

## THE RIGHT TO SPEAK OR SPEAK IT RIGHT: TEACHING ENGLISH SPEAKING IN INDONESIAN EFL CONTEXT

Chris Asanti<sup>1,\*</sup>, & Eka Pratiwi Sudirman<sup>2</sup>

English Department, Faculty of Culture Sciences

<sup>1\*&2</sup>Mulawarman University, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[chris.asanti@fib.unmul.ac.id](mailto:chris.asanti@fib.unmul.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[ekasudirman.fib@unmul.ac.id](mailto:ekasudirman.fib@unmul.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

In this contemporary world, along with the status of English as an international language to communicate, the teaching of English speaking has become increasingly significant in both ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. This paper aims at highlighting and outlining the recent development of teaching speaking of English in Indonesian EFL context, especially in senior high schools. There are three major points discussed in this paper, first it discusses the current status of teaching speaking in Indonesia; second, it depicts the constraints that hinder the implementation of teaching English speaking in Indonesia related to native speaker model; and third it provides an explanation about teaching speaking for intercultural communication in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Teaching speaking, Native and Non-native speaker, Indonesian EFL context

### ABSTRAK

Dalam dunia kontemporer ini, bersama dengan status bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa internasional untuk berkomunikasi, pengajaran berbahasa Inggris menjadi semakin signifikan dalam konteks ESL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Kedua) dan EFL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing). Makalah ini bertujuan menyoroti dan menguraikan perkembangan pengajaran bahasa Inggris baru-baru ini dalam konteks EFL di Indonesia, terutama di sekolah menengah atas. Ada tiga poin utama yang dibahas dalam makalah ini, pertama membahas status mengajar saat ini di Indonesia; kedua, menggambarkan kendala yang menghambat pelaksanaan pengajaran berbicara bahasa Inggris di Indonesia terkait dengan model penutur asli; dan ketiga memberikan penjelasan tentang pengajaran berbicara untuk komunikasi antar budaya di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Pengajaran kemampuan berbicara, penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli, Konteks EFL di Indonesia

## A. INTRODUCTION: Why should be English?

Nowadays, it is an undeniable fact that English is used internationally for different global purposes (see Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2011), such as educational advancement, international relation, business, and diplomacy. People from different countries employ English to communicate with others who do not speak English or vice versa, ‘over 80% of interactions in English today are presently between L2 and L2 speakers’ (Crystal, 1997). The growing number of people use English to link up the communication has resulted to the different varieties of English, such as Singaporean English, Malay English, and Indian English (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

However, the debates of the diversity of English lead to an essential division between native and non-native English speakers (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). In addition, there are two substantial matters which need to be considered by English language teachers and English language learners regarding to the prior notions. The first matter is about the model for teaching the language as English language teachers in Indonesia believe that native speaker model is the most appropriate one to be implemented. Another matter is the learners actually face a dilemma in terms of learning the language; it is not only based on the linguistic norms (grammar, syntactic, and phonology) but also how to use language communicatively to convey their ideas. Yet, there is no single definition of native, especially when it is related to English language.

Allied to the previous statements of the importance of English nowadays, there are two questions which come up: First, is it true that the purpose of learning a language is to communicate and to be comprehended? And second, in order to be understandable by others, do the speakers of the language have to utter it correctly and precisely like native speakers do, based on the linguistic norms which have been codified?

To this extent, this essay will discuss whether or not that it is an inappropriate goal for learners of English to sound like a native speaker in terms of speaking. Due to the aforesaid reasons, this essay is divided into four fundamental sections. In the first section, this essay will highlight the current status of teaching English speaking in Indonesia. There will be two major areas constructed of this discussion that contains the definition of native speaker model and the debates between native and non-native speakers. The second is obstacles that hinder the teaching English speaking when applying the native speaker model in senior high schools in Indonesia. Later on, the third section will explore the necessity of focusing on the purpose of intercultural communication in teaching English speaking in senior high schools.

## **B. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **1. The current status of teaching speaking in Indonesia**

In the Indonesian context, English has become a fundamental foreign language regarded to its history. After gaining its independence in 1945, the government decided to adopt English as the first foreign language in Indonesia rather than Dutch. The decision is created because the current status of English as an international language is underpinned by its extensive use in a range of areas, for instance, educations, international relations, technology, economics, politics, the media, international travel, and diplomacy (see Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2011). The previous notion has made schools and universities in Indonesia keep emphasizing the importance of ‘being able to sound like natives’, whether British or American and this kind of idea has become the has been employed to teach the four language skills including speaking, however the definition of native speaker itself is vague and ambivalent. To get deeper understanding, the more detail description is explained in the following chapters.

#### **a. Native speaker model**

Richards and Schmidt (2010) define native speakers as the users of the language ‘grammatically, fluently, and appropriately, to identify with a community where it is spoken’ (p. 386). They also point out that native speakers always have infinite understanding of what is considered grammatical or ungrammatical in the language. The understanding of native speaker is echoed by Byram in his article about ‘On Being Bicultural and Intercultural’. Byram (2003) says that ‘native speaker is thus the model, the authority’ (p. 61). Therefore, native speaker definitions in language learning result to an assumption that in order to acquire a communicative competence, a speaker has to sound exactly the same as the native speakers do.

This belief is prolonged by the English language teaching practices at schools in Indonesia. The teachers still emphasize on the importance of modeling British or American accent to the students by providing them with materials which focus on the previous models. During the teaching speaking process, the teachers and the students tend to believe that native speaker is the most appropriate model in teaching English speaking. The teachers seem to think that native speaker model is the key point for the students to be able to pass the national examination. In addition, the students will be regarded as failed-language learners if they cannot imitate the way native speakers employ the language in four major areas (reading, listening, speaking, and writing).

To make it worse, these native models are also spread through social media. There are so many influencers (particularly native influencers) who tried to ‘fix’ the speech articulation of those who want to learn English. In fact, “each individual is constantly and quite unconsciously introducing slight changes in his/her speech. There is no such thing as uniformity in language. Not only does the speech of one community differ from that one of another, but the speech of different individual of a single community, even different members of the same family also is marked by individual peculiarities” (Baugh & Cable,

2002, p.16). Hence, fostering these models to be implemented in ELT in Indonesia will only hinder the students to verbalize their thoughts.

It is somehow true that the choice of native speaker model to be implemented in Indonesia is beneficial for the students who are going to continue their study or apply for jobs in inner circle countries, such as America or England. However, according to Kirkpatrick (2011), the amount of the students who are studying English in inner circle countries only constitute a very small minority of the calculation of English learners and even in the inner circle countries being able to sound like native speakers is not their main priority.

## **2. The Debates of Native Speaker vs Non-Native Speaker**

Allied to the prior notions, teachers actually have to pay attention to whose native speakers of English should be used as an appropriate model for teaching speaking such as American English or British English. In addition, Alptekin (2002) argues that languages, English included, often have several dialects. It is obvious that one cannot claim to be the most appropriate or the most standard way to use English due to two reasons. Firstly, overt discussion of native-speaker model implemented in Indonesia will only perpetuate the passiveness of the students in the class and the second one is that teaching speaking in English is not just about pronunciation. A further point which has to be taken for consideration by language teachers is that many Indonesian students are from various cultural and language backgrounds. Most of them speak Bahasa Indonesia in their everyday lives and one indigenous or local language based on their ethnical status.

The native speaker model which is believed to be the most appropriate standard in language teaching in Indonesia preserves an anxiety and a massive burden for the students. The students feel undermined if they want to convey their message in a verbal communication because there is a standard of how to utter it in a correct way. As Cook (2002) has pointed out ‘if L2 learners feel that the chief measure of L2 success is passing for native, few are going to meet it. Both teachers and students become frustrated by setting themselves what is, in effect, impossible way’ (p. 331). As a result, language learners tend to be passive in the class and cannot be engaged in the learning process. In addition, Medgyes (1992) states that even though the learners have put so much effort in learning the language, ‘non-native speakers can never achieve a native speaker’s competence (p. 342).’

Native speaker model which is presented in the classroom, has been one of the tenets in English language teaching which covers four major skills, include speaking. The idea that students should be as proficient as native speakers and that they should represent the originality of native speakers have created close-minded setting of the real purpose of communication. It is true that the students should pronounce the words correctly, but it does not mean that it will enable them to convey the meanings and ideas through pronunciation. There are still several factors which need to be considered by the teachers and language learners, such as how to convey the message and to be able to transfer their ideas to link the communication. To cope with this matter, language teachers have to

encourage the language learners that they have the right to speak. Teachers have to raise students' awareness of the varieties of English around the world and that the measurement of successful communication is not based on the correctness in uttering the words, but when it is understandable by others. Furthermore, teachers should minimize overt correction when their students make mistakes during the teaching and learning process.

### **3. Obstacles of the native speaker model that constrain in teaching English speaking in Indonesia**

Teaching English speaking for Indonesian students is one of the significant purposes to enable the students to express their ideas through verbal communication. However the debate mentioned above has caused a number of obstacles for the task of teaching English speaking in Indonesia as well. The reasons for significance lie not only in the idea, but also in teaching context, learning and teaching style, teacher's expectation, supporting facilities available in the class, and problems with speaking activities.

Native speaker model which has been implemented in Indonesia seems to create barrier for the students to speak, because the students are afraid to make mistake in speaking L2. What is more, according to Turner (1990, cited in Lukmana, 1997), a frequent exchanging from formal to informal is likely to be occurred in Indonesian language than in English. Moreover, students have different accents in producing spoken words even in Bahasa Indonesia, this matter emerges because of various ethnical backgrounds of the learners. In this instance, the substance of individual and cultural needs of the learners tends to be ignored by the teachers because teachers' awareness of cultural diversities is not adequate to cover the differences in Indonesia.

Another underlying issue that Indonesian students have to deal with is the teaching and learning style. In Indonesia, students are inclined to interact with their teachers and they are too afraid of making mistakes, while speaking as a productive skill needs students to be able to express their thoughts through oral production. A further point which has to be taken into consideration is most of Indonesian cultural backgrounds count on hierarchical status in the society, for example, the standard of politeness between teachers and students in the class. Students are not allowed to leave the class without having any authorization from the teachers. Furthermore, students are forbidden to interrupt or question teachers' during the teaching and learning process. Hence, teaching speaking for intercultural communication is at some points, opposed to students' values and beliefs, this will lead to disagreement and confrontation to the learners.

Furthermore, constraint that hinders is teacher's expectation. The teachers tend to worry if the students cannot imitate or sound right, then the teachers are failed in educating the students. In teaching speaking, for example, when the learners make mistakes, the teachers immediately correct students' error. This overt correctness is liable to discourage and devalue students' confidence. In Indonesian case, traditionally the purpose of learning the language is to be able to pass the examination and get a good score. On the other hand, speaking is not assessed in national examination. Yet, the

dependency to native speaker model is existent, teachers are concerned with meaning which emphasize the learners to pay attention the linguistic norms. Therefore, this situation leads to the ignorance of learners' cultures and values.

Beside the aforesaid constraints, supporting facilities available in the class is indeed another factor challenging the application of intercultural approach. Most Indonesian classrooms are small and usually consist of 35 to 40 students; therefore under those circumstances it is intricate to engage students in speaking activities and communicative intercultural interaction among students. Furthermore, the teaching materials are usually not well-developed and not well-supported by the advancement of technology, especially in small cities where electricity is not available.

Finally, matter which may appear is during the process of speaking activities in the class, since English is still regarded as a foreign language in Indonesia, it is sometimes not easy for the learners to extract their ideas. Allied to this, Ur (2002) states some problems which seem to occur in the class. First is inhibition, speaking is different with writing, listening, or reading activities, it requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. In this instance, learners are often restrain of trying to say things in foreign language, they are fear of making mistakes, concerned of criticism or losing face. The second is nothing to say, the learners are difficult to express their feelings in the target language. Third is low or uneven participation, this problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate during the speaking activities. Four is mother-tongue use, this case is likely to happen in Indonesian classes where all the students will speak Bahasa Indonesia because they feel unnatural to speak in the foreign language.

From the constraints mentioned above, it is presumed that the teacher's belief of native speaker model tends to ignore the students' needs in learning the language. In addition, the teachers are not aware of the differences and cultural values of their students. To deal with those matters, the teachers of English in Indonesia should shift their schema in teaching speaking from using native speaker model to speaking for intercultural communication.

#### **4. Teaching speaking for intercultural communication in Indonesia**

Therefore, from the previous statements, it is obvious that English nowadays is being used for different international purposes and that it is spoken not only by people from inner circle countries (eg: British and America), but also by people from outer (India and Bangladesh), and expanding countries (Indonesia and China) as mentioned by Kachru (1986). Thus, if the perpetual growth and expansion of English is one of the significant aspects of the present international sociolinguistic stability of power, as a developing and expanding circle country, Indonesia does not have many choices. English has still to be taught to young generations in order to be able to compete globally.

Even though English is extensively used around the world, the importance of linguistic rules is still adopted in Indonesian teaching context. Based on that consideration, the native speaker model in teaching English speaking in Indonesia should

be shifted from native-speaker model to English for intercultural communication. By integrating culture and language in ELT, this is found to be both 'pedagogically and educationally sensible, as it is said to offer a multidimensional perspective or experience for the learners' Alptekin (2002, cited in Porto, 1996). According to Aktuna (2005), intercultural communication (ICC) can be defined as 'the process occurring when the procedures and receivers of a message belong to different culture' (p. 100). This means that this rationale can be implemented in ELT because the products of other cultures are being taught to the learners who have different cultures. In the same vein, Kramsch (1998) defines intercultural as 'communication between people from different ethnic, social, gendered cultures, within the boundaries of the same national language' (p. 81).

In addition, the development of learners' awareness towards others culture will expand their understanding of how to position themselves in intercultural communication, in this instance; the learners will acquire an intercultural competence. Byram (2003) states five indications of intercultural competence which include: (1). Attitudes, this term is connected to curiosity and openness, (2). Knowledge, it is related to products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, (3). Skills of interpreting and relating, learners' ability to figure out a document or event from another culture, to explain and relate it to ones' own, (4). Skills of discovery and interaction, it is the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture, (5). Critical cultural awareness/political education, it is the ability to evaluate critically. By having such competences, language learners are expected to accommodate different sets of values and beliefs which occur in the society.

This shifting scheme seems to benefit the learners because speaking skill is not assessed in national examination in Indonesia where students' achievement remains the key problem in Indonesian educational system. Other advantages for the students are students will be more aware of the varieties of English in the global context and will not feel undermined when they want to use the language. The implications of teaching and learning pedagogies are necessary to be developed, it is certainly important to not treat the learners the same way as they should imitate native speakers of English. Allied to this, Byram (2003) says that it is important for the learners of the language to be familiar with the differences of one culture – to others. By doing so, language learners cultivate an understanding of the varieties of their own language and another language. Moreover, language learners widen their knowledge of the differences between their own culture and another culture. Based on this, it is suggested to teach speaking in English for intercultural communication at senior high schools.

## **5. Why senior high schools?**

In Indonesia, senior high is the period of time when the students are prepared to continue their study to higher levels, for example, university, college, and polytechnic. Furthermore, for some students who cannot afford to pursue their educational advancement, they will apply for jobs for their career progression. Related to this, giving students understanding of intercultural communication will lead them to more extensive

intellectual capacity in dealing with international development. A further point is that senior high students' prior knowledge of the language is adequate to be introduced to this method. According to Lie (2007) at the high school level (grades 10 to grades 12) students' classes are focused on three classifications: first is Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam or natural sciences, second is Kelas Bahasa or language studies, and the third is Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial or social studies. For all three classifications, English is a compulsory subject and being taught at least four hours per week, while for the language studies the time allocation for English is 11 hours per week.

Indonesian students who have multicultural backgrounds will have more chance to compare and learn of the differences of other cultures. Hence, their learning experiences are able to be applied in real life work fields and further education. In a similar vein, Indonesian English language teaching curriculum for senior high school students actually supports the importance of cultural awareness. The 2004 Curriculum states the objectives of English instruction in junior and senior high schools are as followed (translated from Bahasa Indonesia in Depdiknas, 2004):

1. Developing communicative competence in spoken and written English which comprises listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
2. Raising awareness regarding the nature and importance of English as a foreign language and as a major means for learning.
3. Developing understanding of the interrelation of language and culture as well as cross cultural understanding.

In intercultural communication, although the learners are accommodated with the integration between language and culture, teachers should be equipped with supporting materials which applicable for Indonesian contexts. It can be problematical for the teachers because they have to understand the knowledge of intercultural communication first before modify materials. Furthermore, it is important for the teachers to encourage the students to develop their critical thinking and convey their message verbally.

### **C. DISCUSSION**

The diversity of ethnicity has become one of the challenging aspects that needs to be considered to remodel the teaching speaking method in Indonesia as people speak and produce sound differently the students struggle to speak exactly like native speaker which holding them back to express their ideas in target language. To overcome those barriers, teachers of English in Indonesia realize they should shift their schema in teaching speaking from using native speaker model to speaking for intercultural communication which offer immense opportunity for students to reach the real purpose of communication by embracing their differences rather than expecting them to immitate the native speaker.



#### D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, native speaker model which has already implemented in Indonesia should be shifted to intercultural model because it perpetuates the passiveness of the students in the class. Furthermore, students seem to feel undermined and afraid in using the language to convey their ideas through oral communication. It is the teacher's responsibility to encourage students' confidence and that students have the right to speak, they do not have to sound right or to be native like to communicate with others. Considering the fact of the current status of English and the use of English has shifted for international purposes, language teachers in Indonesia should be aware of this issue by understanding that students in Indonesia are heterogeneous, they are both multicultural and multilingual.

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