

Editorial

2019 marks the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and the theme of this year's International Mother Language Day in February was 'Indigenous languages matter for development, peace building and reconciliation'. Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, pointed out on the occasion of this year's International Mother Language Day that 'indigenous peoples number some 370 million and their languages account for the majority of the approximately 7,000 living languages on Earth' (Azoulay, 2019).

Since the 17th century, when British colonialism brought traders and settlers to the 'New World' (i.e., North America and the Caribbean), English has been in an intricate relationship with indigenous languages through language contact. English borrowed a considerable number of words from languages with which it came in contact during the colonial expansion, and many loanwords in modern English originated etymologically from indigenous languages. As far as the Antipodes are concerned, for instance, the latest edition of the Australian National Dictionary includes more than 500 words from over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, such as *akudjura* 'a bush tomato', *bunji* 'a mate' and *tjukurpa* 'the Dreaming'. There are also Māori words used in New Zealand English, such as *Hangi* 'a traditional feast', *iwi* 'tribe', *kiwi* 'a native flightless bird' and *waka* 'canoe, vehicle'. Across the Atlantic Ocean in the 'New World', there are also words commonly used in English that were originally coined by indigenous peoples, such as *abalone*, *avocado*, *canoe*, *Eskimo*, *guacamole*, *hammock*, *kayak*, *opossum* and *squash*.

The significance of 'indigenous' words in modern English not only lies in their lexical richness and variety, but also the embedded indigenous and scientific knowledge represented by these terms. Terms from indigenous languages remind us that these cultures developed indigenous astronomy and mythology,

kinship systems, philosophies, worldviews and multicultural practices. Indigenous knowledge is often not valued in Western culture because it is not deemed to be 'scientific', but this is a definition that does not fairly assess the contributions of indigenous knowledge or science. It is worth knowing that the International Astronomical Union (IAU) named the fifth star of the Southern Cross officially as *Ginan*, a name originating from Wardaman, a language of aboriginal people of the Northern Territory of Australia. And *Ginan* is indeed the very word that Wardaman aboriginal people have used for thousands of years to refer to the smallest star of the Southern Cross. A similar case in point is recent protests in Mauna Kea, Hawai'i, where native Hawaiians have led protests against the building of another observatory, the proposed Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT). Protestors have been portrayed in the media as promoting indigenous Hawaiian culture at the expense of 'science', but native Hawaiians have counter-argued that 'science' – and especially the observation of the stars – has long been an integral part of native Hawaiian culture.

In light of the ever growing uses of English as a lingua franca and continuing influences on Englishes from outside their territories of use, e.g., American, Jamaican or Nigerian English influence on Indian or Kenyan English (cf. Mair, 2013), English today is increasingly perceived as a translanguaging practice and a dynamic vehicle of multiculturalism alongside indigenous languages with age-old knowledge developed throughout thousands of years. As we come to the end of the year, it is time for us all to acknowledge indigenous languages, to develop awareness of the multilingual and multicultural nature of the English language today, and to do much better in the future.

In this issue authors explore the features of English as an international language, such as the features of Chinese English (and the attending attitudes toward those features) as they appear in

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a CCTV news interview, or the use of *leh* as a sentence-final particle in Singapore English. Punctuation takes the centre stage in this issue with a corpus analysis of how English punctuation may be changing, as well as discussion of the 'intrusive hyphen'. Other issues considered include the factors that influence grammaticality judgements of gender-neutral language, as well as new ways of conceptualising English grammar.

References

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The editors
