

POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TO IGNITE A BRIGHTER FUTURE OF EFL IN MULTILINGUAL SOCIETIES

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Abstract

English is now spoken by more non-native speakers (NNS) than by native speakers (NS) due its global outreach. There are some implications emanating from the conditions mentioned above. First, the notion of the language ownership is being contested. There is a strong demand to the recognition of varieties of English emanating from countries of Kachru's outer and expanding circles. Second, this Yuing demography of the speakers of English has rendered those who use it as their vernacular as the minority. Interestingly, it does not make the notion of native-speakerism, by which native speaker's norms and standards should be set as a benchmark for a success in learning the language, recedes in ELT. In multilingual societies where English is a foreign language (Indonesia will be a very good example), ELT is very challenging due to the language not being used for day-to-day communication, and the interference of the learners' L1 and L2 to their English. As a result, the English which they produce might not comply with the standard norms. To deal with that problem, there have been efforts to interrogate the validity of native speakerim in ELT in countries like Indonesia due to the increasing awareness that the goal of the teaching of English in this region is to use the language successfully in various communication settings thus native-like proficiency is less relevant. For that reason, this paper suggests the introduction Postcolonial Literatature in EFL syllabus to afford learners new insights on the language and hence building their confidence and therefore competence in the language.

Keywords: *Postcolonial Literatures, native speakerism, multilingualism*

You taught me language, and my profit on 't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!
(Caliban in *The Tempest*)

Who owns English? If you can use it, you own it
(Braj Kachru)

1. INTRODUCTION

Because of the international spread of English, it is not surprising that the language is used by “not only more non-native speakers (NNS) than by native speakers (NS), but also more often among NNS than in situation involving NS (Chrystal and Graddol in Yu. 2014: 21).” There are some implications emanating from the conditions mentioned above. First, English has become a global language that it is no longer solely belong to countries within Kachru's inner circle, notably the UK and the USA. In this regards, Kachru (in Alatis. 2005: 34) has famously stated that “if you can speak [English], you own it.” Therefore, as the owner of the language, one definitely can use it to suit her experience and carry the weight of her cultural norms. In this case, the standard forms (particularly, British English or American English) are not necessarily able to do so. As a result, today we are immersed with numerous varieties of Englishes, known collectively as World Englishes of which legitimacy is still widely contested in the realm of ELT. Second, this Yuing demography of the speakers of English has rendered those who use it as their vernacular as the minority. Interestingly, it does not make the notion of native-speakerism, by which native speaker's norms and standards should be set as a benchmark for a success in learning the language, recedes in ELT.

On the one hand, despite some serious endeavor within research in TESOL to interrogate the validity of native-speakerism in the EFL context, teachers and learners alike are still commodiously submit to the native speakers norms (Yu. 2014: 21). On the other hand, it is not uncommon to hear complains from both teachers and learners, especially in the EFL context, on the difficulties to acquire native like control of the language. For this reason, it is not surprising if ELT in countries where English is a foreign language like Indonesia is still considered to be failing. In Indonesia, just like in other countries with similar linguistic situation, this “failure” can be traced back to the fact that those learning English are normally multilingual. For Indonesians, their vernacular is the language of their ethnicity (such as, Minangkabau, Javanese, and Sundanese), and their second language is the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. Linguistically speaking, these languages’ grammatical, lexical, and phonological pattern could have found their way to their English. As a result, the English language they produce might, to some extent, differ from that of the native speakers. Therefore, if these learners are being assessed based on the native speakers’ standard norm, whose English might not influence and shaped by any interference from other language, there are chances that their learning of the language is regarded as unsuccessful.

Despite the rather unexciting picture in the domain of ELT described above, this paper is not in the position to suggest that EFL has no future in a multilingual society like Indonesia. Since the root of the problem seems to emanate from the assumed superiority or validity of a particular variety of English (the usual culprit are British English and American English) over other Englishes, it is a sound move to first neutralize that assumption. For that purpose, this paper is of the opinion that the inclusion of Postcolonial literature in English into the language and literature curricula is necessary. This body of work is widely known as

“one major unintended consequence of British colonialism [...] presenting the story of colonialism and its consequences from [the colonial subject’s] perspective, and reclaiming their land and experience through drama and poetry, a representation and reclamation requiring a reinvention of the English language and English literary tradition (Innes. 2007: viii).”

In other words, it is effective in showing the historical and political background of the spread of English, how new varieties of Englishes emerge and why native speakerism becomes an influential ideology in ELT, why it endures, why it must be challenged. Most importantly, the works’ attitude toward English and how English is used in it can afford learners of EFL in multilingual setting new insights on the language and hence building their confidence and therefore competence in the language.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

a. English: a Short Introduction of How it Spreads and Why?

There are many reasons responsible for the christening of English as an international language and subsequently the world’s primary lingua franca starting from its extensive use in trade, education, diplomacy and the internet. In this light, a report by the European Statistical Office (Anonymous.2001: 381) mentions that English is the most frequently studied language in Europe. Fourteen years later, as published in Mosalingua site (2015), English prevails as the language studied the most compared to other languages. However, the dominance of English has never been innocent because of the historical and political baggage it carries. Its global stretch is the legacy of British Imperialism and American political and economical might. During its heyday, the British Empire ruled in over than ninety territories in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Australia and the Pacific claiming about 25 % of the world’s population (470-570 million people) as its subjects (Innes. 2007: vii). Judging from the statistics above, it can be seen how massive the influence this empire might have on those region including the imposition of the English language to its colonial subject. After it’s decline by the twilight of the the 20th century, it’s former prized colony, the United States of America, took over the helm as the world’s new super power, thus securing the continuing sway of English and it’s perceived

cultural superiority long after the formal colonization era ended.

It has been said elsewhere in this paper that language spread seldom happens in a neutral circumstance. Garcia (2010: 398:399) observes that school children in America learn that the spread of a language is mostly a follow up of a historical changes by which the language of the powerful is imposed to the less powerful. Moreover, still according to Garcia, the same students also learn that dominance, power, prestige and privilege are important factors in a language spread. With this in mind, it explains why English spreads the way it does now: it is the language of the most powerful nations to date with which people believe to attain 'privilege, prestige, dominance and power' over the mastery of the that language. However, judging from its current demography, it takes more that military conquest and socio-politico factors contributing to the language's global outreach. After reviewing some authorities on linguistics delving into the issue of language, Garcia (2010: 409) concludes that English "spreads because it has increasingly synonymous with globalization and with the economic and technological progress that accompanies it.

b. Who Owns English and its Pedagogical Implications

This notion of the ownership of the English language is important to be reviewed to make some inroads to the shackles of native-speakerism to which those involve in the teaching and learning of English still largely submitted to. As has been suggested previously in this paper, English is increasingly used for multiple purposes and in various communication situations by more NNS than NS. Therefore, who owns the language? Elsewhere in paper, it has been mentioned that Braj Kachru, a formidable linguist who coins the term World English, asserts that those who can use English is the owner of the language. Within this line of thinking, the development of varieties of Englishes is feasible. Kachru (in Mesthrie. 2008: 32) once stated that the "internationalization of a language comes with nativization and acculturation." In the same vein, Garcia (2010: 409) remarks that English is used to express global and local messages due to its spread across cultures and at the same time cultures and language spread over English. In other words, instead of a single ownership of the language, it is now widely believed that the ownership of the language should be shared globally. As a consequence, according to Murata&Jenkins (in Wenli. 2015: 48) the legitimacy of varieties of Englishes other than that of spoken by those living countries of Kachru's inner circle, or localized English must be acknowledged. Hence, total submission to native-speakerism in the field of ELT should be re-examined.

The pedagogical implications of the aforementioned issues is best described in some development within ELT. Lin et.al (2002) reiterates that common problem faced by learners of English where the language is not the daily means of communication (just like Indonesia) is a low self-esteem and/or discomfort with the language caused by their inability to produce the language in accordance with the tradition British/American standards. From this perspective, they believe that this problem arises because the learners do not think that the language belong to them. Even if they manage someday to acquire the language, their non-native accent or pragmatic use of the language will still make them not the rightful owner of the language: they are still the other. For that reason, Lin et.al (2002:15) proposes " a paradigm shift from doing TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) to doing TEGCOM (Teaching English for Glocalized Communication)."

Another phenomenon which should legitimize the global ownership of the English language and destabilizes the notion of native-speakerism is the advent of ELF (English as Lingua Franca). According to Wenli (2015: 48):

The growing phenomenon of ELF, without a doubt, has a strong implications for the users of English as a foreign of second language. For instance, non-native speakers need not feel inferior when they canon produce native-like accents. They now have some flexibility to use English in any way as long as the communicative objective is achieved. As a result, when English is used as an international language, its usage is being enriched by all users all over the world, and the varieties of English are expanding beyond traditional British and American forms of English.

In this regards, if English is going to be taught under the notion of ELF, the learning traditional learning goal of learning English should be re-examined. Drawing from his experience in his studies on English in Asia, particularly ASEAN countries, Kirkpatrick (2011: 221) suggests a multilingual model of ELT under which the language learning goal is not to acquire standard forms and native-like proficiency yet to be able to use English successfully in lingua franca or multilingual context.

The arrival of TEGCOM and ELF in the domain of ELT is surely not free from criticisms and opposition. The opposition's main line will be on how to assess learners in terms of their mastery of the target language if there is no certain standards and norms to be observed. The teaching of English in countries of Kachru's expanding circle (e.g. China, Japan, Indonesia) focuses on training students in the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and to produce native-like proficiency (Yu. 2015: 22). In similar vein, taking Taiwan as her research focus, Wenli (2015: 50) asserts that its education system puts an utmost importance for a standard due to its test-centric curriculum whereby students are periodically tested for their language skills like reading and vocabulary and grammar. In other words, the learning of English there is mainly about passing the test to get the desired grade. In this case, accuracy (producing the language the way a native speaker does) prevails over communicative purpose of the language, which is basically the goal of learning a language. In other words, student's success (if success is there) in learning English in the Expanding circle, especially in Indonesia, is confined in good delivery during the written test while their spoken communicative ability remains underdeveloped. As has been touched elsewhere in this paper, the education system which nurtures or native-speakerism coupled with the status of English in those countries are reason why the teaching of English in those regions remains challenging.

From the review of the pedagogical implications of the notion of the spread and ownership of English, there are several conclusions worth contemplating. First, English has been spread globally for, as Kachru (in Garcia. 2010: 409) asserts:

its propensity in acquiring new identities, its power of assimilation and its adaptability to decolonization as a language, its manifestation in a range of lects and its provision of a flexible medium of literary and other types of creativity across languages and culture.

Consequently, aside from going global, this language also goes glocal, a term coined by Roland Robertson and Zygmunt Bauman (in Bragazzi. 2012: 1) referring to "the simultaneity-the co-presence-of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies." With this in mind, the indigenized or nativized Englishes have the same standing as the British/American English and the global ownership of the language is justifiable. Second, there has been attempts made from within the field of ELT to respond to the glocalization of English, e.g. proposals for TEGCOM instead of TESOL, which houses the teaching of English as ESL and EFL, and teaching of English as ELF. Both camps seems to agree that the success of the learning of the English language can be derived from making learners realize that the focus of learning the language is not to copy the native speakers, a goal which often discourages them from learning, but to be able to communicate with others (not necessarily the native speakers) in various communication settings. Third, it is necessary to make students realize that their culture and linguistics situation are not less superior than English and the inherent culture in it (British/American English and/or western culture in general). Therefore, the reason why they learning the language is two folds: they learn the language because they are part of the global community and their mastery of the language can also help to spread their culture to the world.

In trying to be fair, this paper has to admit that this paradigm shifts under which the inclusion of local flavors into the teaching of English should consider the timing of its introduction. Wenli (2015: 55), on the best time to introduce students to the concept of glocalization, asserts that the tertiary level is the most appropriate since students should have had sufficient understanding of the English language that they can use it in their college classes at that time. In the same vein, this paper also suggests that this body of work should be introduced to those who have enough knowledge of the English language and agreeable maturity as not to resort to hurriedly equate their bad English resulting from their negligence

in studying the mechanics of the language with World Englishes, then justifying their action by pointing their finger to Postcolonial work, which might use various varieties of English.

c. Literature: Why it should be included into the EFL syllabus

There are two big opposing camps regarding the position of literature in the teaching of a foreign language. According to Sell (2005: 86-87) the arguments against literature falls in several spectrum, which are:

- a. The political reason. With regards to the EFL context, teachers are afraid of being accused as the proponents of linguistic and cultural imperialism.
- b. The methodological reason. It is believed that students learning a foreign language should be immersed with real life and real life situation while literature, as in fiction, is not realistic and is not relevant to daily living. Literature is also presumed to be detached from students geographically, linguistically, socially and culturally speaking. Moreover, those within this line of thinking also believe that the inclusion of literature is not compatible with the communicative approach employed in the realm of foreign language teaching, which focuses on the speaking and listening ability, because its focus is mainly on reading and writing. Their other concern is the literature in the foreign language class is not used “less as means to an end than as an end in itself, less as a resource than an object of study in its own right.”
- c. Current technological advancement. Writing and reading literature is no longer relevant.

On the benefits of literature in a foreign language classroom, those proposed by Parkinson and Reid Thomas (in Sell, 2005:87) are worth mentioning in this paper, they are: (a) cultural enrichment, (b) Linguistics model, (c) Mental training, (d) Extension of linguistic competence, (e) authenticity, (f) memorability, (h) rhythmic resource, (i) motivating material, (j) open to interpretation, and (h) convenience. This paper is not in the position to delve into the debate whether these ten advantages of literature for learning a foreign language is unanimously accepted by everyone involved in the field of ELT or not. However, Paran (2008: 26), after surveying some relevant theoretical perspectives and research conducted on the role of literature in the instruction of foreign language finally concludes that indeed literature “does have something very special to offer to language learning.”

As being hinted by the title of this paper, it is surely siding with those who believe in the merit of literature in learning a foreign language. However, some precautions must be made before introducing the students to the literature in the target language. As far as the teaching of English is concerned, the instruction of English and subsequently its literature in the realm of the British Empire, has been seen as one of the colonial enterprise to subjugate its colonial subjects. According to Ashcroft (1989: 7) “one of the main feature of imperial impression is control over language [where] imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm [marginalizing other] variants as impurities.” The founding of English Literature Department all over the world is also a direct result of British imperialism of which baton of influence is relayed by the USA. In his infamous minutes to the British Parliament in 1835, T.B. Macaulay, on the need to instruct English to the Indians, asserted that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia [and] English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, that the natives are desirous to be taught English.” It is safe to assume that those are the onset of native speakerism in the field of ELT and the presumed superiority of English literature over literature in other languages. Consequentially, it is not surprising if the study of English Literature stands accused of linguistic and cultural imperialism.

3. POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN ENGLISH AND THE FUTURE OF EFL IN MULTILINGUAL SOCIETIES

If the domain of ELT is to begin to incorporate World Englishes as proposed by TEGCOM or used as a lingua franca as suggested by ELF, the syllabus of English Literature studies must also accommodate literary works written in English coming from countries other than those within Kachru’s inner circles (notably the UK and the USA). The most practical step to begin with is by introducing

Postcolonial literature to the learners of English, especially for those from Kachru's expanding circle, such as Indonesia. Before proceeding to how potent the teaching of Postcolonial literature to ignite a brighter future of EFL in multilingual societies, there must be some ground clearing on its definition. According to Ashcroft et al (1989:1) Postcolonial literature is literary work written by those formerly colonized by Britain. Despite the fact that that definition is riddled with contestations, this paper will stick to that definition because it has already served the purpose of this paper and most importantly the definitional disputes are mainly on the time frame of when the prefix 'post' in postcolonial should begin and its implications on who to include and exclude as post-colonial writers.

At this point, this paper will take sometimes to explain how the inclusion of Postcolonial literature in teaching of English can contribute positively to the learner's acquirement of the language. It provides a convenient instance of English language being abrogated and at the same time appropriated to suit the interest of the 'non-native' user/owner of the language. Language abrogation, as Ashcroft et al (1989: 38) puts it, "is a refusal of categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in word. However this refusal to bow down to any standards set by the colonial master will not be effective without the notion of appropriation which is "the process by which the languages is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's cultural experience.

A good example for it is how Mohamad Haji Salleh, a Malaysian poet laureate who writes in English, in his poem "Do Not Say" challenges stereotypes normally directed to colonized people in general and the Malays in particular. In this poem, the speaker of the poem, who can safely be assumed as a Malay or a once colonized subject, questions the famous stereotype of 'the Lazy Malay' perpetrated by the colonizer, the British, by proclaiming

/do not say my people are lazy//because you do not know.//you are only a critic, an on
looker// you cannot know or judge, //passing the kampong in your car, staring at the
economic data./

In a brief glance, Mohammad Haji Salleh does not use any single capital letter in his poem, defying the standard norms of writing in English. However, pedagogical implication from this poem is not teaching the learners not to use proper punctuation in their writing, but to make them see that the colonial representation embedded in the English language (e.g. the Myth of Lazy Malay) can be abrogated. More importantly, the abrogation is conducted by using the very language imposed to the colonized Malay.

Further into his poem, we can see an instance of the appropriation of the English language. On the greatness of the Malay civilization, the speaker tells the implied audience (the colonizer of the Westerner in general) to

/do not write that we have no literature, culture.//have you ever listened to the sajak or
pantun//stayed a night at the bangsawan?// have you read the epic shairs//or the
theological theses?//how many times have you wondered about history in// the blade//
and ancestry in the handle of the keris, //or felt the pattern of the songket?// have you lived
in a kampong./

This is a perfect example of language abrogation and appropriation. First, the colonizer's assumption on the absence of civilization on the part of the colonized Malay is interrogated. Then, the speakers continues on showing that their civilization is no less greater than that of the colonizer by using the colonizer's own language. In other words, the colonizer imposes their language and cultural assumption to the colonial subject aiming at subjugating them, but in turns out that the latter appropriates the language to express their experience and propagate their cause.

A lesson learned from the poem above is that the presupposition under which English is assumed to be more superior than other language that it can carry the cultural burden of every culture cannot be sustained. Mohammad Haji Salleh has proved that local peculiarities, such as sajak, pantun, bangsawan, shair, keris, songket, and kampong have no equivalence in English. Drawing this fact into

the domain of EFL in multilingual societies, their immersion with Postcolonial literature will make them appreciate their linguistics and cultural complexity more. True to this, Kirkpatrick (2010: 22), on his take on the position of ELF in Asia, believes that the mastery of English is beneficial for facilitating the learning the culture of other countries in the region. He even goes further by suggesting the inclusion of literature written in English from across the regions could be included into the literature syllabus. Then, their reading of Postcolonial literature can lead learners to be more critical of the English language as not to fall to blind submission to native-speakerism which will only hamper them from using the language successfully. With this in mind, learners can be made to think that studying English is important not because it is a superior language, but to learn more about other cultures and communicate with the people across cultures.

4. CONCLUSION

The development of new varieties on English resulting from its global spread is the phenomenon which should be considered in the domain of ELT. First, it causes a changing demography of English speakers where the number of its non-native speakers has staggeringly exceeded those whose vernacular is English. In the domain of ELT, efforts have been made to deal with this current development. e.g the call for paradigm shift from TESOL to TEGCOM or the teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF) whereby the objective of the language learning is to make students successfully communicate in English rather than acquiring native-like proficiency. This shift is believed to be advantageous for those coming from multilingual societies where English is not extensively used for daily communication. However, these paradigm shift is not without opposition since both teachers and learners in EFL context still largely submit to native-speakerism. In this case, Postcolonial literature is effective in undermining native speakerisms, the notion usually hampering students to confidently use the language. All in all, the teaching of Postcolonial literature in English can ensure that English has a brighter future in multilingual societies.

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