
COLOURING ENGLISH MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS WITH MULTICULTURAL VALUES

Prof. Rusdi, Ph.D
Universitas Negeri Padang

Abstract

This paper discusses two issues. First, it discusses the concept of English as an international language and the increase of the number of non-native English language learners in the next decades. It is predicted that the number non-native English language learners exceeds the number English native language learners. The fact also shows that the number of non-native English speakers also exceeds the number English native speakers. The possibility of communication using English among non-native English speakers is greater compared with communication using English among native speakers of English or the number of non-native English language speakers to native speakers of English. Second, it discusses possible integration of cultural values of both native and non-native English speakers into the teaching of English. Such integration ignites the role of English as an international language. The blending of multicultural values into the teaching of English should be reflected in the teaching contents of both spoken and written texts. With this rich cultural values introduced to the English language learners, it will raise awareness of rich cultural differences that should be acknowledged. English as an international language accommodates cultural values of the world multicultural society.

Keywords: *multicultural classrooms, multicultural values, cultural differences*

1. INTRODUCTION

English will remain as an international language in the next decades. The word 'international' is understood as the existence of variations reflecting cultural and linguistic differences of people who use English in multicultural contexts. The way English users communicating in English reflect their cultural norms and values. The way they communicate in English, to some extent, will also be influenced by their first language. Rusdi (2015) argued that Speakers who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds use English differently reflecting their unique speech styles and cultural norms. It cannot be denied English will be used differently by different people from different cultural backgrounds both in speech styles and cultural values attached to it. Such variations should be maintained and understood by other English language users to build awareness and understanding among the English language users throughout the world. The paper discusses two key issues. First, it discusses the concept of English as an international language in multicultural society. Second, it discusses the implication of cultural differences in multicultural society into the teaching of English.

2. ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

English as an international language means variations. Speakers who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds use English differently reflecting their unique speech styles and cultural norms. It cannot be denied English will be used differently by different people from different cultural backgrounds both in speech styles and cultural values attached to it. Such differences make English become an international language. It is, therefore, argued that English will not be regarded as an international language when all people speak like native speakers of English and use Anglo Saxon cultural norms.

English, like other languages, is used to express thoughts and cultures of speakers who come from different ethnic groups. Speakers from Indonesia, for example, when communicating in English will bring their Indonesia speech styles and cultural norms. They do not speak English, in term of

speech styles, like native speakers. They will use Indonesian cultural norms and values when communicating in English.

The fact shows that the number of non-native speakers of English exceeds the number of English native speakers. Honna (1998) reported that in Asia, more than 350 million people speak English for various purposes, a number that is more than the combined population of United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia where English is a native tongue for many citizens. Most non-native speakers of English communicate in English with other non-native speakers. Indonesians might use English to communicate with Thais, Vietnamese, Koreans, Japanese, Cambodians, or Egyptians. Let non-native speakers reflect their cultural norms and values when communicating in English. It is agreeable what Honna (1998) has stated that the spread of English in Asia does not necessarily represent the transplantation of American English, British English, or any other native speaker English in the region. Honna further argued that English in Asia is being increasingly de-Anglo-Americanized, and that new varieties of English are being established to reflect Asian ways of life.

English users are grouped into three categories: inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle, Kachru in van Gelderen (2006). English users in inner circle are native speakers of English. English is used for everyday interaction, language of instruction, formal language used by the government. Countries that are grouped into inner circle are Great Britain, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. In outer circle category, English is used as a second language. English is used as a formal language in schools and government offices. Some people might also use English for everyday interaction. Some of the countries under the umbrella of outer circle are India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam. In the expanding circle, English is used as a foreign language. English is not used as formal language in schools and government offices. For everyday interaction, people in expanding circle use local or national language. In the expanding circle, English is mostly learned for specific purposes. In Indonesia, for example, the main objective for learning English is to prepare students to be able to read English texts. Others are learning English in order to pass the IELTS or TOEFL test. Some of the countries under the expanding circle, for example, are China, USSR, Indonesia, Egypt, Korea, Japan, etc.

In term of the number of English language users, the expanding circle has more English language users than that of in inner and outer circles. Crystal in van Gelderen (2006) estimated that in 2001 the number of English users in inner circle were 320-380 million speakers; in outer circle was more or less 300-500 million; and in expanding circle was about 500 million to 1 billion speakers. The fact show that English users are coming from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. The fact also shows that English are not only used among native speakers in inner circle, but also among speakers in outer circles, and among speakers in expanding circle. In fact, the number of non-native speakers of English communicate to other non-native speakers is greater than native speakers of English to other speakers and via versa.

Take for example in South East Asian region, Indonesians, non-native speakers, communicate in English to other Indonesians, Vietnamese, Singaporeans, Malaysians, The Philipinos, and Thais. Indonesians might communicate in English to other non-native speakers such as to Japanese, Koreans, Russians, and Chinese. Possibly, the greater possibility for Indonesians to communicate in English is to people in expanding or outer circles, not to the native speakers of English in the inner circle.

3. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Every society has its own unique cultural norms and values. The norms and values that attach to the society affect the way the people communicate. One of the differences in the people communicate in multicultural society is methods of reasoning.

One classification of methods of reasoning is inductive or deductive. Kirkpatrick in Rusdi (2015) defines the deductive method of reasoning as “a way of reasoning that moves from a general idea or set of facts to a particular idea or fact.” In contrast, the inductive method is defined as “a way of reasoning in which known facts are used to present general laws.” Kirkpatrick further labels the deductive method as “explicit, to the point, and direct”, and the inductive methods as “implicit,

intuitive, or indirect” (1995:272). It has also been generally accepted that the inductive method of argument is preferred by Asians while the deductive method is preferred by Westerners. For example, Kirkpatrick asserts that “there seemed to be consensus [among Western scholars] that Asian reasoning was somehow more indirect than ‘Western’ and that Asian reasoning preferred the use of inductive or analogical argument” (1995:291). Tyler and Davies (1990) studied the communication patterns between a Korean lecturer with his American students. It was found that the Korean lecturer presented his topic by explaining details of the information first. This method is not expected by the American students where they expected the lecturer presented the general information first, then the details of the information. Samovar and Porter (1991) argued that most Koreans use the inductive method of reasoning while Americans use the deductive method of reasoning. Scollon and Scollon in Rusdi (2015) stated that cultures and preferences might change and argue that Western speakers or writers before seventeenth century preferred to use inductive method of reasoning. They began to use deductive method of reasoning or “CBS (Clarity, Brevity, Sincerity) style” began only in the seventeenth century.

However, Scollon and Scollon (1991:113) also use the term “inductive” and “deductive” to describe the ways ‘Asian’ and ‘Westerners’ develop conversations. In a study of small talk sequence structure, Scollon and Scollon (1991) identified that Asians tend to defer the topic until after a considerable period of talk and that they follow a *call-answer-facework-{topic}* pattern, while westerners introduce the topic early at the beginning of the talk and follow a *call-answer-topic* pattern.

In their study of Chinese conversation patterns in Taiwan, Scollon and Scollon (1995) identified a difference between the Taiwanese and the Western patterns as being in use of *facework*. They argue that they delay of the introduction of topic in Asian discourse is due to the cultural structuring of situations and participant roles. Hierarchy in relationships is more observable in Asia than it is the west. For example, in interaction people will bear in mind who is older and who is younger, who is in a higher position and who is in a lower position. The rule is, with regard to the introduction of the topic, the older person in the higher position has right to introduce the topic. This is in contrast to Western discourse where the person who speaks first (the caller), introduces the topic.

Gundykunts et al. (1988) made a similar point when suggesting that a direct communicative style characterizes an individualistic society and then an indirect communicative style characterizes a collectivistic society. It is therefore hypothesized that the method of argument used by Indonesians, as apart of an Asian and collectivistic community, will tend to use an inductive style, while English native speakers or ‘westerners’, will prefer to use a deductive method of reasoning.

The direct-indirect communicative style refers to the degree of speakers’ explicitness in their verbal communication (Gundykunst et al. 1988). The direct style is defined as “verbal messages that embody and invoke speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and desire in the discourse process”, and the indirect style, in contrast, is referred to “verbal messages that camouflage and conceal speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and goals in the discourse situation” (Gundykunst *et al.* 1988:100). The following is an example given by Rusdi (2015) of an indirect communication style used by an Indonesian in responding to a question regarding exit-permit approval procedures. This Indonesian is a student who is studying in Perth and plans to return to Indonesia during the semester break. He asked other Indonesian students what he should do to ensure that his exit-permit would be processed quickly by the Indonesian Foreign Affairs in Jakarta. One of the Indonesian students, who works for the department of Religious Affairs, suggested:

karena kebetulan kantor saya berhadapan dengan Departemen Luar Negeri. Mungkin kawan-kawan dari luar Jakarta tidak bisa mengurus exit-permit dalam satu hari. Ada beberapa staf di Departemen Agama yang bisa menolong. Tapi saya kira juga harus ada saling pengertian, karena menyangkut extra-hour. (Hppia mailing list 26 Nov. 1999).

English translation:

(Because) my office happens to be just opposite the Department of Foreign Affairs, those coming from outside Jakarta, probably cannot arrange for the exit-permit in one day. There are

staff at the Department of Religious Affairs who can offer help but I think there should be mutual understanding because it is related to extra hours.

What he wanted to say by “but I think there should be mutual understanding because it is related to extra hours” is that you will need to reward the person who helps you. Another example of an indirect communicative style in Indonesia is provided by Alwasilah in Rusdi (2015) who reported an American journalist’s comments about when he applied for visa to visit East Timor.

I made my request through both official and unofficial channels. Everyone I asked was most pleasant, and said, in effect “why, sure, there shouldn’t be any problem, but it would have to be officially approved. “When will that approval come? “The minister in charge of the matter is out of town.” Or “The people who can make the final decision will meet tomorrow.” Or “Call on Friday, we should know then.” Or “Call when you come back from your trip to Sumatra.” For two months I was never told that I could not visit East Timor, that my request had been denied. It was just never granted. The closest to a “no” I never heard was “not yet”, which is probably the most frequent answer to any question in Indonesia. (The New Yorker 6 June 1988, p.49)

To give a straight or bold “no” to an offer or a request is regarded impolite to most Indonesians (Rusdi, 2015). Suseno (1996) states that Javanese almost never say *mboten* (no) in refusing a request or an offer. When they want to refuse the request or the offer, they will use a more polite expression of *inggih* (yes). So, when someone is communicating to a Javanese, she or he should be careful in translating the *inggih* as it could mean “yes” or “no”. Park in Rusdi (2015) reports similar observations in Korean-speaking communities, where Koreans rarely make negative responses such as “no”, “I agree with you”, or “I can’t do it.” They prefer to use expressions such as “I agree with you in principle...”, or “sympathize with you...” (Park 1979:88). The indirect communicative style has also been identified in Japanese-speaking communities. Okabe in Rusdi (2015) also identified that Americans used explicit words such as “absolutely”, “certainly”, and “positively”, while Japanese used less explicit words such as “maybe”, “perhaps”, and “Probably” (1993:36). Kartriel (1986) studied the speech styles of Israelis and Arab speakers and found that Israeli speakers used “straight talk” or “tough talk” style, but the Arab speakers’ speech style is labelled as “sweet talk”. Gibson (1996) defined the terms *tough talker* and *sweet talker* as follows:

The Tough Talker is a man or woman dramatized as centrally concerned with himself or herself. His or her style is *I-talk*. The Sweet Talker goes out of his or her way to be nice to us. His or her style is *you-talk*. The Stuffy Talker expresses no concern either for himself or for herself. His or her style is *it-talk*. (p.x)

Linked to the underlying concepts of inductive-deductive methods of reasoning or direct-indirect speech styles, Hinds (1987) differentiates language users as *writer or speaker* responsible, or *reader or hearer* responsible. In English speaking culture, speakers have responsibility to be clear over listeners. This can be read from following aphorism:

Tell’em what you’re going to tell’em, tell’em, then tell’em what you told’em (Hinds 1987), p.144).

The review of these literatures has shown that every ethnic group has its own cultural norms and values. These cultural norms are reflected in the way people communicate.

4. LOCAL CULTURE, FOREIGN CULTURE, AND ACADEMIC CULTURE

In context of English language teaching, it is argued that culture is classified into local culture, foreign culture, and academic culture (Rusdi, 2015). Local culture means the cultural norms of the people who learn English. In context of students who are learning English in Indonesia, for example, the local culture is the students’ cultural norms depending upon their ethnicity. If the students are from West Sumatra, their local cultural norms will be Minangkabau norms. If the students are from East and Central Java, their cultural norms will be Javanese norms. Similarly, when the students are from North Sumatra, their local cultural norms will be Batakese norms.

Foreign cultural norms are considered to be all other cultural norms which do not belong to local cultural values of the students. These can be target language cultures or other cultures of different ethnic groups across the globe. For students who are learning English in Indonesia, the

target language cultures such as British, American, Canadian, New Zealand, or Australian cultural norms are all regarded as foreign cultures. Other cultural norms or values of people from different ethnicities are also considered to be foreign cultures. The cultures of people from Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, Poland, Russia, Peru, Egypt, or Uganda are also considered to be foreign cultures for students learning English in Indonesia.

The third type of culture is called academic culture. Academic culture has its own rules or conventions. In academic culture, for example, students are urged to communicate clearly, efficiently, logically, and communicatively. When writing a good paragraph, for example, students are asked to write the topic sentence explicitly and clearly. It is preferable when the topic sentence is written as the first sentence of the paragraph. Other sentences in the paragraph should be related to the topic sentence. Such format of developing a good paragraph is an example of an academic culture. Another example of academic culture is that when students are asked to give a presentation, they are urged to introduce the topic of the presentation early. When the presentation is long, the speaker should mention early at the beginning how the presentation is going to be developed. People coming from different cultural backgrounds (individualistic or collectivistic, high context or low context) when they come to academic life, they should follow academic cultural norms.

5. TEACHING ENGLISH IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Teaching English does not mean teaching the cultures of native speakers of English. The teaching of English should equip students with examples of multicultural norms reflecting how people communicate. Students should aware to the fact that the way people communicate differs cross-culturally. The contents of the teaching should be varied representing local cultural values, foreign cultural values, and academic culture.

Students should be introduced to different examples of people communicating in English. From the examples, the students will know how the speakers' accent and cultural norms and values. The examples are taken from English users from inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. They know how Vietnamese, Thais, Singaporeans, Arabians, Africans, Australians communicate in English. The examples can be presented in different forms. Teachers can use English television programs taken from CNN, National Geographic, or other English channels. There are many channels available. The examples can also be obtained from written sources.

Local and academic cultural norms and values should be dominant in teaching materials used and classroom teaching and learning activities. The question now is: Which cultural norms and values are going to be used by the non-native speakers of English when communicating in English to native speakers of English or to other non-native speakers of English?

There are two answers to the question. First, as it is generally known, language including English is used to express thoughts. People's thoughts are built and shaped by the cultural norms and values they believe in. People's thoughts differ cross-culturally. The way Indonesians think will be different from the way Americans, Canadians, and Australians think. The best choice is to be ourselves. Indonesians keep communicating using Indonesian. Australians keep communicating using Australian cultural norms and values when communicating in any languages including English. Therefore, it is my stand point to argue that the best way to communicate in English for social purposes is by using one's own cultural norms and values. Indonesians will communicate in English using Indonesian cultural norms and values. Thais will communicate in English using Thai cultural norms and values.

The second answer to the question is, when it is in academic culture, the way one communicates in any languages, including in English, to use academic cultural norms. Academic culture belongs to everyone and to every ethnicity that are in academic settings. When writing a paragraph, writers are expected to write the topic sentence early in the beginning of the paragraph. Such expectation is one of the academic cultural norms for writing. The norm does not belong to English native speakers' cultural norms or to the non-English native speakers' cultural norms. It belongs to an academic cultural norm. When giving a presentation, for example, the presentation must be clear, simple, concise, and well ordered. The presenter must tell the audience the topic of the presentation, how the points in the presentation to be divided. The following introduction of a presentation is considered to be well-form in academic culture.

Good morning.
It is my great pleasure to give a presentation this morning.
The topic of my presentation is Effective Techniques of Writing an Academic Paper. The presentation will be divided into three parts. First, I will explain the characteristics of a good academic paper. Then, I will explain the techniques of quoting. And, lastly, I will discuss the issues on plagiarism.

6. CONCLUSION

English as an international language is used in multicultural society. It emphasizes the fact that English is not only used among native speakers of English in inner circle, but it is used by speakers in outer and expanding circles. The facts also show that the number of English language users in outer and expanding circles is greater than the number of English users in inner circle. The way speakers of English communicate differs linguistically and culturally influencing by their first language and cultural norms and values. Such differences make English as an international language. The differences also colour the use of English in multicultural society. English is only used as an instrument to express thoughts of speakers coming from different ethnicities with different cultural norms and values. Therefore, the teaching of English should be able to prepare students to successfully communicate with other speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds in multicultural society. English classrooms should be coloured with multicultural norms and values of speakers of English who come from different cultural backgrounds.

REFERENCES

- Gibson, W. 1966, 'Tough, Sweet and Stuff: An Essay on Modern American Prose styles', In *Culture and Interpersonal Communication*, eds. W.B. Gudykunst et al., 1988, sage, Beverly Hills.
- Gudykunst, W. and Kim, Y. 1984, *Communicating with Strangers*, Random House, New York.
- Gudykunst, William. B et al. 1988, *Culture and Interpersonal Communication*, Sage, Beverly Hills.
- Honna, N. 1995, 'English in Japanese Society: Language Within Language', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 16, no. 1 & 2, pp. 45-62.
- Hinds, J. 1987, 'Reader Versus Writer Responsibility: A New Typology', in *Writing Across Languages: An Analysis of L2 Text*, eds. U. Connor and R.B. Kaplan, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, Reading, Mass.
- Hppia-news group, November 26, 1999.
- Katriel, T. 1986, *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Saba Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Kirkpatrick, A. 1995, 'Chinese Rhetoric: Methods of Argument', *Multilingua*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 271-295.
- Okabe, R. (1983). 'Cultural Assumptions of East and West: Japan and the United States', in *Intercultural Communication Theory*, ed. W. Gudykunst. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Park, M. (1979). *Communication Styles in Two Different Cultures: Korean and American*. Seoul: Han Shin Publishing Company
- Rusdi. (2015). Tailoring Local Cultural Norms in the Teaching of English. *A Paper Presented at the Third International Seminar on English Language Teaching*, Universitas Negeri Padang.
- Samovar, L.A. and R. Porter. (1991). *Communication between Cultures*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Scollon, R. and S.W. Scollon. (1991) Topic Confusion in English-Asian Discourse, *World Englishes*, 10(2), 113-125.
- Scollon, R. and S.W. Scollon. (1995). *Intercultural Communication*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd
- Suseno, F.M. (1996). *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama
- Tyler, A. and C. Davies. (1990). Cross-linguistic Communication Missteps, *Text*, 10(4), 385-411.
- van Gelderen, Elly. (2006). *A History of the English Language*. Amsterdam: Jhon Benjamins Publishing Company.