



**INCREASING THE COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN
GLOBAL CONTEXTS: FROM COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE TO
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

Indawan Syahri
Muhammadiyah University of Palembang
E-mail: indawansyahri_ump@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

Both Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have to adapt their goals, materials, and modes to anticipate the appearance of ‘new legacy’ towards new variants of English. The increasing numbers of English varieties has offered a shift of English teaching goal, i.e., from enabling the learners to possess communicative competence (CC) to bringing up the learners with intercultural competence (ICC), the ability to maintain the intelligibility (termed by Smith, 1992) between or among the interlocutors when communicating. It requires knowledge about universal cultural dimensions, knowledge about cultural specifics, and knowledge about personal behavior patterns. This paper attempts to present reasons and facts why English becoming Global language (see Crystal 2003), how to synchronize English teaching goals in Indonesia with global English, what relevant teaching materials to be taught, and how or what techniques to use. It will elaborate some theories underpinning the change of paradigm, i.e., the Communicative into ICC.

Keywords: communicative competence, intercultural competence, intelligibility

INTRODUCTIONS

The use of English in various areas and fields is commonly increased. People all over the world shared that they need English in order to ‘survive’ in their societies. It will be a new a baseline: without English, you are not even in the race (Graddol 2006). In virtual communication they use English just to share ideas and feelings with other persons from other nations. It is not surprising that about 80 percent of all electronic information stored in computers and transferred via internet is in English (Rohde 1996). Take for examples, a person can find friends through social media. They need to invite new friends in English. English is the most utilized language in business. The producers advertising goods through media also use English. The contracts and invoices in business signed by sellers and purchasers are usually written in English. Agreements in many matters between two or more parties are realized in English. In academic affairs, every study requires good commands of both spoken and written English of teachers and students. Scholars have to socialize ideas through journals that also commonly written in English. Though they also might publish papers in other language journals English written journals are mostly required by the academic communities. In shorts, it is the most used and taught foreign language around the globe (Yano 2009).

Traditionally, native speakers of English are people who acquired the language naturally and effortlessly in childhood in the community which uses the language (Cook 2003, p. 28). However, globalization has resulted in increasing numbers of children who have native-speaker parents but have grown up in non-English speaking community. The number of native speakers of English is rapidly expanding. It makes the definition of native speakers may be challenged (Yano 2009). Conversely, the second language speakers in the Outer Circle become ‘functional’ native speakers (Kachru 2005). They are acquiring native-speaker intuition on grammar accuracy and generative ability in their varieties of English. In the Expanding Circle, there are people who speak new varieties of English,



which are learned in non-English-speaking societies and therefore are linguistically and culturally de-Anglo-Americanized (Yano 2009). These varieties have functional clarity and international intelligibility. The speakers of new varieties speak English not only with typical pronunciation but also with typical cultural embedment. They communicate ideas with others from different countries in English brought their own cultures, though they attempted to recognize the interlocutors' cultures.

It is estimated that the number of native English speakers is 300 million to 450 million (Stevenson, 1994), 320-280 million (Kachru, 1995), and 325 (Graddol 1997 in McKay 2002, p 32). More than one billion people are believed to speak some form of English (Rohde, 1996). Although the numbers vary, it is widely accepted that hundreds of millions of people around the world speak English, whether as a native, second or a foreign language. English, in some form, has become the native or unofficial language of a majority of the countries around the world today. In 20 to 30 countries around the world, English is merging with native languages to create hybrid Englishes." (Rohde 1996).

English as considered as *lingua franca* (Jenkins 2009) among people all over the world has become the reality. In global sense, people interact and transact to one another in English. From the simple purposes, for instances, greeting and introducing for making friends through social media to the most complex like diplomatic and business communication with persons from different countries people need English. As the consequences of the great number of speakers and the non-native speakers as the most, the new varieties pervasively appear in peripheral countries. For instances, Singaporean English, Indian English and others are recognized as new accepted varieties of English. They are competitively used as a means of international communication. The users of the new varieties commonly feel sure that the speakers from other nations who considered English as their second or foreign language understand what they tell and say. Even those who use English as the first language comprehend what they talk about.

As new varieties of English increase and have multiple numbers. There should be some impacts on English teaching in Indonesia. Until at the present time, the applied linguists and teachers of English have considered 'legally' English as a foreign language for many years. As usually the foreign language learners are exposed with the materials dealt with native speakers' cultures, enactment, and behaviors. In relation to English as International language (EIL) or global language, functions as *lingua franca* among nations, some questions are arisen: how to synchronize English teaching goals in Indonesia with global English, what relevant teaching materials to be taught, and how or what techniques to use.

How to synchronize English teaching goals in Indonesia with global English

In Indonesia contexts especially for high school learners the goal is, in general, to enable learners to understand, develop and create text, e.g., descriptive, narrative, explanatory, etc. Realizing EIL, the orientation of teaching should aim to provide some activities in which learners could practice English in cross-cultural contexts. They are facilitated not only to be familiar with the native speaker's culture but also with other varieties' cultures. They need to learn Anglo-American cultures in order to communicate with native speakers of English and other varieties' cultures to talk and negotiate with non-native speakers of English.

In communication interlocutors need to have shared knowledge of the norms of they *act* as they do, *make* the things they make, and *interpret* their experiences in distinctive way they do (Quinn and Holland 1987). First *act* includes verbal acts whether conversation and writing for the purposes of persuasion, direction, or aesthetics are realized the distinctive experiences of a speech community. If



they share a common language and cultural norms they have no difficulties to 'make sense' of each other's utterance and action. Vice versa, if they do have that shared knowledge communication breakdowns may occur. In order to establish the intelligibility in communication, they should be able to interpret the verbal acts expressed, on only understanding the words in utterances but also the values transferred. It is strengthened by the recognizing the cultures embedded in the utterances.

The ability to communicate with others is not partially a matter of mastering a language usage. It deals with competences holistically. Teaching English emphasizing on enabling learners to have Communicative Competence (CC) showed unsatisfactory results. Huda (1999) did a survey to find out that stakeholders (learners, teachers and parents) wished a change in the objective of English instruction. The reason why they wished a change is that the majority of learners (82.7%) never spoke English outside the classroom, as another finding of the survey. Of course there were some factors contributed the 'failure'. I considered the objective that enable the learners to possess the CC whose linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components (Canale, 1983) referred to native speakers' competence. The settings exposed in the classrooms were mostly the interactions conducted by native speakers of English and less of those of by non-native and non-native speakers. Teachers still assume that English as 'foreign language', but have not considered very well that English as 'international language'. Promoting Intercultural Competence (ICC) is more realistic and challenging. The learners will recognize various cultures from nations in which English is used as L1, L2, and FL. In addition, they can express their cultures to others. Then, the teachers are challenged to teach English as a means of communication and of sharing cultures.

What relevant teaching materials to be taught

When communicating ideas speakers usually bring their own cultures indicating identities of origin. For instance, Chinese speak English with typical pronunciation and rhetorical structures. Though they try to imitate native speaker's ways of pronouncing some words, the sounds will not exactly the same as the native speakers do. The intelligibility is reached not only due to linguistic or language factors, but also shared knowledge of cultures embedded by interlocutors.

In increasing ICC learners should be facilitated to have knowledge of various cultures. What cultures to be taught? The contents of teaching materials are possibly derived from varieties of cultural backgrounds. The cultural diversities embedded are transferred through the target language. There are three domains that the teachers should considered, i.e. general culture, specific culture and behavior.

General cultures

The teaching materials are about the cultures of general principles in term of degree of formality. Sociolinguistic variables play important roles in this context. Teachers can list the dichotomies of formal and informal usage and they can even arrange into three categories: formal, neutral and informal. The choices of utterances relevant contexts are the focuses of teaching materials.

Germane to basic contexts, the materials can be developed by teachers emphasizing on appropriateness on Inner Circle *per se*, the utterances that are mostly used by native speakers. The appropriateness is determined by whether or not the expressions or utterances are used by native speakers.

Specific cultures

ICC covers the knowledge of cultures that are practiced by people all over the globe. It deals with general principles applied in most communication. The cultures most commonly used by speakers of every language. This knowledge is usually brought the most dominant and advanced societies. General cultures are grouped into west and east cultures. For instance, in terms of *directness* Anglo-Americans are more direct than eastern people. Chinese use inductive ways and indirect acts



when requesting. Honorific markers are more frequently used by speakers of EFL or ESL from Asian Countries.

Indonesian speakers of English frequently are found to use 'sir, mister, mom, miss,' and the like as politeness realizations. They even call classmates by 'mister'. It has nothing to do with asymmetric relationship between or among interlocutors. It is considered common to Indonesians. The lists of teaching materials contain specific cultures from many countries. They are taught to the learners because cultural differences of speakers potentially cause misunderstanding and communication breakdowns. In other words, intelligibility maintains if the interlocutors have shared knowledge of each cultural background.

The teachers of English can develop their teaching materials based on cultural mainstreams. For instance, the topic *preparing breakfast* covers general ways, i.e. American breakfast, then continues with more specific ways of preparing breakfast, e.g. Japanese breakfast, Chinese breakfast, and Indonesian breakfast. Discussions on diversities of manners, attitudes, menus, and others are essential for learners in order to have sensitivity on others' cultures. Knowing other interlocutors' cultures lubricates interactions and transactions made during communication.

Behaviors

Behavior refers to the range of actions and manners made by people in conjunction with themselves or their environment. It also deals with perceptions towards other people's actions. In communication, the speakers tend to express their own cultural manners at the same time they convey messages. So the interlocutors require the culture recognition of the speakers. *Vise versa*, speakers also need to know the interlocutors' cultures.

The teaching materials cover some topics that infer how the people perform when realizing speech acts. Usually individual behavior is influenced by cultures that people manifest in certain communities. The community members are committed to apply in their communications. When the speakers want to share the cultural norms, they have to recognize their own values and habits in advance. At the same time they try to understand other's cultures. If both interlocutors have the shared knowledge, their communications run smoothly. We can start from community culture then continue understanding individual behaviors. Alternatively we start from individual learners to community cultures.

How or what techniques to use

Intercultural competence is the ability to adjust and apply intercultural knowledge in a specific communication situation taking into account the actual conditions of the setting. Intercultural knowledge as stated previously consists of knowledge about cultural specifics, general cultural dimensions and personal behavior patterns as well as a conscious behavior repertoire which is derived from that knowledge.

How to train the learners in order to have intercultural competence? There are two approaches: top down and bottom up. The former recommends that teachers start from general cultures. For example, the teacher offers a topic of discussion 'how Americans go to wedding party'. The teachers may give some text about American wedding party. It is about how the bride and bridegroom's are dressed. How menus are served. Including how the bride and bridegroom express their thanks to the guests.

Then, the learners are facilitated to find out other cultures relevant to the topics, those of the non-native speakers' varieties. They may visit websites to get some information about how other countries or ethnic groups to celebrate similar events. How Korean or Japanese hold wedding parties. They compare some countries that have this kind of events. The teacher may continue giving other activities



to the learners. For example, the learners are asked find information about traditional wedding parties around Indonesia. The learners are to compare wedding party traditions.

The bottom up approach is different, another way around. The learners are elicited to share information with one another, could be individual or group tasks. Since learners are heterogeneous. They are from different cultural backgrounds. They are asked to tell to their classmates about typical cultures in their communities. In group they discussed what they learn from their classmates have already told to. Then, they agree to certain topics to discuss in group. Each individual may perceive towards the topic. For example, one group discusses South Sumatra tradition and comparing with Javanese tradition in wedding parties. Then they are asked to report in both spoken and in writing. Each group will develop and create texts about what they have discussed. In form of writing the teachers could facilitate the students to make compositions.

In applying these approaches, there should be supportive media. In the students are given internet access, they could do the tasks comprehensively in class. If not the teachers can ask the learners to do the tasks in group outside the class.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The teaching of English generally should match with the functions of English. In Indonesian contexts the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are 'legally' stated in constitution. The goal is to enable the learner to possess communicative competence (CC). In fact, the teachers have already attempted to consider cultures at the same time they teach English as a means of communication. Some teachers, if not all, only concern with the target culture, American-Anglo cultures or Inner Circle Cultures.

Another fact English as an International Language (EIL) has become a reality. The teaching of English enlarger the coverage, i.e. CC plus Intercultural Competence (ICC). In *global sense*, the teaching goal is to enable the learners to communicate not only with native speakers of English, but also with other nonnative speakers of English. In *local sense*, in Indonesia, English functionally become medium of instruction, conference, business and Information communication and Technology (ICT).

The teaching materials should cover all aspect of cultures from all over the Globe. Teaching approaches, techniques and strategies provide some relevant activities in which learners can optimally obtain knowledge of other cultures. Finally the learners are not only able to understand what people talk, but also able to tell and share their local cultures with others from all over the world.

REFERENCES

- Canale, M. (1983). *Communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy* In J. Richards and Schmidt (Eds.) *Language and Communication*. London: Longman
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, G. (2003). *Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English Next*. London: British Council.
- Huda, N. (1999). *Language Learning and Teaching: Issues and Trends*. Malang: Universitas Negeri Malang Publisher.
- Jenkins, J. (2009). English as a lingua franca: interpretations and attitudes. *World Englishes*, 28 (2): 200--207.



- Kachru, B. (1985). Institutionalized second language varieties. *The English Language Today*: 211--226. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Kachru, B. (2005). *Asian Englishes beyond the Canon*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- McKey, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an International Language: Rethinking Goals and Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quinn, N., and Holland, D. (1987). *Cultural Models in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rohde, D. (1996). As English Spreads, Speakers Morph it into World Tongue. *Christian Science Monitor*, 10.
- Stevenson, R. (1994). *Global Communication in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Longman.
- Smith, L.E. (1992). Spread of English and issues of intelligibility in Braj B. Kachru (Eds.), *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*: 75--90. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Yano, Y. (2009). English as an international lingua franca: from societal to individual. *World Englishes*, 28 (2): 246--255 .