UNIVERSITY OF
FORWARD
THINKING
WESTMINSTER

WestminsterResearch
http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch

Introduction

Linn, Andrew and Ahn, Elise S.

This is the author version of the following article: Linn, Andrew and Ahn, Elise S. 2021. Introduction. World Englishes. Advanced online publication, DOI:10.1111/weng.12551, which has been published in final form at:

https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12551.

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving.

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Introduction

Andrew Linn[1] | Elise S. Ahn[2]

[1] University of Westminster, London, UK
[2] University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA

Correspondence
Andrew Linn, University of Westminster, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 309 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW UK
Email: a.linn@westminster.ac.uk

Elise S. Ahn, University of Wisconsin–Madison International Division, 254 Bascom Hall, 500 Lincoln Dr., Madison, WI 53706 USA
Email: elise.ahn@wisc.edu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of the authors for their contributions to this special issue, as well as the anonymous reviewers who provided thoughtful feedback for the different articles. A number of the articles in this special issue were first presented at a one-day workshop in London in July 2019 focused on the *Changing reality of English in Central Asia*. The workshop included studies of English and Englishes from several applied and theoretical perspectives and across a range of countries and resulted in the proposal to the editors of *World Englishes* of what would become the present volume. The workshop was funded from a grant from the UK Research and Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund at the University of Westminster.

Abstract
This brief introduction opens with an overview of the region of Central Asia, its constituent countries and a discussion of how they do or do not constitute a discrete region, historically, politically or linguistically. The introduction goes on to note previous work on Englishes in the region before providing an overview of the contents of the special issue, how the articles are organised, the key themes arising from them and some potential avenues for further work.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The five 'core' Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) have a total population of 73 million across an area of four million km^2. The Republic of Kazakhstan dwarfs the other countries of the region with an area of 2.7 million km^2 compared with Tajikistan's 143,000 km^2. Population-wise, Uzbekistan has 33.5 million people while Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan comprise fewer than seven million each. While it is tempting from the outside to view Central Asia as a defined entity, it is clear that the individual modern countries are different in scale from each other, and their historical and linguistic identities are likewise far from uniform. However, across the region, there is a common commitment to English language acquisition which is seen as

instrumental to establishing new international relations. The justification for the shift from Cyrillic to Latin orthographies in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Linn, 2017) has been a desire to integrate more closely with the international community via an alphabet deemed to be more familiar (begging the question: ‘familiar to whom?’), and the official language policy in both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is one of trilingualism (titular language—Russian—English). Across the region, the relationship with Englishes and with the wider world is multi-faceted, shifting and also under-explored in the world Englishes literature.

Language policy in Central Asia can be seen as a barometer for political allegiances which remain complex for historical, economic, and geopolitical reasons. For example, while EU aid in the region totals a modest €1 billion, China has invested €22,5 billion in Central Asia since the start of the Belt and Road Initiative (Sahajpal & Blockmans, 2019). And in the last 30 years, the five Central Asian republics have been undergoing dynamic processes of socio-cultural-political change, which has driven significant reforms in their respective language and education policies. In terms of scholarship, language policy and planning research in the 1990s and early 2000s focusing on Central Asia—that is, first and second wave post-Soviet sociolinguistics and sociology of language research—often focused on language policy, politics, and planning efforts along with language revitalisation processes following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Pavlenko, 2013). More recently, research has focused on the instantiation of nation-state language ideologies vis-à-vis language revitalisation initiatives with little to no attention focused on how the role of other languages like English has been changing and/or emerging (Bahry et al., 2017).

The rise of English-medium instruction (EMI)—particularly in higher education (HE)—is a global phenomenon with the majority of the literature focusing on Europe (Dimova, Hultgren, & Jensen, 2015; Henriksen, Holmen, & Kling, 2019) and South-East Asia (Barnard & Hasim, 2018; Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2017; Zhao & Dixon, 2017). This special issue grew out of a project on EMI policy in Uzbek higher education (Linn et al., 2020) and the associated realisation that there was little research into the changing use of and attitudes towards English in the region more broadly. This has been shifting recently with the emergence of more EMI universities and the focus on issues like teacher education and identity (Agbo & Pak, 2017; Goodman & Abdimanapova, 2020; Goodman & Tastanbek, 2020; Karabassova, 2018, 2021; Karabassova & Isidro, 2020; Osman & Ahn, 2016).

However, examining the role of English more broadly in the region is important because, while in all five republics the language of the titular nationality is the state language, and Russian is the *de jure* or *de facto* language of wider communication, English has become positioned as the language of internationalisation (and often synonymously, also as the language of modernisation). Moreover, since national commitments to internationalisation are underlyingly motivated by political interests and ideologies, English may also become a proxy for liberalising governments as in the case of Uzbekistan (Government of Uzbekistan, 2018). Subsequently, the changing positionality of English (as well as other languages) provides one lens onto a better understanding of the shifting contours of the geo-politics of Central Asia. An example would be Brooke Bolander’s (2016) work examining the role and function of English in the context of Khorog, Tajikistan and the social, political, and religious complexities connected to English language policies in this region.

Four of the five countries—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—were Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) from 1924 with the Kazakh SSR being formally

constituted as part of the Soviet Union in 1936. While the Soviet definition of ‘Middle Asia’ (*Srednyaya Azia*) did not include the Kazakh SSR, when the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the leaders of the four other new nations agreed that Kazakhstan should be part of the new Central Asia, symbolically moving away from the Soviet past towards a new regional future (Glenn, 1999, p. 103). And although the new independent nations were constructed according to Soviet ethnographic, political and administrative principles, leading to the ‘patent absurdity of some of the territorial realignments’ (Roy, 2011, p. 62), the Soviet republics became the blueprint for independent nationhood post-1991. However, there are no contributions in this special issue which focus on Turkmenistan. While there are scholars writing about the Turkmen context, scholarship in and on this country remains scarce (Ahn & Jensen, 2016; Clement & Kataeva, 2018; Linn & Shrestha, 2021; Sartor, 2010).

While the core countries of the region have self-identified as the ‘New Central Asia’, the scope of Central Asia has been subject to a number of other definitions. Roy (2011) noted that the concept of Central Asia is at once broad and specific but that ‘if we analyse the area in terms of cultural space, then Central Asia in its broadest sense is the area of Turco-Persian civilisation which was the crucible of languages and cultures from Istanbul to Delhi’ (pp. 1-2). Adopting a longer historical view, Dani et al. (1992-2005) included Afghanistan and Mongolia in the classification of Central Asia using the nomadic peoples who traversed the region as the point of departure (see Figures 1 and 2 below). More recently, these countries also have the shared experience of being impacted by Soviet expansionism and continue to grapple with the vestiges of its influence. Thus, in understanding that these geopolitical borders were imposed on ethnolinguistic communities that preceded them—which continue to inform and shape opportunities and issues of socio-economic access—we adopt this expanded view of Central Asia in this volume.

FIGURE 1 Map of the Caucasus and Central Asia

(Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Caucasus_and_Central_ Asia_-_Political_Map.jpg)

Figure 2. Map including an expanded view of Central Asia. Retrieved from https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/eurasia-pol-2006.jpg

World Englishes (WE) provides a robust framework through which to critically reflect on the role of English in the region, with its acknowledgement of the multi-faceted motivations and the complexity behind engaging with the language in emergent Expanding Circle contexts (Bolton, 2006; Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2006). To date, the journal, *World Englishes*, has published one article on WE in the region, specifically Uzbekistan (Hasanova, 2007). By expanding the literature to include all 15 states of the former Soviet Union, one finds more research (Russia—Gritsenko & Laletina, 2016; Proshina, 2019; Ustinova, 2005; Moldova—Ciscel, 2003). However, there remains ample room for greater intellectual engagement. Consequently, looking at the role of English in this region through a world Englishes lens provides insight into the contours of the dynamic internal political context of the Central Asian republics, the structural residues of the Soviet legacy in various policy and intellectual domains, the comprehensive project of nation-state building, and increasing pressures to navigate the global economy. More broadly, the emergent ways in which English language policy, planning, and practices are being realised in this region also point to the limitations of utilising a WE lens as noted by scholars arguing for new or augmented paradigms (Bolton, Graddol, & Meierkord, 2011; Dovchin, Sultana, & Pennycook, 2016; Tupas, 2020; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

2 | THE SCOPE OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE ON ENGLISHES IN CENTRAL ASIA

As already established, the linguistic landscape across the region is a complex and shifting one, and we have already noted one of the most recent developments in language policy and practice, namely the upsurge in EMI in the higher education sector. The eight contributions in this special issue utilise various theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches which have been the focus of several recent special issues of *World Englishes*—translanguaging (Jenks & Lee, 2020) and digital media (Lee, 2020). This special issue of the journal further contributes to world Englishes scholarship by providing empirically informed research into diverse formal and informal language use contexts. Contributions also examine the positionality of English through a language policy lens and how this type of language ideology is then marketed to the public and the potential ramifications. Thus, the articles in this special issue—when taken together—provide a more nuanced perspective of the sociolinguistic reality of English in Central Asia than has previously been presented in the literature.

Drawing on surveys and focus group interviews, Ahn and Smagulova focus on language choices and attitudes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan by examining how English factors into people's language choices (either for themselves or for their family members). Utilising the concept of 'language as pure potential' (Park, 2015) the authors conclude that given (and despite) the investment in language policy and planning activities by the governments of both countries, English language competency broadly has not substantively shifted in either country. This then raises the question of 'who has benefited the most from the prioritisation of English throughout the education system in these countries?' Hasanova examines the growing ubiquitous presence of English in Uzbekistan's urban linguistic landscape by examining the way English is utilised in signage. Examining both historical and contemporary signage, she examines the connection between liberalisation of the market and the increasing use of English. More broadly, she concludes that the appeal to English in market settings reflects the way English is seen as the language of opportunity. However, in examining the commodification of English, this observation reinforces the question raised by Ahn and Smagulova, of what types of opportunity and for whom?

Utilising digital ethnography, Tankosić and Dovchin examine how online language users use English. They argue that current theoretical paradigms in sociolinguistics like translanguaging and code-switching do not adequately capture people's authentic linguistic practices. Instead, building on the notion of 'relocalisation', they argue their findings make the case for the emergence of 'Monglish'. Coleman's article on Afghanistan situates English in the broader socio-political context impacting the country in the 20th century. The article draws from extensive work done with the British Council in collaboration with a number of local partners to examine the complex and varied roles of and for English in the Afghanistan context. Because Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviet Union was distinct from that of the former SSRs—even Mongolia was arguably a satellite of the USSR—the way that its titular languages and language of wider communication like English are positioned is different. Coleman observes that because of the history of conflicts, English does not hold out the same promises of opportunity for Afghanistan as in the other Central Asian republics.

Bezborodova and Radjabzade's article presents findings from a study based on an earlier research project led by Andrew Linn focusing on the changing status of English

across Europe (Linn, 2016). The project presented by Bezborodova and Radjabzade draws from initial work on EMI policy and practice at a private university in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and then was later expanded to include higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The study involved 85 faculty members and 330 student participants in focus group interviews and a total of 782 survey respondents from 58 different higher education institutions. Using the ROAD-mapping framework, Bezborodova and Radjabzade examine key stakeholder—faculty and students—attitudes toward EMI (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). Among the various findings, they conclude that as EMI becomes operationalised in universities, participants' responses point to substantive misalignments between student expectations and teachers' realities (teaching materials, resources and capacity). Thus, without examination of how language-in-education implementation processes are going, just simply implementing EMI may potentially exacerbate issues of education inequity and inequality that already exist in the higher education system.

Djuraeva focuses on English within the frame of multilingualism and the notion of 'nation branding'. Through phenomenological interviews conducted with 60 university-aged participants in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, she argues that state-backed campaigns around nation-branding underpinned by different language ideologies are powerful tools in instilling a particular sense of linguistic ownership. Yet, in the two countries, respondents prioritised different facets of language. In Uzbekistan, Dzjuraeva's respondents saw English through an opportunistic lens offering more promise than their local languages. In contrast, among her Kazakhstani participants, she argues that English was a part of their civic identity because of the linkage the government has constructed between a civic identity and the trilingual language policy. Zhunussova, Cortazzi and Jin focus on Kazakhstani educators, their roles and idealised notions of 'model teachers'. Using an ecological framework of English language teaching and learning, Zhunussova et al. examine the Kazakhstani model teacher and situates them within the broader teaching environment by taking into consideration five meta-functions of teachers. Through interviews conducted with 100 students and 43 English language educators from six cities, the authors use those meta-functions as an organising principle for analysing the language attitudes of the different participants. Similar to Bahry (2016), Zhunussova et al.'s use of an ecological framework for English language teaching and learning provides a different vision for how and where language is situated in the Central Asian context.

Finally, Tyson and Abdysheva draw from a multi-year teacher training and textbook development initiative to increase the quality of English language education in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, moving beyond policy research by focusing on a survey conducted with 177 respondents and site visits, Tyson and Abdysheva demonstrate the myriad of challenges experienced in secondary schools. These include the diminishing status of teachers more systemically and the lack of resources in schools and by teachers. By situating these language reforms—including EMI in compulsory education—Tyson and Abdysheva highlight the ways that policy changes are situated in material realities that impact the implementation of language polices. The Kyrgyzstan case also demonstrates how reform itself can become the premise for reform and the implications of this in the broader context of under-funded public primary and secondary education.

The eight articles in this volume fall into two equal sections. The first four articles address the changing roles and manifestation of English(es) across society, giving an overview of some of the drivers of change in the region. This initial section opens with a

comparative study (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) before moving on to consider issues affecting the individual states of Uzbekistan, Mongolia and Afghanistan. The second section turns attention to the education sector with two comparative articles on the experience of English in higher education, followed by a pair of articles on English in general education (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan respectively). Three articles look at each of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, while three further countries are considered in just one article. This already points to a need for further work to help understand and inform the role and status of English and Englishes in particular countries, notably Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In terms of regional coverage, it would be of undoubted benefit to researchers and local education ministries alike to dig down into the Englishes of more focused regions too (for example, Karakalpakstan).

One key theme may be found throughout all eight articles—emerging from many of these papers is what happens or does not happen at the intersection between the aims and policies of governments and institutions on the one hand and the experiences and hopes of language learners and users on the other. It is this intersection and interaction between global and international processes and geopolitics, the articulated ideologies and national agendas established by governments, and the choices that are available for individuals that the context in which individuals may exercise their agency is created. What Braj Kachru did in establishing WE was to form a framework to help make sense of the geopolitical and socioeconomic dynamic between the supranational-national-local and the agency and creativity that language users demonstrate with a focus on English(es). Conceptually then, as the field of sociolinguistics integrates 'new' ways of articulating asymmetric power dynamics as seen in language policy and planning efforts, the Central Asian case provides complex cases for exploration (Bolton et al., 2011; Park, 2015; Tupas, 2020; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015). Pragmatically, as governments and institutions seek to implement new policies on language status and acquisition, a research-informed understanding of how Central Asian Englishes or English in Central Asia plays out amongst their learners and users will be crucial, particularly in relation to broader questions of inequity, inequality and access.

REFERENCES

Agbo, S. A., & Pak, N. (2017). Globalization and educational reform in Kazakhstan: English as the language of instruction in graduate programs. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *26*, 14-43.

Ahn, E., & Jensen, T. (2016). An autoethnographic look at language education in Turkmenistan. In E. Ahn & J. Smagulova (Eds.), *Language change in Central Asia* (pp. 59-85). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bahry, S. (2016). Societal multilingualism and personal plurilingualism in Pamir Tajikistan's complex language ecology. In E. Ahn & J. Smagulova (Eds.), *Language change in Central Asia* (pp. 125-148). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bahry, S., Niyozov, S., Shamatov, D., Ahn, E., & Smagulova, J. (2017). Bilingual education in Central Asia. In O. Garcia, A. Lin, & S. May (Eds.), *Bilingual and multilingual education* (pp. 1-22). Basel: Springer International.

Barnard, R., & Hasim, Z. (Eds.). (2018). *English medium programmes: Perspectives from South East Asian universities*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.

Bolander, B. (2016). English language policy as ideology in multilingual Khorog, Tajikistan. In E. Barakos & J. W. Unger (Eds.), *Discursive approaches to language policy* (pp. 253-274). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bolton, K. (2006). World Englishes today. In B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru, & C. L. Nelson (Eds.), *The handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 240–269). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Bolton, K., Graddol, D., & Meierkord, C. (2011). Towards developmental world Englishes. *World Englishes*, *30*, 459-480.

Ciscel, M. H. (2002). Linguistic opportunism and English in Moldova. *World Englishes*, *21*, 403-419.

Clement, V., & Kataeva, Z. (2018). The transformation of higher education in Turkmenistan: Continuity and change. In J. Huisman, A. Smolentseva, & I. Froumin (Eds.), *25 years of transformations of higher education systems in post-Soviet countries* (pp. 387-405). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dafouz, E., & Smit, U. (2020). *ROAD-MAPPING English medium instruction in the internationalized university*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dani, A. H., Masson, V. M., Harmatta, J., Puri, B. N., Etemadi, G. F., & Litvinskiĭ, B. A. (Eds.). (1992–2005). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Paris: UNESCO.

Dimova, S., Hultgren, A. K., & Jensen, C. (Eds.). (2015). *English-medium instruction in European higher education*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Dovchin, S., Sultana, S., & Pennycook, A. (2016). Unequal translingual Englishes in the Asian peripheries. *Asian Englishes*, *18*(2), 92-108.

Galloway, N., Kriukow, J., & Numajiri, T. (2017). *Internationalisation, higher education and the growing demand for English: An investigation into the English medium of instruction (EMI) movement in China and Japan*. London: British Council.

Glenn, J. (1999). *The Soviet legacy in Central Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goodman, B., & Abdimanapova, L. (2020). Alignment, challenge, and agency: EFL teachers' perspectives on trilingual education and curriculum reform in Kazakhstan. *Asian EFL Journal, 24*(6), 73-102.

Goodman, B., & Tastanbek, S. (2020). Making the shift from a codeswitching to a translanguaging lens in English language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, *55*, 29-53.

Government of Uzbekistan (GOU). (2018). Education sector plan 2019–2023: Uzbekistan. Retrieved from https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/education-sector-plan-2019-2023-uzbekistan

Gritsenko, E., & Laletina, A. (2016). English in the international workplace in Russia. *World Englishes*, *35*, 440-456.

Hasanova, D. (2007). Broadening the boundaries of the Expanding Circle: English in Uzbekistan. *World Englishes*, *26*, 276-290.

Henriksen, B., Holmen, A., & Kling, J. (2019). *English medium instruction in multilingual universities: Academics' voices from the Northern European context*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.

Jenks, C., & Lee J. W. (2020). Translanguaging and world Englishes. *World Englishes*, *39*, 218-221.

Kachru, B., Kachru, Y., Nelson, C. (2006). Introduction: The world of world Englishes. In B. B. Kachru, Y. Kachru, & C. L. Nelson (Eds.), *The handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 1-15). Malden: Blackwell.

Karabassova, L. (2018). Teachers' conceptualization of content and language integrated learning (CLIL): Evidence from a trilingual context. *International Journal of Bilingual*

Education and Bilingualism, Latest Articles. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1550048
Karabassova, L. (2021). English-medium education reform in Kazakhstan: Comparative study of educational change across two contexts in one country. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, Latest Articles. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2021.1884436
Karabassova, L., & Isidro, X. S. (2020). Towards translanguaging in CLIL: A study on teachers' perceptions and practices in Kazakhstan. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, Latest Articles. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1828426
Lee, J. (2020). Digital communication, social media, and Englishes. *World Englishes*, *39*, 2-6.
Linn, A. (2016). *Investigating English in Europe: Contexts and agendas*. Boston/Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Linn, A. (2017, November 22). Kazakhstan is changing its alphabet: Here's why. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/kazakhstan-is-changing-its-alphabet-heres-why-87466
Linn, A., & Shrestha, P. (2021). *Current practice in English medium education in higher education (HE): Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Nepal and Turkmenistan*. London: British Council. In press.
Linn, A., Bezborodova, A., & Radjabzade, S. (2020). Tolerance and control: Developing a university language policy in Uzbekistan. *Sociolinguistica, 34*, 217-237.
Osman, S., & Ahn, E. (2016). Navigating change: Kazakhstani English language teachers' responses to multi-scalar education reform. In P. Ng & E. Boucher (Eds.), *English language teaching: Teacher agency and policy response*. New York: Routledge.
Park, J. S. (2016). Language as pure potential. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *37*, 453-466.
Pavlenko, A. (2013). Multilingualism in post-Soviet successor states. *Language and Linguistic Compass*, *7*, 262-271.
Proshina, Z. G. (2019). Elaborating on the Expanding Circle, *World Englishes*, *38*, 233-244.
Roy, O. (2011). *The new Central Asia: Geopolitics and the birth of nations*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris.
Sahajpal, M., & Blockmans, S. (2019). The new EU strategy on Central Asia: Collateral benefit? *Centre for European Policy Studies*. Retrieved from https://www.ceps.eu/the-new-eu-strategy-on-central-asia/
Sartor, V. (2010). Teaching English in Turkmenistan. *English Today*, *26*(4), 29-36.
Tupas, R. (2020). Decentering language: Displacing Englishes from the study of Englishes. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *17*, 228-245.
Tupas, R., & Rubdy, R. (2015). Introduction: From world Englishes to unequal Englishes. In R. Tupas (Ed.), *Unequal Englishes* (pp. 1-17). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ustinova, I. P. (2005). English in Russia. *World Englishes*, *24*, 239-252.
Zhao, J., & Dixon, L. Q. (Eds.). (2017). *English-medium instruction in Chinese universities: Perspectives, discourse and evaluation*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge.