WEBSITE REVIEW

Corpus of Misunderstandings from the Asian Corpus of English
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INTRODUCTION

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a field of study has been an interest of experts such as Seidlhofer, Jenkins, Firth, House, and Kirkpatrick to investigate further the features of Englishes spoken by the outer and expanding circles approximately since the mid-1990s. The implication of their studies are crucial to the language learning in those circles, and are beneficial for ELF users. The spoken language features investigated in that particular field ranges from the segmental to suprasegmental level. The main purpose of the investigation of these features is to help learners in that particular area be understood by the native speakers of English and other ELF users (intelligibility). When this purpose is not achieved, there most likely will be a misunderstanding between the participants which causes a communication breakdown. This specific subject in the field of ELF is the focus of *The Corpus of Misunderstandings from the Asian Corpus of English* website.

This website was created based on some studies of the creators and their project groups on misunderstanding occurrences when EFL users communicated. The analysis conducted was on the word and phrase levels. The main purposes of this website are to make the studies accessible to more people who are interested in the field and to provide an opportunity to listen to the data used in the studies (D. Deterding, personal communication, November 12, 2015). The data analysis is expected to be a significant contribution to an understanding of what causes misunderstandings in that particular context.

THE CREATORS OF THE WEBSITE

The Corpus of Misunderstandings from the Asian Corpus of English website is managed by David Deterding and Salbrina Sharbawi. Deterding is a professor in the faculty of arts and social sciences in the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He has contributed a lot in the field of World Englishes, particularly Asian Englishes such as Singapore, Chinese, and Brunei Englishes. His studies have been published in the forms of books, journal papers, and websites. His co-worker in developing this particular website, Sharbawi, is a senior lecturer in the same faculty of the same university. She has been working in the area between Sociolinguistics and Phonetics, known as Sociophonetics. Her interest in variations in World Englishes has been shown by her contribution in the field including her research findings which revealed the fact

that unlike Singapore English, Brunei English is less uniform. These two key people are parts of a bigger team which collects corpus for the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) data to provide examples of misunderstandings in the communication between EFL speakers in Asia.

THE CONTENT OF THE CORPUS

There are two main data sets in this website: The Brunei data and the ASEAN data. These two sets of data are parts of the corpus collected for the Asian Corpus of English. The Brunei data is gathered from group discussions involving at least three people and interviews between a Bruneian female and various other speakers from Asia. This data is being collected by the team of seven members, which is based at the UBD led by Sharbawi. The other set is the ASEAN data collected by prof. Andy Kirkpatrick in 2004 and 2005 located at the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (RELC) in Singapore. The data gathered from six groups of three or four from different background discussing about their experiences and impressions about Singapore. The duration of the discussion was 20 minute per session. The result of the study of misunderstanding conducted by Kirkpatrick and Deterding (2006) was published in the *World Englishes* journal entitled "Emerging South-East Asian Englishes and intelligibility". Another analysis focused on the communicative strategies adopted by the speakers in this data was performed by Kirkpatrick (2011) and published as a book chapter with the title "English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model".

THE WEBSITE CONTENT AND LAYOUT

Figure 1 is a screenshot from the website to provide illustration of how the website is organized. As shown, the heading of the website is "Corpus of Misunderstandings from the Asian Corpus of English" representing its content described previously in this paper. It has three menus on the top bar: Home, Transcription, and Contact Us. *Home* mainly describes the general purposes of the website including the information about the book in which the main study is elaborated, and links to the Asian Corpus of English main website. *Transcription* provides information about the transcription convention used both in the study and in the website. *Contact us* provides links to get more information about the key people (Deterding & Sharbawi) as well as their contact information. Frankly speaking, they were very responsive when contacted.

The sidebar consists of the data sets, Brunei and ASEAN, followed by their subcorpora. In the Brunei data set, there are nine pairs of interviews: China & Brunei, Hong Kong & Malaysia, Hong Kong & Taiwan, Indonesia & Malaysia, Indonesia & Taiwan, Japan & Brunei, Laos & Brunei, Nigeria & Brunei, and Taiwan & Malaysia. In each pair, there is a description of the participants' background (nationality and age), the context of how the data were gathered, and some acknowledgement. The list of misunderstanding examples within the session is provided on the left side. Navigating under each sample, the user of this website will get information about the nationality and age of the participants involved in the discussion and the context when the misunderstanding occurred. Additionally, the transcription and the audio of the conversation are also provided, enabling users of the website to read and listen to the data. It is important to

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highlight that under the transcribed conversation, there is a set of explanation on what actually caused misunderstanding (as shown in Figure 1). I think this is the most important part of this website as users can learn what was going on in the excerpt of negotiation of meaning.

The same organization is applied under the ASEAN data set. However, since the corpus was collected from group discussion, the menu of the subcorpora is named ASEAN Gp 1 to Gp 6 (Gp = group) instead of the participants' nationalities. The description of the location and time of the data collection as well as the participants' gender and nationality are also provided under each group.

Figure 1. The layout and sample content of the website.

EVALUATION

In this website, it is emphasized that "most of the conversations proceeded smoothly, without frequent breakdowns in communication. While we focus on misunderstandings here, we should remember that these were the exception, not the norm, in these interactions between speakers from the various ASEAN countries." (Deterding & Sharbawi, 2015). It indicates that the use of 'misunderstanding' goes broader that what it is expected. As stated by Björkman (2015), "Deterding adopts a rather broad definition of 'misunderstanding', which includes not only situations where something the speaker says is misinterpreted but also where something the speaker says is not understood by the listener." In addition to that, the studies did not only focus on when the 'misunderstanding' occurred, but also how it was dealt and avoided (Deterding, 2013). This process of analysis and the term used might potentially bring into different

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expectation and interpretation of the users when using the website. I am aware that the field of misunderstanding has been recognized in this field, but I think there should be an evaluation on whether the term matches what is analyzed and presented in this website.

Another thing to look at is the number of the participants involved in the studies and included in this website. It has a very little chance for the data to be claimed as representation of the Englishes of the participants' nationalities, as "it may have idiosyncratic patterns that may not occur in individual English varieties." (Deterding, 2013, p. 186). As a consequence, more participants to represent each country are needed. I believe that the use of technology would be beneficial to gather more data for this website improvement. As a cross-nations project, it is important to note that it needs a lot of parties and studies involved to enable the Englishes in this website more generalizable. Unfortunately, there are not recognized studies in this particular topic (D. Deterding, personal communication, November 12, 2015).

The last thing I would like to discuss about this website is in terms of its usefulness. As stated previously, the main purpose of this website is to give greater access to the data of some studies in South East Asian Englishes: Deterding (2013), Kirkpatrick (2011), and Kirkpatrick & Deterding (2006), indicating that its role is limited to be as a complement to those studies. Additionally, there is no indication that users can navigate and interact directly with the data to have concordances or conduct some newer corpus study. As a consequence, this website has very limited circle of users.

Regardless of the limitation of the website that I mentioned earlier, I am honored to be given a chance to evaluate this website. It gives me an opportunity to learn about studies conducted to investigate characteristics of the Englishses in South East Asia, including my home country, Indonesia. These studies are beneficial for researchers who are interested in this field so that they can contribute to the English language instruction in South East Asia. Their contribution will give better understanding to the English teachers in the region to help their students encounter potential constrains in learning English.

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