Incorporating World Englishes into classroom practices: the Indonesian Context

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There is worldwide recognition that English is spreading around the world at an increasing rate. Kachru & Nelson (1996) state that “English is the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known” (p.71). The rapidly increasing English speakers and usage has resulted in types of varieties and speakers on which Kachru bases his three concentric inner, outer and expanding circles, which constitutes one definition of World Englishes. According to them, inner circle countries are USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or where English is spoken as the first or native language. Outer circle countries include those where English is a second language (ESL), and which have developed their own norms of English, or norm-developing countries, resulting in different varieties like Singaporean English, Indian English, Malaysian English, English in South African, and so forth. Meanwhile, expanding circle countries are those where English is a foreign language (EFL) – not used in immediate communication but studied for specific purposes (e.g. trade and access to higher education), and taught and learned with reference to Standard English, namely British (BE) or American (AE) English -or norm-dependent (Kachru, 1985 as cited in Holmes, 2008, p. 79-80), like Indonesia.

Currently, Indonesian EFL curriculum requires teachers to teach BE or AE consistently (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2007). It assumes, ideally English teaching should enable students to communicate both in spoken and written forms, be aware of the importance of English in order to compete globally and the inseparableness of language and culture (Depdiknas, 2003). However, to date, besides English classroom at schools is mainly reading-based and test-driven (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Jazadi, 2000; Musthafa, 2001), speaking and pronunciation are hardly taught since speaking is not part of the national exit exam, which is in
contrast with the curriculum’s first objective. If speaking were to be taught, it is unlikely that teachers in Indonesia would be able to teach BE and/or AE accents. Furthermore, in my view, the dominance of English as the lingua franca (ELF) in South East Asia (SEA) (Kirkpatrick & Deterding, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2006) with all the different accents with which it is spoken makes the curriculum’s imposition on BE or AE varieties both unachievable and unnecessary. This paper therefore argues that raising awareness of and aiming mutual intelligibility toward World Englishes should be part of English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, while persevering the teaching of Standard English in Indonesian classrooms. It further discusses how such attempt is brought into practice with regards to the input, process and output aspects of English teaching and learning, so as to produce proficient but not native-sounding English users.

WEs and ELF

There are a number of terms associated with different uses of English around the world, such “English as an International Language”, ‘World Englishes’, ‘World English’ (in singular), ‘International English(es)’, ‘World Standard Spoken English’, ‘English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)’ and so forth (Acar, 2007; Matsuda, 2003). For the purpose of the discussion, World Englishes (WEs) in this paper is defined in conjunction with Kachru’s polycentric approach, as previously explained, and is differentiated from ELF, as suggested by Jenkins (2006) or Seidhover (2001), and investigated by Kirkpatrick & Deterding, (2006), Kirkpatrick, (2006), Sifakis (2009), Pickering (2006), or Elder & Davies (2006).

Both WEs and ELF seem to illustrate the different contexts and uses of English in the world. While WEs classifies the circles more globally, ELF appears to focus on the outer and
expanding circles, where interaction among non-native speakers (NNSs) of English is arguably more dominant (Pickering, 2006). There has also been a growing debate about whether ELF is "a well-established variety of English with its own norms and regularities, similar in kind if not degree to so-called nativised varieties" (Prodromou, 2007, p.109). Whether it sufficiently provides norms of standard written ELF, by which it can be fully claimed to be an emergent or emerging variety of English has also been questioned by Maley (2009) for example, who argues that it seems to focus only on the spoken language. Still, this paper does not intend to discuss whether ELF is in existence as proposed by its proponents or whether it is widely accepted by many linguists. It does, however, agree with the fact that English has shifted from mainly used to communicate with its native speakers (NS) to a means of communication also among NNSs of English, or a lingua franca, makes it necessary to reconsider imposition of varieties spoken only by English NSs including BE or AE, for several reasons.

First, it is unachievable and unnecessary to expect ELT to be able to make all students become English NNSs, who are sounding like native, though as in Japan (Butler, 2007; Matsuda, ibid), Cambodia (Moore & Bounchan, 2010), and Greece (Sifakis, 2009), Indonesian teachers and students, to date, regard native varieties and accents as the most correct and thus aspire to them. Compared to the large number of students in Indonesia, there seems to be insufficient teachers skilled in producing pronunciation consistent with these accents. Taught by Indonesian teachers, few of whom, had experienced living or studying in inner circle countries, most practicing teachers were insufficiently exposed to nor acquiring either accent. With lacking teachers trained in BE or AE accent, inflicting either accent is not feasible.

Secondly, similar to Japanese (Matsuda, 2003), Indonesian students are 'as likely to be exposed to outer-and expanding-circle Englishes as they are to inner Englishes' (p.721).
Deterding & Kirkpatrick (ibid, p.392) particularly proposes an emerging South-East Asian Englishes due to the accelerating number of various English speakers in the region. Accordingly, learning to speak inner circle accent(s) seems unnecessary for Indonesian students as they will likely encounter speakers from Asia, and not all of them learn English to go to English speaking countries. Further, restricted to BE/AE accent exposures in classroom will even make them unprepared when confronted with a variety of accents other than the one(s), be they Asian, African or European, and therefore cannot communicate in English effectively.

However, Timmis (2000 cited in Maley, 2009, p.194) asserts that not teaching standard of English aspired by students is as inappropriate as imposing native-speaker varieties. Hence, according to Acar (2007), Maley (2009) and Matsuda (2003), what is more important is how teachers can teach a standard variety of English to satisfy curricular and examination conditions, while equipping students with (accommodation, repair, clarification) verbal strategies to enable them cope with a variety of accents – either native or non-native. Maley also argues that in reality teachers are teaching what they are able to teach – what they have learned. He says that,

"It is also true that teachers teach what they are able to teach. For the most part, they do not completely control their own accents or even their own syntax, which will be heavily influenced by their mother-tongue speech community. Though they may assert that they are teaching are teaching “British” or “American English”, what they are actually doing is attempting to teach a standard variety with whatever accent or grammatical form of English they happen to have, be it Chinese, Brazilian, Spanish, Italian, or whatever. And this is perfectly acceptable. Indeed, it is difficult to see what else they might be doing" (p.195).

Given this, it is suggested that Indonesian teachers should also be allowed to teach whatever accent they have, be it Indonesian, outer or expanding circle one, while attempting to teach either or both BE and AE. Acar (ibid, p.50) argues that considering inner circle varieties as a model for an expanding country, including Indonesia, does not necessarily mean the students
(and teachers) should achieve native like proficiency. Native-sounding pronunciation will be a discouraging target since research shows that ‘very few learners are capable of achieving a native-like standard in all respects’ (Luoma, 2004, p.10). Luoma continues,

“Communicative effectiveness, which is based on comprehensibility and probably guided by native speaker standards but defined in terms of realistic learner achievement, is a better standard for learner pronunciation”.

Supporting, Derwin and Munro (2005, p.384) claim that accented speech or foreign accent is a normal consequence of second language learning. English with ‘marked local flavour’ is unavoidably a product of aspiration toward a standard variety but influenced with first languages in the process. Aiming at comprehensibility, both teachers and students will develop more confidence to produce and be proficient users of English despite their non-native accent (Maley, 2009, p.196). This also raises positive attitude toward non-native teachers, who often suffer from less intelligent and professional perception resulting in their reduced quality of pronunciation and degree of confidence in using English (Medgyes, 1994; Nelson, 1991; Solomon, 1991; in Butler, ibid, pp. 734-736). Accordingly, while endeavouring to reach native pronunciation accuracy and acknowledging other non-native accents, teaching English in Indonesia with local but comprehensible accent should be justifiable. Thus, it is more important to equip learners with accommodation skills that allow them to get their messages across through achieving mutual intelligibility, in order to communicate successfully with either NSs or NNSs of English.

Aiming mutual intelligibility

Maley (2009) argues that teachers can hardly teach all English varieties in the world but how to cope with those differences, “through developing a respect for difference and a positive attitude to accommodation” (p.197). It is therefore the skills of accommodation which are needed
to be taught to allow learners achieve mutual intelligibility when communicating either with NSs or NNSs. Citing Canagarajah, Maley highlights that studies in speech accommodation suggests that speakers “make mutual modifications in their speech to facilitate intelligibility”, and that conversation analysis shows that speakers “skillfully employ strategies of repair, clarification and paralinguistic interpretation (that includes gestures, tone and other cues) to negotiate differences” (Cited in Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006a, pp. 208 and 209, in Maley, 2009).

Within discussions of Wes, Smith and Nelson’s (1985, cited in Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Pickering, 2006) definition of intelligibility has been widely accepted. Intelligibility comprises three levels including “word recognition, utterance comprehension in a given context, and interpretation of speakers’ intention or meaning behind utterance. Since the nature of interaction between NS-NNS and NNS-NNS interactions is different, various factors have to be first identified to aim mutual intelligibility particularly in the latter type of interaction. Pickering, with focus on ELF, suggests some variables affecting intelligibility and comprehensibility in those two kinds of interactions. It should be remembered, however, that citing his ideas does not necessarily mean that this paper provides support for the existence of ELF as a variety, but is expected to help in finding ways to tackle with those factors, i.e. speakers and listeners factors.

Phonology and the effects of accentedness are factors influenced by speakers in NS-NNS interaction (Pickering, 2006), while pronunciation is the greatest problem among ELF speakers (Jenkins, 2002, cited in Pickering, 2006). Listener aptitude is the next factor crucial in aiming at intelligibility in NS-NNS interaction. Pickering explains that “a listener who expects to understand a speaker will be more likely to find that speaker comprehensible than one who does not” (p. 226). Other related variables on listener part include “familiarity with a particular speech
event, topic, or specific interlocutor, listener specific factors such as level of tiredness or situation specific factors such as environmental noise”.

The first factor relates to phonology, pronunciation and accentedness can be overcome by giving more emphasizes on teaching pronunciation in English classroom in Indonesia. The teaching of pronunciation can be based on either BE or AE accent, yet without imposing the native-like pronunciation as target. Instead, intelligibility should be a standard of measurement, aiming at understanding and conveying the intended messages across, by both interlocutors. To compensate with different varieties, it is advisable to expose learners with different accents or varieties of English, particularly those of NNSs who are from neighbouring countries. Exposures to English BE, AE or other accents can be made available through particular methods of teaching and the use of technology.

Zhang (2005) carried out a conversation class where native-speakers and learners communicate to each other authentically in foreign language classroom. In Japan, assistant English teachers (AETs) are employed through Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program to enhance its teachers’ English proficiency (Matsuda, 2003, p.720). Free English learning websites and online dictionary with pronunciation model should also prove useful. Meanwhile, introducing students to non-native accents will increase their confidence to speak ‘accented’ English and ability in recognizing and comprehending different accented Englishes (Omori, 2007). Omori further finds that training in familiarizing with accented English (English spoken by NNSs) is proven effective to help increase intelligibility on part of listeners. Utilizing multimedia and electronic communication, Maley (2009, p. 197) suggests using songs, E-mail, websites, blogging, texting, DVDs, TV and internet sources to provide exposures to various accents. Having a video conference or live chat with speakers in inner, outer and expanding
circle countries can be another solution. Yet, encouraging and facilitating Indonesian teachers whose oral proficiency is high to develop their own audio materials modelling accurate and comprehensible local accent(s), to me, are more likely to build Indonesian teachers and students’ confidence in their accent while purporting native’s pronunciation accuracy.

Factors related to listeners can further be coped with providing learners with accommodation skills including repair and clarification strategies, and abilities in interpreting paralinguistic aspects of communication (gestures, tones, conversational cues), and knowledge of speech events or topic. Repair strategies Those skills should inevitably be taught in class directly or indirectly. Since these factors are likely to occur in spoken interaction, teaching verbal skills of English is thus necessary. It should not merely provide learners with opportunities to create and perform dialogues with peers or listen to others’ speech but also provide authentic samples of speech events happening in meaningful contexts. Input given in English classes must be in context or taken from a speech event, either written or spoken. When it is written, teachers should provide discussion on how such event can be carried out in spoken medium. When discussing speech events, teachers are also to expose specific utterances or expressions commonly used in given situations, and certainly their meaning in relation to specific cultural values or norms of a given society exhibited in the samples of events. Ultimately, learners are given opportunities to experience interacting in such events in classroom setting. Since input is what EFL settings lack of, providing meaningful but comprehensible input is of great importance. The alternatives suggested above should also be fruitful to deal with input scarcity.

When input is already made available, shifting orientation from product to process-based approach is advisable (Serdikov & Tamopolsky, 1999). Regardless methods of teaching being used, ELT should be directed to provide learners with opportunities to experience with the target
language. Learners should certainly be engaged with not only forms but also meaning, where pragmatics might have to come into play. Since this approach is expected to be in conjunction with any methods or techniques of teaching, it is thus the mindset of teachers, which plays a great role in implementing such approach. In assessing the output or outcome of learning, it is advisable that teachers do not solely apply form accurateness standard. Evidences of the use of accommodation skills, and knowledge of different speech events should be considered in assessment, and incorrect or inappropriate class performances should be referred to how far learners have been well endowed with those skills and knowledge. In other words, strategic competence should come first over linguistic accuracy, in terms of pronunciation or verbal aspects of communication. In regards to pronunciation (and accent), Luoma (2004, p.11) proposes fitting accuracy and communicative effectiveness into a criterion like ‘naturalness of pronunciation’ if other criteria co-occur. Likewise, (Smith, 1992 in Deterding and Kirkpatrick, 2007; Kachru and Nelson, 1996, pp. 93 – 4) encourages mutual intelligibility that assesses ability to recognize words, comprehend utterance and capture the meaning behind the utterance.

In conclusion, due to different accents of speaking Standard English, English teachers in Indonesia encounters challenges related to the spread of uses of English and its various varieties, how to teach the varieties to enable learners to cope with them in real communication, and aiming mutual intelligibility through teaching accommodation skills and knowledge of different speech events. It is suggested that Indonesia should adopt ‘polycentric’ model – teaching English referring to native accents while valuing teachers’ ‘local’ accents and recognizing other nonnative accents (Maley, 2009). Technology, conversation buddies, teacher assistant program, developing local-accent based materials are recommended to expose students to a variety of accents. The inputs should be made meaningful and comprehensible, through which
accommodation skills (repair and clarification strategies) are taught. The process of ELT is recommended to adopt process-based approach where learners are provided with opportunities to experience the target language in classroom settings. The assessment criteria should therefore contain mutual intelligibility in terms of native pronunciation accuracy and communicative effectiveness – but not native-like accent.
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