

NON-NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN ELT (ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING) PROFESSION

Nuse A. Rahmati

Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

Universitas Islam Malang

E-mail: nuse.rahmati@gmail.com

Abstract: For most English teachers in non-English speaking countries, especially who serve English as a foreign language are highly influenced by some beliefs such as the monolingual classroom environment, the native speaker teachers, the early start learning period, and the maximum exposure on English. While the teaching and learning process can be complicated, all those beliefs are misleading and weighing down non-native English teachers as well as students. Therefore, this paper will emphasise the alternative thought of ELT professions and consider the uniqueness features in EFL situations.

Keywords: non-native English teachers, fallacy, ELT

Abstrak:

Sebagian besar pengajar bahasa Inggris di banyak negara yang bukan berbahasa Inggris, terutama yang menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, pengajaran dipengaruhi oleh tiga keyakinan yaitu, lingkungan kelas *monolingual*, pengajar penutur asli, waktu awal pembelajaran, dan pajaran yang maksimal dalam bahasa Inggris. Sementara itu, proses belajar mengajar bisa menjadi rumit apabila hal tersebut didukung oleh ketiga keyakinan di atas, hal tersebut mampu memberatkan dan menyesatkan pengajar bahasa Inggris yang bukan penutur asli seperti yang terjadi dengan siswa. Oleh karena itu, kajian ini akan menekankan pada alternative pemikiran profesi Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris dan mempertimbangkan keunikan pada pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: Pengajar bahasa Inggris bukan penutur asli, kesalahan berfikir, pengajaran bahasa Inggris

The term 'the globalisation of English' can be referred to the prompt spreading of English as a second or a foreign language. The amount of the world's native speaker (NS) to non-native speaker (NNS) ratio for English is approximated to be between 1 to 2 and 1 to 4 (Crystal, 1997). By considering this predominance of NNS of English, it can be asserted that communication between NNS to NNS is far more frequent than communication between NS to NS or NNS to NS. It means that by far, English used as a lingua franca is the most common form in the world today. The globalisation of English also has an effect on education. Most of worldwide government has discussed similar educational agendas that have some purpose, so that educational discourse often offers learning for improving job skills and economic development (Spring, 2008). This situation strengthens the

importance of English language to be taught in schools. However, globalisation of education does not mean that all schools are the same, mainly in EFL contexts. In this regard, the concept of native and non-native speaker arises. An English native speaker in the linguistic perspective is someone who speaks English as his or her mother tongue also called as first language, and a non-native English speaker is someone who does not speak English as his or her mother tongue or first language (Medgyes, 2006). However, the native or the non-native issue is controversial and has been debated endlessly, especially from a sociolinguistic perspective as well as among language educators. Regarded as worthless matter, Medgyes (2006) offers new concepts and terms of the native/non-native dichotomy, involving "more or less accomplished and proficient users of English, expert versus novice speakers, and

bilingual speakers to include both natives fluent in another language and non-natives fluent in English" (p. 431).

Moreover, there is a claim that there is no reason to separate speakers into two categories since there are no obvious features between them, also both native and non-native speakers have the same right to use English language. Conversely, there are some precepts of English language teaching (ELT) that still exist in today's world. The origin of these tenets comes from a conference held at Makerere, Uganda in 1961. The conference was presented by 23 countries representative who were presumed to have ELT aid needs, and required support from Britain (Phillipson, 1992). In addition, the objectives of the conference were to "provide opportunity for the exchange of ideas and experiences among people from different part of the world who may not be aware of development elsewhere; and to discuss ways and means of increasing the efficiency of teaching English as a second language, particularly in the difficult initial stages, and in accordance with the needs and wishes of the countries concerned" (Makerere Report as cited in Phillipson, 1992: 183-184). The conference also generated some precepts that inspire ELT work, and these precepts underlie many methodological beliefs which influence on the nature and the content of ELT profession activity in periphery countries.

Based on Makerere conference, there are five precepts of ELT which have influence in ELT area till now. Unfortunately, those precepts are merely misleading concepts especially in teaching English in EFL contexts. Since non-native English teachers have to struggle with the language and overcome the intimidations to their professional self-confidence as non-native teachers.

The first precept of ELT is that English is best taught monolingual. This precept assures that English teachers should use English as the only medium in the teaching and learning process. It means that the only language allowed in the English classroom is English. Moreover, this precept believes that an exclusive use of English will get the most of the learning of language, without consideration of whatever of other languages the learners may recognize (Phillipson, 1992). Believing that immersion in English, teachers are likely to force their students to speak

only English and ban them speaking their mother tongue or first language. What is more, students who disobey the English-only rule are often punishment, for instance they are asked to stand up in front of or outside the class. By forcing students to speak English-only, countless teachers, even in EFL situation, believe that the students will acquire the language faster. However, it is unlikely an ideal situation for learning a language where there is no or little exposure of the language in the environment. For an illustration, imagine that an English teacher explains a lesson entirely in English to students who only understand Bahasa Indonesia. It is highly convinced that the students will unable to follow and actively participate in the activity. Additionally, students unlikely learn through a language which they are not familiar with (Dursin, 2007). It is also considered that a monolingual system pays no attention to home languages, concepts, and ways of thinking. In a similar fashion, Cummins (as cited in Dursin, 2007) states that this kind of policy may abandon students to have a chance to preserve their mother tongue as the significant part of their cultural identities. The prohibition in using other languages reflects a belief that other languages, including the mother tongue, are prevention in achieving proficiency of second or foreign language learning. In contrast, a great deal of researchers reveals that there is a direct correlation between proficiency in the mother tongue and proficiency in the second language. It means that skills attained in the first language can be applied to learn the second language and to be successful in mastering that language (Dulay and Burt as cited in Nunan, 1999). Another reason, questioning the monolingual precept is that it is impractical (Phillipson, 1992). It is that the majority of teachers of English in EFL situation are non-native speakers, but the reality in ELT indicates that local teachers are imposed to follow the example of native speaking teachers in Central country. Take for example, large amount of books that demonstrate the teaching methodology and approach seem unresponsive to the real needs of the students particularly in EFL contexts. What is more Kirkpatrick (2002) asserts that insisting on a monolingual classroom when both teacher and students have same first language or national language, where there is a common teaching language problem in EFL context such as

Indonesia, is to reject the usefulness of the first language or national language as a means to help students rationalise the target language and give them better understanding of their own. It is clear that the effect of monolingual teaching on students and also teachers in EFL situation can be distressing, and this can be described as the monolingual fallacy.

The second precept listed in Makerere Report is the belief that says the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker. There are some features that the native speaker possess what may make them better qualified than the non-native. This is because non-native speakers have capability in showing fluent, appropriate language utterances, and in recognizing the value of cultural nuance of the language. However, particular languages are obtained in social settings. It is a misleading opinion to think that a person exclusively belong to one particular social group, in fact a person can participate in many different groups, such as family, peer group, region, age, and gender. It means that membership of a group may change over time and so does the language, but it does not mean that a person who was born into a group, he/she automatically speaks its language fluently (Rampton, 1990). Therefore, teachers' skills are accomplished rather than untaught; many of them have excellent capacity as a language teacher, whether they are native or non-native speakers. Therefore, this is the importance of teacher training in preparing non-native teachers to be professional teachers in ELT. Pasternak and Bailey (as cited in Snow, Kamhi-Stein, and Brinton, 2006) emphasize three points of professional preparation not only for native but also for non-native speakers. They should have "knowledge about something", "procedural knowledge", and "ability to do things." This knowledge covers three aspects; "knowing about and how to use the target language", "knowing about and how to teach in cultural appropriate ways", and "knowing about and how to behave appropriately in the target culture" (p. 262).

Furthermore, some researchers highlight that non-native teachers may be more competent than native speakers when they have near native speaker proficiency in the target language through the painstaking process of acquiring English as a second or foreign language, and when they understand the cultural needs of their students. It

can be argued that success in mastering a foreign language, especially verbalize it fluently, may have relationship with high success in teaching (Britten as cited in Phillipson, 1992). In addition, teachers who speak the same first language with the students have the same experience of learning the language that the students are now trying to accomplish. According to Kirkpatrick (2002), the ideal English teachers in EFL context are trained with high proficiency in English, and they: "provide an appropriate and attainable model of the language, provide a motivating example for their students, have empathy for their students, are linguistically sophisticated, understand local cultural and educational traditions, and represent an excellent educational investment" (p. 222). The most important thing is insight that the teachers are acquainted with structure and usage of a language, and their ability to analyse and explain; this certainly has to be learnt.

The third precept from Makerere Report is that the earlier English is taught the better the result. Gatenby (as cited in Phillipson, 1992) confirms that the best time to learn a second language is when children learn their mother tongue. He also thinks that the ideal period to learn a second language is from birth to 10+, whereas 10+ to 16-17+ is considered too old for students to learn a second language. However, age does not influence the route of second language acquisition; all learners will follow constant developmental path regardless of their age when they begin learning a language. Research shows interesting findings that adults learn faster than children, and young adults learn faster than children and adult. This is because the fact that young person and adult have already developed intellect and cognitive abilities that can help them to learn a second language (Ellis, 1997). This is the reality in EFL countries such as Indonesia, that English is introduced in elementary schools, even in kindergarten. However, this is still hotly debatable since children will not use that language outside the classrooms, and they have other subjects to learn based on the designated curriculum by the government. It can be a burden for children, particularly when English is a compulsory subject in schools. Therefore, non-native English speaking teachers in EFL countries may consider the exposure of the target language variable in their teaching planning. It is the fact

that there is no or little exposure of English in EFL situations, especially in rural or remote areas, then the teachers may know students' need and purpose in learning English in order to make the most of the resources to support the learning successfully.

Moreover, Brown (2007) points out some beneficial aspects in teaching adult learners. The variables are that adult learners are more competent to handle abstract system and concept, they are able to concentrate on the lesson that may not intrinsically motivate them in longer time, and also adult learners carry their own self-confidence into the classroom. For that reason, non-native teachers may take the advantage based on these characters. Likewise, educational program in foreign language milieu should be transformed. Non-native English speaking teachers may promote cross-cultural communication in the non-native speaker contexts. In it argued that the most important thing is providing sufficient opportunity for students to put together their own identity based on their first language or mother tongue personality (Modiano, 2005). Still in the Makerere Conference Report explicitly ensures that the decision to use English as a medium of education is considering be "the earlier the better." The Report assumes that this decision will help children to fulfil the demands of future employment, and success in later assessments for educational advance. Nevertheless, a contradictory example is shown by Holmstrand (as cited in Phillipson, 1992) that there is no evidence of better result when English as a foreign language lesson was started two years earlier than regular in Swedish schools. There is other substantial number of aspects that should be considered in making English language lesson start earlier in schools, especially in EFL context. It is argued that the most important concerned aspect is government policy that support successful English program in schools, such as adequate teacher trainings, pedagogical supports, cognitive, affective, and linguistic factors which related to students organization of learning, and social factor corresponding to the first and second language (Phillipson, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Africa as cited in Phillipson, 1992). It may be concluded that this precept is the early start fallacy.

The fourth precept in the ELT profession is the more English taught, the better the results

will be. This precept assumes that a large amount of exposure in the target language in teaching process will have the better result. In spite of this, this belief takes no notice of the appropriateness and the comprehensibility of the input. It does not say about the quantity, but the quality of the input in teaching and learning process is significant for successful foreign language learning, and there are specific conditions that need to be implemented for the designed outcomes, such as codeswitching in the second or foreign language classrooms (Macaro, 2005). Moreover, Pattanayak (as cited in Phillipson, 1992) points out that the developed mother tongue will facilitate foreign or second language learning. It looks like many educational perspectives, especially EFL contexts, may need to articulate this principle. In many EFL countries, particularly which are developing countries, such as Indonesia, concepts of language learning are heavily influenced by the Central's scholars. Take as an example, this conception is applied in some educational institutions in Malang, a small town in East Java, which made a decision to use English as the instructional language in teaching mathematics and sciences, like Biology, Physics, and Chemistry. The schools' administration believes that the more English language used the better results they get. However many students do not convenient with this system, since their proficiency in English is still low, especially understanding the technical terms of the subjects, also they have minimal knowledge of the subjects. Additionally, the school do a great effort to have some English courses for the teachers to learn how to teach the subjects in English, and it takes a great deal of money and time. This situation becomes a problematic issue and a really burden not only for the students but also the teachers. It is likely that this situation is a continuation of the maximum exposure fallacy.

The last precept of ELT listed in Makerere Report is if other languages are used much, standards of English will drop. The standards of English education will drop is likely common issue in ELT profession. There are some problematic matters related to this precept. The first problem is which standard is used to measure the maintenance or fall in ELT. On one hand, the standard of curriculum that is prescribed in the Centre which based on an elite system; on the other hand is the standard that is set down in

independent periphery countries or EFL contexts which based on their own goals and ideological contents of education. The second problem is the subjectivity of standard used right now or later. This precept also believes that when an education system is growing fast till reach the periphery countries; there will be large numbers of underqualified teachers and inadequate availability of textbooks and these may be the causal factors in standards falling (Phillipson, 1992). Furthermore, Quirk (as cited in Canagarajah, 1999) declares that Periphery variants of English will harm the purity of English and influence “mutual intelligibility” between speakers of English language. Additionally, native teachers of English will give an ideal role model of indigenized variants of English and preventing the further diversification of English language. More confidently, native speaker teachers may share out the Centre variants of English to new students and maintain the dominant standards of English. Quite the opposite, Kirkpatrick (2002) emphasis the English standard which is usually used could be shifted to Asian standard where English is served as a foreign language. This is because the local or regional varieties of English need to be promoted in English language teaching materials especially which represent the cultural and practical norms of the students and the community. This situation will likely be useful particularly when they use English to communicate with other non-native speakers. Then, it is said that this precept is the subtractive fallacy.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that natives and non-natives have equal chance to become successful teachers, but the routes used by the two groups are not the same. In fact, as teachers professional, it is needed to refuse any discrimination, whether rooted in race, intelligence, education, and other tongue. All speakers are equal; no one is higher than another (Medgyes, 1992). If teacher training programmes, educational language, and pedagogical planning policy in EFL contexts are influenced by the monolingual fallacy, the native speaker fallacy, the early start fallacy, and the maximum exposure fallacy, it is unlikely to promote the uniqueness features in EFL situations and to encourage non-native speaking teachers to

facilitate the students to reach their needs and goals in learning English. This is the turning point for educational language planning policy to refine the objectives of English language learning in relation to all teachers’ and students’ necessities in the community.

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