John Platt and H. Weber. *English in Singapore and Malaysia: Status, features, functions.* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980.xix + 292 pp. 76 tables, 19 figures, 1 map, 8 plates.

Reviewed by Anne-Marie Smith
University of Papua New Guinea

Progress in sociolinguistics has so far come in the form of articles scattered amongst a variety of journals, or as books of readings which tend to republish those articles. Rare are the works of one author on one specific variety of English, besides Labov's and Trudgill's contributions. Platt and Weber's book does focus on one variety of English, the Singapore/Malaysian one, and illustrates through this example the principles of linguistic variation. This is a major contribution to sociolinguistics. Platt and Weber's study is to a large extent a fusion of the score (literally) of articles which Platt mainly has contributed to a score (literally again) of international journals. It is also set against the work of Tongue and Crewe who initiated studies on Singapore/Malaysian English and fully acknowledges their work while remaining critical and drawing only from their better suggestions. The book however does make a unit, yet it is a three-fold unit both in the sense suggested by the subtitle (Status, Functions, Features) and also because part of it is on Singapore English (SE), some of it is on Malaysian English while most of it is on both Singapore/Malaysian English (SME). A reader interested in Singapore English does not necessarily have to read the specific chapters on Malaysian English (ME). This does not really apply conversely as the reader would, I feel, be missing out on some of the valuable insights expounded in the Singapore English sections on features and functions of a variety of English in a country where English is the official language. The treatment of this is what makes this book so valuable. It thus has far-reaching implications for countries with similar circumstances, and particularly Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Papua New Guinea English (PNGE).

The first three chapters deal with the growth, development and spread of English and Chapter 7 with the status of English in the two countries. The last few chapters discuss, also for both countries, the implications of the existence of distinctive linguistic features and functions for Applied Linguistics (Ch. 10) and Language Teaching (Ch. 11), as well as the use of English in the media and in literature (Ch. 12 and 13 respectively). Features and functions are, however, handled independently for Singapore English (Ch. 4-6) and for Malaysian English (Ch. 8-9). This apparent division makes for a concise and practical compartmentalisation of information throughout the book. The addition to the text of a set of photographs and a glossary of linguistic terms makes reading readily approachable, although the inclusion of, in all, 97 tables/diagrams somewhat tempers this laudable attempt. Of the two varieties of English dealt with in the book, the Singapore sub-variety appears to be the one closest to the variety we have in PNG, and this is the one I shall concentrate on. English in PNG not only has in common with English in Singapore the fact that it is the official language but also, as we shall see, a striking number of linguistic features.

Platt and Weber set about to demonstrate "the amount of system to be observed within Singapore English and the increasing similarity of Singapore English as spoken by those of different ethnic backgrounds." (p. 46). From the start the authors get away from a "random error" interpretation of the variations which has been put forward by at least one set of writers in PNG (e.g. Smithies and Holzknecht (1981: 28) suggest that L2 speakers of English in PNG are "haphazard" in their error patterns). The authors prefer a model based on variables. The variety spoken there, they establish, slides along a continuum, and speakers of SE can be placed along a scale according to a range of linguistic features. They also show that within this continuum each speaker, besides the fact that he or she can be placed along an "axis which is related to educational level and socioeconomic background" (46), is also capable of sliding from one position to the other. They further explain that, depending on the speaker, there is more or less

flexibility for sliding. The idea of sociolects and switching from one to the other is definitely a principle which would be of great help for understanding the Papua New Guinea situation.

Two basic sociolinguistic principles are illustrated and underlie the authors' philosophy of approach. First, variability of usage is reviewed in reference to the work on Black English by Labov and also in parallel with the work of Trudgill on Norwich English speakers (47-48). The most interesting outcome of this is the striking similarity of principled language use between native speakers and second language speakers. Secondly, the authors also raise repeatedly through the book the issue of norms and standards and make the major point that "the application of the term sub-standard is related to haphazard investigations and a complete disregard of the whole spectrum of a speech community and of the formality-informality range at the disposal of many speakers" (48).

The area of features is perhaps the one that compares best with the situation in PNG. Features of Singapore English are looked at separately under three headings - Pronunciation, Syntax, and Lexis, - in Chs. 4-6. When Platt and Weber discuss the features of Singapore English pronunciation, they focus on the diagnostic features, "i.e. features by which it may be recognized as SE" (49). These include the reduction of consonant clusters, the treatment of initial dental fricatives, and the shift in vowels which is said to be both quantitative and qualitative. There are also sections on stress, syllabic prominence and intonation, in which the principle of primary stress shifting is said to follow a definite tendency.

One interesting link between phonology and syntax is also observable in PNG English: "The non-marking of verbs that require a final -d or -t for the past tense markers is definitely related to pronunciation features in SE, i.e. reduction of final consonant clusters" (61). For PNG English, this has also been shown to be true (Smithies and Holzknecht 1981:12) and it is so to the extent that the verb form in

PNGE: *It happen yesterday*

can not only be unmarked orally but often is unmarked in writing too.

However, Platt and Weber go further in their interpretation of low marking in verb forms in that, they say, it does not ONLY relate to phonology but to "the differences between the various categories of verbs themselves" (61). They show that the abovementioned low marking feature is only ONE of the four types of low marking and that the four main categories appear in a fixed order in terms of frequency of low marking. An example of low marking that is not affected by consonant cluster avoidance is the one that requires a vowel change (e.g. break, tear, come) (59).

For this low marking feature the authors give two possible reasons. The first one suggested is the overgeneralisation interpretation (51), which is related to both interlanguage theories and to theories of first language acquisition. The other reason suggests first language interference (61), both phonological (cluster simplification) and syntactic (tenses). Theories of interlanguage and also of language universals might have more to offer for interpretation of these features than the first language interference theories, and Platt and Weber show this themselves when they establish four categories of verbs. I would have preferred, however, that they had given less illustrative prominence to the first language interference interpretation. The technique which is used of parallelling a SE example with an example of Hokkien or other background languages runs into the danger of convincing the reader that the speaker tends to follow a structural parallelism between the two languages, whereas the reader needs to be shown convincingly that to a large extent these changes are systematic and related to features stemming from the English language itself.

A very convincing section is the one on the verb to be used as Copula/Aux before _-ing_ constructions and the demonstration that its "non-realization or variant realization...depends to a great extent on syntactic environment, i.e. what type of construction follows the verb" (62-63). Platt and Weber show very clearly that we are faced with an implicational scale which is linked not only with

socioeducational background but also with syntactic environment "-with the pre-Adj. position being the one where the copula is used least of all "(64). Although again SE examples are being parallelled to background language examples, the authors make it clear here that they do not subscribe to a first language interference interpretation, as they state "it would be wrong to trace all characteristics of SE to the local background languages as every interlanguage and every emerging new variety develops its own system, which is to some extent independent of the background languages" (65). The study is reminiscent of Labov's work in two ways, first because of the model which is obviously a useful one to apply, and also because of the way in which the copula realization does seem to be linked with the English syntactic environment.

The section which I think is the most original in the book is the one on aspect. Here again the authors make use of studies on Black English and of work on the origin of creoles by Bickerton, strikingly suggesting that there is a habitual, completive, and irrealis use of auxiliary or adverbial markers in SE. This is very similar to PNG English usage. One would even be tempted to expand the list of SE examples with PNGE ones:

PNGE *'She use to work in town.'* to mean
Standard British English (SBrE) *'She works in town (now).'*
PNGE *'Already she came.'* to mean
SBrE: *'She has (already) arrived here.'*

These and the sections on the NP very clearly identify areas where research should be quite productive and enlightening. The section on structural devices describes very thoroughly various principles of usage, the most significant one being the technique of focusing, and the related one of pronoun copying as in

SE *'Some customer, they disapprove if you speak to them English.'* (74) which could be compared with

PNGE *'One man, he was not a good man.'* (Smith 1978: 34)

In the section on Lexis the point is made again that there are more parallels across varieties of English than one would expect.

"Words and expressions are used in SE differently from SBrE, although not always differently from other established varieties of English" (82).

Tendencies are isolated here again within the principle of variability. It is interesting to see "alphabets", "schooling", and "matured" being used in SE similarly to the way they are used in PNGE. Strikingly enough, one difference in usage between SE and PNGE is based on a similarity of principle; compare:

SE *'Sometime, he get(s) odd job(s).'*

PNGE *'See you sometimes.'*

The parallels are, however, stronger than the differences and this is where the book does illustrate some universal principles of the types isolated by Bickerton (1981) in *Roots of Language.*

I am particularly interested in the suggestion that School English has been fossilised and I feel this hypothesis needs documenting. Platt and Weber's study of English in Singapore and Malaysian is altogether a significant and original contribution to (socio-)linguistics.

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Reviewed by R.L. Brandson
University of Manitoba

We are once again indebted to Graham Scott for a major work on a Papuan language. This is the second published dictionary of a language of the East-Central Family, East New Guinea Highlands Stock, and will likely soon be followed by several more dictionaries of other languages of this family.[1]

There are approximately 3,600 entries in the Fore-English section of the dictionary, but this is not an accurate indication of the number of lexical items represented, as some 60% of the entries are duplicate listings of variant forms. By subtracting the number of duplicate listings from the total, we can estimate that there are some 2,400 lexical items represented.

Most of the duplicate entries are of Northern and Southern dialect variants, such as:

nayawawe N; nawaye S *(my) tail*'[2]

pumpu'me nkinane N; obebe inane S *'weed type'*

Others are not coded for dialect, and are apparently variants which are found in both dialects. Scott does not indicate whether or not the choice of forms reflects differences in register, speech habits

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[1] The other published dictionary of an East-Central Family language is G.L. Renck's *Yagaria Dictionary (PL* C-37, 1977), based on the Move dialect of Yagaria. John Haiman's dictionary of Hua will likely appear in 1983. My own dictionary of Gende will be several years in preparation. Linguists are presently working on at least eight other East-Central languages, so it may be reasonably hoped that the next decade will see several more grammars and dictionaries of these languages in print.

[2] I have not indicated accent in the Fore examples, and have long 'a' with 'a:' rather than 'aa'. Otherwise I have used Scott's orthographic system.

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