to have to the same degree. There are even professional editors, whose job it is to give the final polish to written texts. Many people in the world today need to be able to read Standard English, and need to be able write informally or in draft form, but a smaller number of people need to be able to do final polishing of texts. It is not reasonable to expect that all products of a school system will be able to write Standard English of the quality seen in most of these texts from Borneo.

Standard English has to be taught. It is essential to remember that being a native speaker of English does not guarantee that a person will have good skills in Standard English. Equally, being a non-native speaker does not prevent someone from having excellent skills in Standard English. There are many non-native speakers of English whose skills in writing Standard English are far superior to the skills of the majority of native speakers. Modern societies assess skill in Standard English and validate achievement by examination systems. Those who achieve high scholastic achievement in the medium of English have been rewarded for their good skills in the writing of Standard English, as have those who achieve high-level qualifications in English as a foreign language. Such qualifications predict high levels of skill in Standard English, and native and non-native speakers of English without such qualifications are unlikely to have skills in the writing of Standard English.

The reason people in all the countries of the world seem to think they are failing in the teaching of Standard English is that they have unreasonable expectations. Even in countries where the vast majority of the population speak nothing but English, not all children will learn skills in Standard English to the same degree, any more that they will all develop skills in mathematics to the same degree.

An additional problem is that, to some extent, we learn what we want to learn. People need to see a reason for learning English in order to apply themselves. A sense of need can be fostered, but only if the need is realistic: in practice, plenty of people in the world won't need English in their adult lives, and others will not need the most advanced writing skills. Some children will wrongly think they do not need English, and will resist learning it at school. If a high standard of English is not

attained at school it is not a disaster for the individual, because people can develop skills later, if they see a need. There is a damaging idea in circulation that there is a critical age beyond which languages cannot be learnt. There might well be a critical age (round about 8 years) after which we cannot learn a *first* language, but as long as we have learnt at least one language in childhood, we can continue learning more languages all our lives. If a child does not learn a language at school, or does not learn it well, the language can be learnt or improved later, when, as an adult, the person realises that it is needed.

What is important is that a country's education system should try to give the opportunity to as many children as possible to attain a reasonable standard of English at school. The focus should be on oral and written comprehension, confidence in speaking, some skill in writing, and in taking pleasure in the learning and use of a language. There should be clarity about what aspects of Standard English matter and what aspects are less important, and that clarity should come from looking at how English is used. Children should not be 'corrected' for writing Standard English that a particularly strict teacher, syllabus creator, or examiner thinks is incorrect. English is not a dead classical language but a living language that is at work in the real world: all learners should be encouraged to be attentive to the English they see in use and should be able to learn from it. The focus of teaching and assessment should be on promoting Standard English as it is, and little attention should be paid to areas of disputed usage until the most advanceed levels of study. And it should never be forgotten that English is only one of the things learnt at school, and may not be the most important.

Countries also need to provide opportunities for the learning of English at all levels of education and for adults, to allow those who did not see the need earlier to develop English skills when they do need to. At the highest levels of education in English, it is necessary to foster professionalism in the writing of English and to promote editorial skills in English specialists.

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