

The construction of learner identity in a global Englishes era: A self-reflection

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ABSTRACT

This paper is geared by my perceptual understanding on insights of teaching English as an international language (TEIL). It firstly departs from my conservative belief that the best English to teach is British and American. Apparently, these English(es), shaped by the linguistic imperialism, are the 'only perfect' language in the international communication. However, my mind has altered to be paradoxically blessed with the knowledge I gain from reading studies on World Englishes (WEs) and English as an international language (EIL) issues extensively, for instance, works by Kachru (1985, 2005); Zacharias (2003); Floris (2013); Mukminatien (2012); Renandya (2013); and Kirpatrick (2007). Their works on both EIL and WEs have broadened my narrow-minded perspectives on the issues. For this tenet, the paper reflects on my identity construction as a language learner which has been anchored amidst the issues of incorporating WEs in English education curriculum. It seems problematic, however, to realize this idea since the curriculum of English language teaching in Indonesia excludes this issue. It is for this purpose then that the present paper highlights the issue of WEs in the teaching of English and my identity construction as a language learner. Suggestions for inserting WEs in teaching English is also discussed at the end of this paper.

1. Introduction

Reading more publications can cater English teachers insights for their professional development in teaching English. Being an update reader of the literature would possibly assist them to enhance their expertise in language teaching. In my mind, this does not only affect English teachers grow professionally but also the learners will be influenced to be more open-minded about what going on is in the world of English teaching and learning.

I contend that it does happen to me, a language learner of English with extensive habit on reading research publications about ELT and the like. A few years ago, when I was assigned by my English teachers at pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) to teach English in an English course, I believed that I had to maintain one out of two English accent in teaching English, particularly in speaking. I was on a certain belief that only British English and American English which are appropriate to be spoken in and outside the class. I did not know any other kinds of English in the world though, to some extent, I had ever heard the Australian English, Canadian English, and New Zealand English, I just thought that those are not that formal and is not that urgent to discuss and learn. My belief was also supported by teaching materials (e.g. books, dictionaries, novels, etc.) existing in my room as these were donated by my teachers.

Furthermore, my belief in these two kinds of English is still motivated by my lecturers when I was in my first and second semester, studying English education in a private Islamic-based university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. They, after teaching listening class, told me that in TOEFL listening test, the native speakers are from America, meanwhile in IELTS

listening test, the speakers are from UK. It was such a motivational assumption to me, to think that both British and American English are internationally accepted as ‘standard English’ at that time.

World Englishes: What, Why, And How

At the end of my undergraduate study in 2015, I just realized that English is not a narrow language that is limited to only British and American accent. It starts when I read literature on English as an international language (EIL) by Kachru (1985, 2005) which is also related to World Englishes (WEs). In his study, Kachru (1985, 2005) divided three areas called ‘circle’ in the spread of English; inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. He contended that UK, USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand include in The Inner Circle countries since THE English there is spoken as a native language. The Outer Circle covers Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The English in these countries is spoken as a second language known ESL. Meanwhile, The Expanding Circle are Indonesia, Japan, and Korea in which they speak English as a foreign language, and it is taught as a compulsory subject in the class. The concentric circles proposed by Kachru can be seen in the following figure.

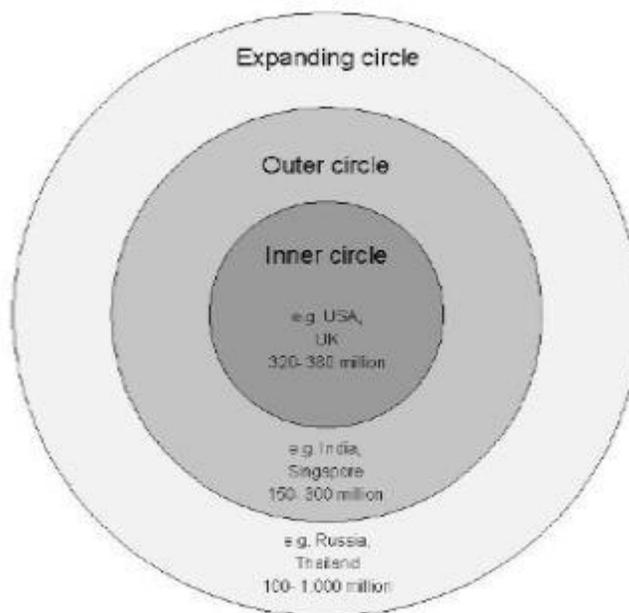


Figure 1. Kachru's model of WEs circles.

Apparently, the issue of World Englishes in language teaching yield controversial beliefs from many experts. One of the opponent language practitioners of this issue is Quirk (1999, in Kilickaya, 2009), stating that the varieties of English / World Englishes is just a matter of interference. Therefore, English teachers need to pay attention to only onestandard English language to teach in the class. If they, English teachers, acknowledge the existence of many varietiesof English, it would possibly ruin the intelligibility in the teaching of English for both written and spoken skill.

The idea above has been commented by Kachru (1985), arguing that norms and registers of certain circle countries are not appropriate for the other countries. It is irrelevant to adopt cultures of the inner circle since the users of English are mostly from the expanding countries whose norms, speech acts, and cultures do differ in many contexts. Widdowson (1994, in Kilickaya, 2009) supported what Kachru said, claiming that bilingual users of English use the language in educational contexts which tend to focus on particular standard and unifying forms of English. It will never have an ending to discuss about World Englishes, yet English teachers are expected to put themselves on the right track when teaching English to their students. Teaching English in Indonesia is so much different from teaching English in Malaysia and Singapore. There should be cross cultural understanding on the issue of WEs to accommodate better learning and L2 acquisition.

World Englishes And The Teaching Of English As An International Language

Consequently, the discussions on WEs have affected language teaching methodology over the world. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has been deemed as an irrelevant to teach English as an international language (McKay, 2003), yet it is used for certain purposes. Despite its robust comments, McKay (2003) suggested English teachers to be a critical user of a teaching method, rather than relying on its use during teaching and learning. As a case in Japan, exemplified by McKay, CLT which focuses on group work and teacher less explanation is no longer appropriate to apply since Japanese learners prefer working with teachers' talk during the class. Meaning that, they expect teachers' explanation in the class than learn independently.

Many research studies have been conducted to propose English teachers teaching English as an international language ways on inserting WEs in ELT since. Renandya (2013), for instance, proposed teachers of English to consider several aspects in the teaching of English as an international language:

1. Intercultural competence
2. Awareness of varieties of English
3. Multilingualism
4. Teaching materials
5. Socio-cultural teaching methods

It is tangibly clear that teaching English today should refer to its role as an international language used by many people in the world with different socio-cultural backgrounds. Similar to Renandya, Zacharias (2003) put a major focus on several questions about the teaching of English as an international language:

1. How is the way in teaching English with regard to its role as an international language?
2. What standard English should teachers teach to their students?
3. Will the teaching of English neglect students' mother tongue?
4. Do Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) serve better in teaching methods that those Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs)?

Debates and discussions on the questions risen above lead to a focus on one thing, does English belong to the English speaking countries or international community? What English teachers should believe is in the intelligibility that they can cover during the teaching and learning process.

Learner Identity Construction: Reflecting My Self-Experience

Synthesizing the above studies on WEs, I myself as an English learners who extensively engage in reading current research on ELT issues, feel blessed to know that English is no longer seen as a small-scale language, yet it is now a language of the world. This condition affects me as a learner and (student teacher), since my current program is English teacher education, to reconsider the way I am acquiring this language. The need to put another concern on the other existing English such as Canadian English, Singapore English (Singlish), and even Indonesian English model should be prioritized. I believe by acknowledging these kinds of English, a learner of English like me would possibly be able to adjust the identity and status amidst the global English learned by people in the world. I can respect other cultures and share my ideas of culture around the world regardless the correct English I have to use. But of course, since my country, Indonesia, mostly adopts the English of American people, I will still maintain it as my standard English. Through this way my identity as a language learner will evolve significantly on the right track.

Obviously, I would say to myself that I am blessed as well to have known the issues of WEs earlier on my stage of becoming an English teachers next. I believe that I can teach English based on the role as an international language after much reading the literature, researching the phenomena, and investigating teachers' beliefs as reflection. I would then suggest my English lecturers to also address this issue in their teaching by considering the aforementioned aspects above from Zahcarias (2003) and Renadya (2013). Aside from my identity construction on WEs, I also fathom that the English curricula in Indonesia have not yet put a major concern on this issue. There are few English departments in Indonesia that include World English course in their study. On this condition, who to teach World Englishes then? If not the teachers themselves who can be responsible for this knowledge by introducing it to the students as what Floris (2013) did in her teaching. The following suggestion are made for English teachers to insert WEs in the teaching of English.

Possible Ways To Integrate World Englishes In Teaching English

As the goal of learning English is to communicate effectively, the English teachers serve as the gate provider for such purpose in order their students are able to optimally communicate with the English. Here are some suggestions for English teachers:

1. When teaching English, it is advisable for teachers to use students' mother tongue as instructional languages, not fully English. It underlies our attention on students' psychological condition as they have learned many other languages previously (e.g. Javanese, Bahasa Indonesia). The learners with this condition, are probably bilingual and multilingual speakers.
2. When speaking in English, teachers are encouraged to maintain and use their standard (British or American), yet not to focus on grammatical competence as long as the speaking can be understood well. It will also lead students to acknowledge that other varieties of English exist globally.
3. When teaching English, do not forget to insert students' own cultures. It underlines a prejudice that relying on native English speakers' culture will ruin the local culture of the students.

2. Conclusion

It has been clear that my identity as a learner of English which varies in term of its kind in the world affected by culture and other factors has been shaped. This has made me realize as well that later when I am teaching English to my students, I should also give them know the varieties of English by not focusing only on two mainstreams of English, British and American, yet acknowledging the other existing varieties of English. The issues that I have read really play a significant role on my journey of acquiring this language. I have now understood how to respect other norms and cultures of different English spoken by different people around the world. As I am a candidate of English teacher, I suggest myself and the other English teachers to keep reading and researching their expertise especially on English as an international language.

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