The role of English in ASEAN: implications for language pedagogy and policy with specific reference to Myanmar

By Andy Kirkpatrick

It is now well-attested and understood that the use of English as a lingua franca is a major, if not the major, role of English in today’s world (Seidhlofer 2011). In Asia alone, it has been estimated that there are nearly one billion multilingual users of English (Bolton and Graddol 2012). All ten countries comprising the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ratified the ASEAN Charter in February 2009. The Charter officially identifies English as the sole working language of the organization (Kirkpatrick 2010).

Using findings from recent research investigating data from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) (http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/ace/) I shall illustrate how English is being reshaped, both linguistically and culturally, by multilingual Asian users of English.

I shall then consider the implications of the development of English as a lingua franca in ASEAN for the teaching of English especially given that English now operates in many non-“Anglo-cultural” contexts in settings in which so-called native speakers are absent. The paper will present a number of proposals for a radical new way of teaching English in multilingual settings: the lingua franca approach. This discussion will encompass the role of English and other languages across the educational levels, including higher education. Myanmar will provide a specific context, as the proposer has been a member of a UNICEF-led team advising on language education policy for Myanmar.