

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: ITS HISTORICAL PAST AND ITS FUTURE

Zuliati Rohmah

Abstract: This paper discusses English as a global language. The description of its history is offered to enable us to detect the underlying motivation of spreading English world-wide. How English plays a role on the death of other languages is presented to make us aware of preserving our own language, while making use of English. The future of English is predicted to give us a direction to our activities in relation to a possible future of English.

Key words: English, global language, history, future.

We are now experiencing a globalization era. Globalization is a relatively new phenomenon of multi-dimensional nature that puts variety of complex trends in the economic, social and cultural fabrics of all societies. These trends have presented alarming challenges which throw people into perplexing situation. Globalization impacts on all conceivable aspects of life.

Globalization has created a “smaller” world for people. Recently, people can reach more than three countries within a single day. Early in the morning, an executive is still in Jakarta. After dropping in Singapore for some minutes and flying for other four hours, the executive enters Tokyo. Eleven hours later, he reaches one of the U.S. cities, a place located far on the other surface of the earth. Hence, meeting people from different places in the world is greatly possible in the era of globalization.

When people of different backgrounds meet, they need to communicate using a particular language as a *lingua franca*. English is now a world *lingua franca*. Nowadays, English is used by people in almost every part of the

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world. What is interesting is how English become so widely spread.

This paper describes the notion of English as a global language. The history of English is then depicted to understand the spread English in the world. Besides, the effect of the existence of the global language to the life of other languages is also discussed. Finally, this paper predicts the possible future of English.

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

About fifty years ago the notion of English as a true global language was merely a theoretical prediction which is still diffuse and vague. However, realities have created it as a real world language at the present time. People in every part of the world feel its urgent role in their life: for academic purposes, for business goals and for other purposes. English is spoken by people throughout the world as their first language, second language and foreign language. Indeed, English is now a world language.

English as a world language is not merely an international language. The notion of international language can be understood as a language which is used in any international communication which involves people from two or more countries. Japanese is an international language, but it is not a global language. Japanese is often used by people who communicate with Japanese people, usually in the area in which Japanese people, tradition, political power and/or business are dominant. Japanese, however, is not used in a great number of other contexts. The same thing applies to Arabic. As an international language, Arabic is not only used in the area in which Arab people are dominant, but it is also employed when people communicate with Arabs in other places. However, Arabic is not used when there is no connection with Arabs. This is different from the fact of English as a global language. English is not only used when people communicate with English speakers. English is used by people of different first languages. It is not only applied when people speak to English people, but also used when people from different nations meet. English is the most widely spoken language in very different contexts in the world. Therefore, English is not only an international language, but also a global language.

A language gains a status as a global language when it has a special role that is recognized in every country in the world (Crystal, 1997). To gain recognition from certain country does not mean that the language should be

spoken as the first language by people in the country. The global language can be spoken as either first, second or foreign language. The prominent characteristic of a global language is that it is the most widely used language in communication in most places in the world. People feel the need to master it for their life.

As a global language, of course, English has certain countries wherein people speak it as a first language. USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and several Caribbean countries are among the thirty territories that use English as the first language (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Komin, 1998). However, English does not gain its special status as a global language merely by being spoken by people in those countries. English becomes a world language because people in other countries give a special credence to English, even though they do not speak it as a first language.

Special status given to English by other countries can be in the form of using English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). As a second language, English is spoken by people in the countries as the 'official language' (Crystal, 1997: 4) or 'the language of the administration' (Graddol, 1997:11). English is used as a means of communication in various contexts such as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. There are more than seventy countries that place English as a second language (Crystal, 1997). Because of this special role of English in these countries, mastering English should be done as early as possible. As an official language, English may be the one and only official language or it may share the status with other languages, such as that in India, Singapore, and Malaysia. In the later version, English is usually spoken in a distinct way which is influenced by the accompanying language(s) in the territories. This results in the emergence of new varieties of English. The new varieties of English are called 'New Englishes' (Graddol, 1997:11).

English as a foreign language does not have the official status, but it is the language which is most likely to be taught to children and learned by adults for various reasons. Now, English is the most widely taught as a foreign language in more than 100 countries, including China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, Brazil, and Indonesia (Crystal, 1997). There are various reasons of favoring English as the language to be learned, ranging from the need for business and trade, academic pursuit, cultural and technological contact, to political convenience.

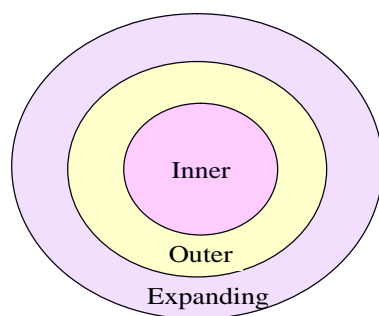


Figure 1. Kachru's Model

The use of English as a first language, a second language and a foreign language is as described by Kachru (1985) in three concentric circles. The three circles, namely the inner, the outer and the expanding circles, represent the native speakers of English, ESL and EFL speakers respectively. Figure 1 shows the notion of English as a global language spoken in three concentric circles.

The fact that English has become a global language raises a question as to, "Why should it be English; why not another language?" To answer this question, we need to look at its historical background discussed in the following section.

A NOTE ON ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the earlier era, the spread of English from Britain to other territories was mostly through colonization (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Kachru, 1986). The first groups of settlers from England came to the American continent in search for a new land in which they expected to be able to purify their faith. The other groups of English speaking people came to the conti-

ment for trading. Starting from this point, English reached the American continent which then also spread to the south, to the West Indies and to the southern part of the mainland. English spoken by the black population in these territories was of the same features as that spoken by the slaves shipped in barbarous condition to the Caribbean Islands.

English's presence in Australia and New Zealand started when prisons in England were overcrowded with convicts and the British rulers needed a new distant place for the freed prisoners. When they set free the convicts, they sent them to the lands. This was done at the first time twenty years after James Cook's arrival in Australia in 1770.

Besides, English also spread to other parts of the world through colonization sprouting from trading between traders under the East Indies Company (EIC) and native people in Asia and Africa. The trading changed into colonization when the British rulers supported the traders by sending them soldiers. The major parts of Africa (especially South Africa) and Asia (e.g. India, and Malaysia) were under the direct rule of Britain making the people to become bilingual. English was taught to native people in the territories they had occupied. Hence, it was taught not with the best motivation to educate. Rather, it was for the benefit of the British rulers, as pointed out by Kaplan (2000:270) as follows:

It was necessary for the British to teach English through out the wide-spread empire because they needed people in distant places to speak English so that soldiers could understand their British officers and so that a civil service could be developed to maintain civil order under the leadership of British administrators.

In addition to the motivation of direct ruling of the territories by the British rulers, the teaching of English at that time was also done with the Christianizing urge. Again, Kaplan rightly pointed to this phenomenon with the following words, "...missionaries worked throughout the Empire—and beyond—engaging not only in the saving of the soul, but also in the spread of English" (Kaplan, 2000:271).

English as a modern discipline began to offer an educationally important trial to the prestige which had been implanted in classics during the early decades of the twentieth century (Crystal, 1997; Phillipson, 1992). At that time, some people observed that the classics were getting worn out in

some sense and the plan to introduce English Language and Literature at Oxford would give new life to it.

The spread and domination of English over other languages are mostly due to external factors. The prestigious position of English has not come up as an innate potential. English as a language does not have intrinsic qualities which attract people to learn and master it. English is complicated to learn (Kachru, 1986; Kaplan, 2000). Even, it took time for English to get recognition from academic environment within Great Britain itself. It is its speakers that have made it spread throughout the world. One interesting aspect to focus on is the aspect of promotion of English by the headquarters, Great Britain and the US, which is called by Phillipson (1992: 136) as “new international crusade”. Phillipson states that the British Council has been the important organization for the teaching of English worldwide. He also believes that the establishment of the British Council was the intention of the British Foreign Office to fight against German and Italian propaganda. The symbiosis of linguistic promotion with political benefits then invited royal support. This is apparent in the statement of Duke of Windsor at an official inauguration in 1935 that the promotion of English abroad is to make others appreciate fully the glories of English literature, English contribution to the arts and sciences, and to the political practice (White in Phillipson, 1992).

Similar to the propaganda spread by Great Britain, the US also plays an important role in promoting English worldwide. The US’s “contribution” was marked by their introduction of English to the Filipinos. American textbooks have been used by the Filipinos as the medium of study. Even the mastery of English has become the standard of being educated among the Filipinos. As a result, although the Filipinos obtained their independence in 1946, they are still dependent very much on foreign theories and methods (Crystal, 1997; Phillipson, 1992).

After the World War II, many countries lost its power. The United States, as an English-speaking country, was the only big Western power that remained undamaged educationally, scientifically and politically. Therefore, the United States, helped by its allies, had power in reorganizing the world through the creation of the United Nation. English was then one of the four official languages spoken in the UN. This made English gain stronger status in the world. It is a coincidence that when English gained better status in political world, the computer era came into being. The first computer programs were then written in English-like language and the output was also English

or English-like. This, again, made English gain its status in science and technology in which computer was of important use in it. Nowadays, about 80% or 85% of all the scientific and technological information is written in English (Kaplan, 2000; Mauranen, 2003).

All these facts help the spread of English globally. At the present time, the spread of English world-wide is not only supported by the US and the United Kingdom, but also several other countries. All other English speaking countries, which are called “core” (Philipson, 1992:17) or “inner circle” (Kachru, 1985), including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, are also participating in teaching English world-wide. Australia founded the Australian Overseas Service bureau (OSB) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Canadian government established the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Even some non English-speaking countries also take parts in this activity, for example, Swedish government launched the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (Kaplan, 2000).

It is true that the teaching of English has become the concerns of several countries. It is no surprise because the teaching of English world-wide has contributed a lot to the balance of trade of those countries. For more than 30 years, English has become a “world commodity” although, ironically, the teachers of English, especially the non-native, have been poorly paid (Philipson, 1992:4). Its masters, Great Britain, the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, built such a popular enterprise of ELT. As a great enterprise, the teaching English world-wide has a significant contribution to its owners. Thousands of young, inexperienced US citizens, just to mention an example, can afford a foreign travel while teaching English in the distant countries. It is just because they are native speakers of English, not because they know how to teach. Let alone if they are equipped with enough training for education. They will be more and more badly needed.

In addition to the income gained by its citizens for teaching English, those countries are also benefited from its technology related to the teaching of English globally. Technology here refers to techniques, methodologies and procedures applied in the teaching-learning process, in this case the English teaching. The technologies, materials and facilities are needed in the teaching-learning process. Of course, the publishers in those countries are happy to supply books, cassettes, and CD-ROM on English and how to teach English. Other supporting facilities, such as tape recorder, CD ROM players,

video-tapes, slide projectors, and overhead-projectors are then produced to support the process. Thus, the activity of spreading English generates money. And it attracts people in many other countries to follow suit; they teach English for financial reasons.

WHAT DOES THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE DO?

When a new language is introduced to new communities, and a new better life is achieved by the new language, it makes people prefer to use the language than their own language(s). In turn, the low frequency of using particular language may cause the language to vanish. This was true when English was introduced to academic life. The establishment of the English Association in 1907 marked more the eclipse of classics by English. The association was founded by the English to promote the idea that the new discipline of English had been their best means for 'real humanistic education.' The effect of it was the vanishing of Latin and Greek from the curricula of schools and universities. This is also true when English spreads to distant places. With all aspects of life, including political and economical aspects, as well as aspects of science and technology, supporting the use of English, people become more attracted to master English than any other languages. This makes English dominate the local languages that results in the disappearance of the languages.

In fact, there are at least three factors that cause the loss of languages. The first is related to intergeneration language transfer. Parents who are unable or not willing to pass on the language to their children will cause their own language(s) to die. The second is related to functions of language. If the language is no longer the key in communication, it will not live anymore. People will forget it for sure. The third factor concerns the stability of the society. Community which is unstable is risky to a language to decrease (Kaplan, 2000). An example of this can be found in the former Yugoslavia. It used to have a common language, that is, Serbo-Croatian. However, after the genocide, Serbo-Croatian is not in use anymore. The Serbs preferred to use Serbian, the Croats began to speak Croatian, and the Bosnians started to communicate in Bosnian. Thus, instability caused the death of Serbo-Croatian language (Crystal, 1997).

Likewise, the presence of English globally does not constitute the sole cause of the death of the languages. Many other factors contribute to the death of the languages (Kaplan, 2000). War, revolution, economic development or urbanization resulting in population redistribution and relocation are among the factors. Besides, the spread of other languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, and French cause the languages to die. In addition, the development of some areas, like aviation, tourism and banking makes certain language(s) to be used and others left, making it not frequently used.

Thus, English is not the only cause which makes other languages to die. but, indeed, it contributes to the death of the languages. Then, it depends on the global language speakers to determine the future of English among other languages in the world.

FUTURE TRENDS OF ENGLISH

The notion of global English, just like the term ‘globalization,’ implicates on a homogenizing process in which the dominant language, in this case English, overrides local languages (Samuel, 2000). Several terms are applied to picture this kind of relationship between English and these local languages. Colebrook (1996) mentions four paired terms, namely ‘The Centre–Periphery Relationship,’ ‘The Language and Other Languages,’ ‘The Native Speaker and Non-Native Speaker,’ and ‘Standard Forms of English and Non-Standard Forms of English’.

The terms above give an idea that the English speaking countries are the subjects and the rests are merely the spectators, if not the objects. English is the important language, while other languages are only complement to English. Moreover, the use of the third paired terms, without mentioning English or other names of languages, strengthen the fact that domination of English over other languages has put people into seeing English, as if it is the only language. Finally, the terms also show that English has been widely used that make it develops into various forms some of which are judged as having higher status than the others.

This eventually puts different effects on native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English (Crystal, 1997). For those whose mother tongue is English, the spread of English globally accords them with mixed feelings of pride knowing that their language is flourishing and of discontent realizing that their language is spoken in the way which is different from

their accent, pronunciation, tone, etc.

The mixed feelings are also experienced by non-native speakers of English, but of different kinds. They are motivated to learn English because it promises a better future. They are proud when they have been successful in learning it; however, they may be disappointed realizing that native speakers of English have taken advantage of them. Especially, when their own language is in danger because of English; they may feel resentful, even offended and annoyed.

Due to such kinds of feelings, which are very natural, of non-native speakers of English, the number of which is much bigger than the native speakers (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Komin, 1998), there will be possible changes in the configuration of the speakers of English in the world. Previously, the speakers of English as a second language tend to take native speakers of English as models. In the future, because the demands of English are higher, there will be a tendency that the outer circle will shift into inner circle and those in the expanding circle will move to the outer circle. When they are in this stage, they will be aware that the trends should be changed. As such, they do not want to be mastered by English any more; instead, they will master English and make it submit to their will. Consequently, those in the outer circle will become increasingly conscious that they do not have to always use English in the way people in the inner circle use it. People in the outer circle will increasingly use English in the way they want it; they will determine the future of global English (Graddol, 1997).

The phenomenon of English which is spoken with local accent, local style and local meaning is then termed as 'GLOCAL' language (Pakir, 2000:15). The phenomena of English as GLOCAL language show that while English has its international status in its global spread, it expresses local identities of its speakers (Lemke, 1998; Pakir, 2000). The global English is then spoken in various accents which are regarded as equal to the accents of those in the inner circle.

Thus, the three concentric circles of the speakers of English suggested by Kachru (1985) will quite possibly not apply anymore. Instead, three circles standing side by side as suggested by Graddol (1997) will be probably more suitable to describe the future of English and its speakers.

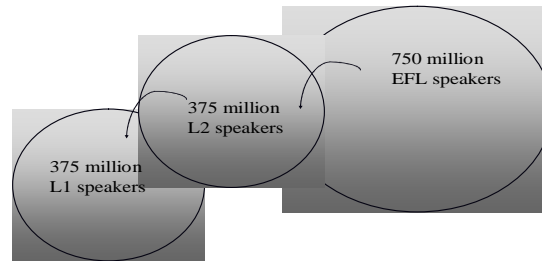


Figure 2. Graddol's Model

In the future, English as an international language will stand side by side with local language(s). It entails the use of English which is suited to the local 'taste' and the use of local languages for international communication in the region. For example, in addition to English, Chinese might be used in the Southeast Asian countries as the language used for international meetings or communication. This tendency arises from the awareness of people in the outer and expanding circles in that they should maintain their own language(s) while making use of English. Thus, to secure its role in the global context, English should compete, or possibly lives in harmony, with local languages maintained by their speakers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

English as a global language has been used by people in the world as a first language, a second language and a foreign language. The domination of English over local languages may cause the speakers of English in the outer and expanding circles to experience mixed feelings of happiness and disappointment. This, in turn, makes those people treat English in such a way that makes it submit to their will. They speak English in the way they want it. In addition to English, they will also try to use their own local language(s) in regional forum and regional contacts. Thus, the status of English in regional communication might be challenged by the local languages, and, in the future, the role of English in the regions may decrease.

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