

Seeing English in Asia from Multicultural Language and Intercultural Literacy Perspectives: Indonesian Perspectives

Arham. M

University of Muhammadiyah Gresik

arham_bayao@yahoo.com

Abstract: The majority of Asian countries nowadays recognize English as an indispensable language not only for intranational as well as international communication, they are increasingly committed to strengthening and improving English language teaching (ELT). In parts of Asia where English serves as an official language and ELT expands and succeeds, people start speaking English among themselves. Wherever this happens, a set of indigenous patterns develop, the kind of patterns people find easier to handle. The same situation can develop in "English as an international language" countries, like Indonesia where English serves as foreign/international language. Indonesia needs to fully understand the aspects of present-day English if they try to deal with their various ramifications. One important issue is diversity management. This paper tries to observe and argues that a plausible way of managing the multiculturalism or varieties of English especially in Asian country is not standardization but more on intercultural literacy.

Keywords: English in Asia, Multicultural, Intercultural Literacy

1. Introduction

Most of Asian people agree that English as international language or a global language and it is very important nowadays. When we say this, do we really understand what it means? This is a profoundly important question we have to ask ourselves in Asia now in view of the "developing Indonesia with English abilities" initiatives introduced by the governments few decades since its independence.

English is unique, functionally and structurally quite different from other languages of the world [1]. Functionally speaking, English has conspicuously spread among non-native speakers as a sizable number of Asian, African, Pacific, and other countries designate it as their official, associate official, or working language. In view of the situation, millions of students are learning English as a language for wider communication including students in Indonesia. According to a survey in 1999, Asian people unanimously consider English as the most useful language for world-wide communication,[2].

From an Indonesian point of view, English is considered as the most important foreign language to be used globally and not to use only with Americans, the British, or any other native speakers of English. But also English is the language for them to use with Chinese, Koreans, Bruneians, Thais, Malaysians, Singaporeans, and other Asians. It is the language for us to use with Europeans, Africans, Arabians, South Americans, and many others. That English has become an international language means that it has become a language for multinational communication

Diagram 1

Two Major Characteristics of Contemporary English

1. **Global Spread: Internationalization of English**
2. **Development of Distinct Varieties: Diversification of English**

Structurally speaking, as the spread of English progresses, English is bound to reflect a diversity of disparate cultures. Importantly, non-native speakers are taking advantage of this additional language and are exploring new dimensions of English usage, phonetically, lexically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically [3]. Since no language is used to its fullest extent by its native speakers, there is always much room left for non-native speakers to exploit it in their unique ways. As a matter of fact, they are using English in non-Anglo-American cultural contexts. Actually, when Indonesian speaks English with Singaporeans or Malaysians, there is no room for American or British culture. It would be clumsy if the Indonesians had to represent American ways of behavior and the Singaporeans or Malaysians the British version while speaking English to each other.

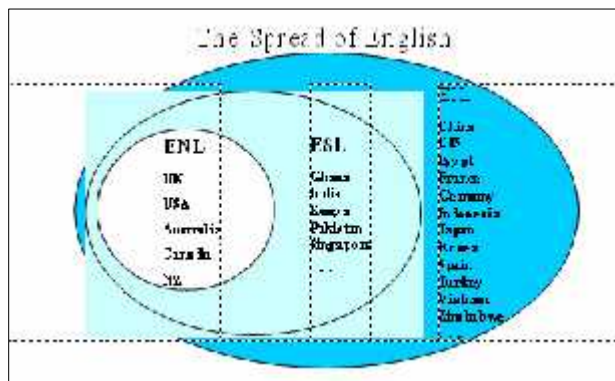
The case is true with English conversations between Turks and Brazilians, French and Swedish people, or any other interactions there may occur on the global stage.

What actually happens is that Indonesia behave like Indonesian and speak English in Indonesian's ways, and so do Malaysian, Vietnamese, Italians, Danish, and many others respectively.

2. Diffusion and Adaptation

In order to grasp this English language trend, it is important that we fully understand the correlation between diffusion and adaptation. If things are to spread, they must most normally *mutate*. This principle apparently applies to language, too. The fact is that the internationalization of English has prompted the diversification of English. The diversification is the cost we have to pay for the internationalization of English. Here, it is important to recognize that English has become an international common language simply because it is being enriched as a culturally diverse language.

Figure. 1



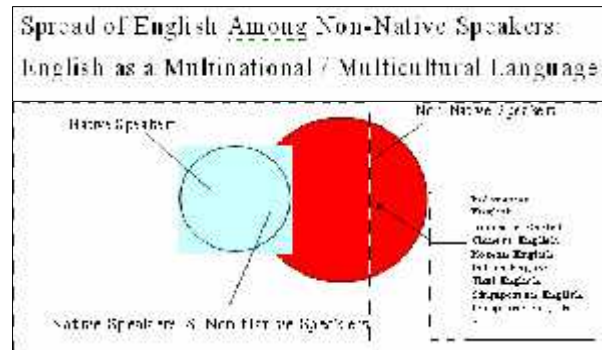
In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996: 61), Samuel Huntington claims that English as a lingua franca is devoid of ethnicity, culture, or identity. In the same vein, people tend to believe that a common language is a uniform language. But this is not true. English can be a common language for multinational communication only when its cultural diversity is accepted. A common language has to be a multicultural language. A lot of allowances have to be made and differences accepted. If American English standards, for example, were imposed upon all users of English, English would never become an international common language.

3. English in Asia

The spread of English as a language for multinational and multicultural communication utilized by an enormous number of non-native speakers shows that English is becoming more and more de-Anglo-Americanized in many regions of the world. This creates a new role that English can play in the contemporary world.

As a matter of fact, English has become a very important language in Asia. It is a working language for intranational and international communication in many parts of the region like happened in Indonesia. According to a report, 350 million people speak English for various purposes in Asia, a number that is close to the combined populations of the United States and Great Britain, where English is a native tongue for most citizens.

Figure.2



Home and abroad, indeed, many Indonesia are finding themselves using English more frequently with other Asians who not use English as official language (Singaporean, M'sia, Filipino). As we are expected to have more and more contact with them in the fields of business, tourism, overseas studies, environmental protection, or regional cooperation, it is high time that we started exploring issues in English communication in Asia.

Since Indonesian are all non-native speakers, they feel relaxed when they speak English with each other. Allowed to be less aware of the native-speaker standards, they find their selves speaking English more flexibly and liberally, even though some cases showing beginner of English less confidence, but who don'ts in learning new language . World should be more conscious of the significance of the fact of ELT in Indonesia [5].

In much of Asia, English is no longer a colonial import. Throughout the region, English is the language of education, culture, business and, above all, regional cooperation. English-speaking Asians claim English as their own language. Filipino poet Geminio Abad once said, "The English language is now ours. We have colonized it, too."

This is not a political statement. This is simply a descriptive remark concerning the current state of the English language in this part of the world, "English is not fully belong to them anymore". Thus, students are becoming more and more aware that English is an indispensable Asian language.

The likelihood of using English with other Asians motivates an increasing number of students to learn the language better. Moreover, College students in Asia are being informed or recognized by themselves of English status as a multinational and multicultural language, similarly in Indonesian context. Lecturers as well as teachers of English In Indonesia are showing positive attitudes toward the concept starts realizing the there are many different varieties of English that are used in Asia and other parts of the world What is important in intercultural communication is one's capability and willingness to understand what the other has to say, not the disposition to impose one's values and norms upon the other. Actually, with some degree of intercultural awareness, one is capable of understanding the other even if the two persons' communication styles are different.

4. Asian Language VS Varieties of English

Asian varieties of English are diverse, however, with different social roles attached to the adopted language. Each country has used the language in its traditional cultural and linguistic contexts, thereby producing a distinct variety characterized by unique structural and functional features. Proficiency levels also differ with "English as a second language" (ESL) countries producing more skillful speakers than "English as an international language" (EIL) counterparts.

As most Asian countries recognize English as a useful language for intranational or international communication, they are increasingly committed to strengthening and improving English language teaching. Most prominently, they start teaching English at the elementary school level. While primary school English is common in ESL countries, many EIL countries are now following suit, including Japan, China, and Korea as well as Indonesia. Moreover, in parts of Asia where English serves as an official language, and where ELT expands and succeeds, people start speaking English among themselves. Wherever this happens, a set of indigenous patterns develop, the kind of patterns people find easier to handle.

As languages come into contact, they get mingled in many interesting ways. The notion of one language as an independent system is only an imaginary creation. This has become increasingly obvious in Asian English studies, where cross-linguistic analysis is a key to a better understanding of a wide range of new patterns. As a matter of fact, the forms and uses of English in Asia are enormously influenced by other Asian languages. While the influence often gets blurred in syntactic superposition, it is visible in lexical and idiomatic borrowing.

It is also important to note that teachers do not teach local varieties of English in the school. They teach "Standard British English" in the classroom in Singapore and Malaysia. But if people are compelled or expected to speak English, it is natural that they should do so only in the way best fit for them. The same phenomenon can spring up in countries where English is taught as an international language if we encourage our students to speak English, as we must for various good reasons.

Many researchers showing many interesting revelations can emerge from socio-cultural including in Indonesian context, Many Indonesian very often use Indonesian expressions in English or caught in Indonesian "tata-krama" or social attitude as Indonesian . Since Indonesia is diversity country the speakers from different ethnics they also tend to be interfered with their mother tongue. It would be illogical to turn down these "tata-krama" as incorrect because these are non-native. Above all things, most Indonesia learners are non-native speakers, encouraged to speak English by taking full advantage of the repertory they have acquired, however limited it might be.

This study believes that this potential problem of Non-native Speaker English could not be solved not by forcing a restrictive conformism. Intercultural literacy can be a solution.

5. Diversity Management: Language Awareness

At this juncture, In order to enrich English as a multicultural language and to ensure its intervarietal communicability in Asia, the paper would like to address one important issue: diversity management. It is important to introduce the Teaching *language awareness* to the students in EFL countries. The aims is to make clear understanding of how language is designed and how people use goals in an attempt to overcome and one thing that should be included in these programs is the study of metaphor.

A cognitive and expressive device human beings are generally equipped with, metaphor relates concept A to concept B. Human beings have a propensity to use basic and concrete experiences to understand and express profound and abstract affairs. Yet, in many countries in Asia, 'metaphor' is considered a technical term for literary criticism, one limited to the analysis of fiction and poetry. It is essential that we understand that metaphor is an operation that ordinary people employ in all domains of their daily lives based on their perception of similarities in an array of natural and social phenomena.

If people are aware of the structure and the function of metaphorical extension: The idea of metonymy (or synecdoche) should also be included in the study of metaphor. The knowledge of metonymy, a type of metaphor where a part represents a whole or vice versa, can save a lot of mis- or non-communication among speakers of different varieties of English. Significantly, metonymy and metaphorical analysis to Indonesian students can improve their ability of semantic interpretation of unfamiliar phrases. While language awareness teaching is generally and independently important, it is essential for ELT. If EFL country like Indonesia develop enlightening curriculums for language awareness in ELT and other language-related subjects This paper predict the result will be showing that they will be able to use English better as a language for international and intercultural communication while enjoying its multicultural values.

6. Conclusions

With this much said, let me now refer to some aspects of Asian ELT situation. The aim of the most countries in ELT in public education is to develop a working command of this global language and nurture international and intercultural. That is why ELT is often considered as part of a larger endeavor of international/intercultural understanding education.

Further, ELT in Asian look a like has a similar goal were composed on three important elements; (1) understanding other cultures, (2) explaining our own culture, and (3) teaching English as an international language, not as an American or a British language. In Indonesian's school curriculum, however, there is a remarkable imbalance of emphasis placed on these three components.

Asian countries in general see international/intercultural understanding as learning about other cultures. Consequently, awareness training in explaining Japanese ways of life explicitly is almost completely ignored. This is witnessed in many programs that municipalities organize for their citizens. An increasing number of teachers of English were helping and foster Asian people from different countries to talk about themselves with people from abroad, to explain their countries customs and express their opinions on international occasions.

The communicative approach is meant to put more value on mutual understanding than on simple mimicry and rigid pattern practice. Frequent exposure to English using environments is expected to make students aware of its varieties. The success of ELT largely depends on understanding English as a multicultural language. One of the benefits of this is that our students are assured that they can speak English but still interfere with their mother tongue.

Intercultural literacy is a prerequisite for promoting English as such. In order to put all this into practice, it is essential we coordinate educational efforts based on the spirit of regional cooperation in Asia.

Reference

- [1] Adam, Brown. (1999) *Singapore English in a Nutshell*. Singapore: Federal Publications.
- Adamson, Bob. (2004) *A History of English in Chinese Education*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- [2] Agnihotre, R. K. and A. L. Khanna. (1997) *Emblematizing English in India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- [3] Bautista, Maria Lourdes S. (1997) *English is an Asian Language: The Philippine Context*. Sydney: The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd.
- [4] Bolton, Kingsley, ed. (2002) *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press,
- [5] Cheshire, Jenny, ed. (1991) *English Around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
- [6] Crystal, David. (1997) *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Foley, J. A. et.al. (1998) *English in New Cultural Contexts: Reflections from Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Gonzales, Andrew. (1988) *The Role of English and Its Maintenance in the Philippines*. Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House.
- [8] Gopinathan, S., Anne Pakir, Ho Wah Kam and Vanithamani Saravanan. (1994) *Language, Society and Education in Singapore: Issues and Trends*. Singapore: Times Academic Press,
- [9] Gupta, R. S. and Kapil Kapoor. (1991) *English in India: Issues and Problems*. Delhi. Academic Foundation.
- [10] Ho, Mian-Lian and John T. Plan. (1993) *Dynamics of a Contact Continuum: Singaporean English*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- [11] Honna, Nobuyuki. (1995) "English in Japanese Society: Language within Language." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Vol. 16, Nos.1&2.
- [12] Honna, Nobuyuki. (2000) "Some Remarks on the Multiculturalism of Asian Englishes." *International Communication Studies* X: 1.
- [13] Honna, Nobuyuki. (2003) "English as a Multicultural and Intercultural Literacy." *Southern Review* No. 18.