Marianne Hundt and Devyani Sharma (Eds.)


The volume deals with the linguistic aspects of the Indian Diaspora, the regional spread ranging here from Singapore, via Africa and the UK to the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Both primary and secondary diaspora contexts (in the UK and New Zealand) are covered.

Apart from Mesthrie (1991) and Wiebesiek (2011), very little research has been produced on the local contact variety of Indian English. This selection of articles brings together scholarly research on the use of English in the Indian Diaspora posing the following theoretical and methodological questions (Different diasporic situations for different outcomes?/Similarity of contact features and processes across diasporic situations/Types of responses to dialect contact relating to the degree of endonormative stabilisation of Asian Englishes?/The relations between the differences and our understanding of community structures, attitudinal orientations/Identity development and the link between the rate of change, adaptation, and the degree of transnational network maintenance).

Linguistic features such as phonetics, syntax and lexis are tackled.

Within variationist linguistics, four articles first deal with phonetic variation.

First, Leung and Deuber, in ‘Indo-Trinidadian speech: an investigation into a popular sytereotype surrounding speech’, question whether the fundamental frequency (F0) is a cue to distinguish ethnicity. Indo-Trinidadians are perceived as having high-pitched voices whereas Afro-Trinidadians are said to have low-pitched voices. Samples of both communities are modified and tested on listeners. It is thereby suggested that there exists an Indo-Trinidadian suprasegmental ethnolect and it is proven that Trinidadians rely on F0 to distinguish ethnicity. This can especially be applied to Indo-Trinidadian women whose pitch-range is clearly different. It is less obvious on male samples.

Farhana Alam and Jane Stuart-Smith present a sociophonetic study of /t/ in their article entitled ‘Identity, ethnicity and fine phonetic detail’. They deal with the phonological processes by which features are passed on through generations. In keeping with the research framework of Lawson (2011), Docherty and Foulkes (1999), they are concerned with phonetic characteristics being salient for a community. More precisely, they present an acoustic phonetic analysis of /t/ when used as the syllable-initial, in the speech of Pakistani heritage Glaswegian girls in inner-city secondary schools. Through an acoustic phonetic analysis, tokens of syllable-initial /t/ are extracted into Praat and four measures (the mean, the spread, the skew and the kurtosis) of the spectral energy are considered on a statistical level: they prove that fine phonetic variation is indexical of local ethnic identity.
Claudia Rathore studies the phonological variation across generations in her research entitled ‘East African Indian twice migrants in Britain’. Do the dynamics of dialect variation differ if one considers on the one hand double diaspora situations or second generations? This question is tackled by studying the variation in the production of postvocalic /r/ by first generation East African Indians in Leicester (whose use very much equals the rhoticity variable in Indian English) and by second-generation speakers (whose use is very similar to that of the East Midland speakers). Though twice migrant, the former have kept apart from African linguistic influence and their linguistic pattern is very much that of Indian English. This is accounted for by their recurrent ties with their home land and their schooling in Africa via imported South Asian teachers. As far as the difference between the first and the second generation goes, socioeconomic backgrounds are also factored in. The retention of the rhoticity by the first generation East African Indians can be linked to the fact that they have mainly been a working-class community whereas the second generation enjoys higher education and is employed in middle-class occupations.

In their study entitled ‘Sociophonetics and the Indian diaspora’, Rajend Mesthrie and Alida Chevalier deal with ‘the nurse vowel and other selected features in South African Indian English’. Besides considerations on the Indian English phonology (retroflexion, aspiration) giving indications of levelling and fudging of variables like aspiration of p t k, the authors follow a sociophonetic study showing internal sociolinguistic developments and innovations within the South African Indian English relating to age, gender and class. A detailed analysis of nurse vowel shows that young South African Indian English speakers move away from the L2 norms of the former generation, take on gender differences without necessarily adopting the variants used in the White South African English. As a matter of fact, middle class females have lower(-ed) nurse vowels (lower vowel height, F1) and fronted Nurse vowels (more vowel advancement, F2).

The two following studies are concerned by grammatical variation.

In their article entitled ‘Imperfectives in Singapore’s Indian community’, Jakob R.E. Leimburger and Lavanya Sankaran test the over-use of the –ing form as a marker of all imperfectives among 96 informants in Singapore coming from the Tamil, Malay and Chinese communities. Much more than the two other groups who tend to dismiss the inflection on statives and non-delimited habituals, the Tamils rate the use of –ing as acceptable. This can be understood by the fact that this over-extension reproduces the Tamil aspectual system where the marker kondiru is used to mark all imperfectives. The Tamils, though a minority representing 9% of the population, against 13% of Malays and 74% of Chinese, are a well-established ethnic group, both socially and economically, who use English as a home language and are likely to be linguistically