

Indonesian English(?): A Corpus-Based Lexical Analysis

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Abstract

In the past, the goal of learning English in Indonesia was often to communicate with its native speakers. English was seen as a 'foreign language' packed with its own lexicon. Words of Indonesian-origin were kept apart from those of English. People were considered proficient in English when they knew a lot of words in it, including those which were specific to the native speakers' culture and environment. English learning was therefore aimed at conditioning learners to express ideas like the natives did. Recently, as English becomes the language of international communication, new varieties of English have come to prominence. In Indonesia, with the growing popularity of its English language mass-media, there has been another need for using the language to express ideas not only to native English speakers but more importantly among Indonesians themselves. This has marked a new beginning in which English, which was known as a foreign language, is being adopted to be a second language. The need for the locals to express themselves and their own culture in English as a Second Language (ESL) has triggered the adoption and/or adaptation of Indonesian words into their English and thus might create a new variety of English - Indonesian English. The objective of this study is to scrutinize the use of local lexicon in an English language newspaper published by Indonesians called The Jakarta Post.

Keywords: Indonesian English, World Englishes, Jakarta Post, corpus

1. Introduction: History of English in Indonesia

Indonesia is a very ethnically and culturally diverse country in Asia with a myriad of languages that are often categorized into three types, namely Indonesian as the national language, a huge number of regional languages, and several foreign languages. Since the country declared independence in 1945, English has been considered to be the primary foreign language officially taught in both junior and senior high schools and included in the national examination. Some elementary schools and kindergartens in big cities have even started to introduce English as one of the subjects in their local curricula. In fact, college students with non-English majors usually also have to attend one or two semesters of English course.

Long before that, when the Dutch occupied the archipelago, English was already a compulsory subject in high schools along with Dutch (Suharjati, 2010, p.162). It was then abolished for three and a half years during the Japanese occupation. At that time, the position of English and Dutch was replaced by Japanese. The reestablishment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching was later done when the Japanese left. Eight years after Indonesia's declaration of independence, a committee was set up to develop syllabi for English language instruction in high schools (Ibid, 2010, p. 164). It marked a major milestone on the road to more Indonesian-oriented EFL instruction with more and more related projects done by numerous institutions and organizations.

Even though English has not gained the status of lingua franca in Indonesia, from that moment onward, its number of speakers has been continuously growing with various levels of proficiency, from novice to advanced. Nowadays, there is a limited number of families who have even adopted English to be the first language in their homes. With the advance of technology, especially for the young generation, finding exposure to English has become as easy as just one click away. People in the country these days can effortlessly access various types of mass media, such as magazines, newspapers, TV programs, and movies, which use the language as their medium of communication. Public figures oftentimes speak fully in English or make a switch

from Indonesian to English and vice versa either to express ideas more easily or to gain both national and international prestige. It is very common for today's Indonesian internet users to post and comment online in English or a hybrid mix of Indonesian and English. After all, a language that was once considered foreign has now become so "familiar" that it gets widely internalized into day-to-day communication.

2. EFL vs. ESL

Languages are dynamic. It is not only their forms and meanings that change, but also their status and use. In the past, English in Indonesia was merely considered a foreign language. This status largely influenced the objectives of Indonesia's traditional English language teaching (ELT). Learning English in Indonesia used to be perceived as only embracing a foreign culture and communicating with foreign speakers. It was even often mistaken as imitating how the native speakers express their ideas and, if necessary, leaving one's identity behind by damaging "the mastery of the national language", as stated by Suharjati (2010, p. 166).

In the traditional view of EFL teaching in Indonesia, proficient learners were those knowing a lot of words including foreign lexicon specific to native English speakers' culture and environment. Take the word 'oak' for example. It might require an extra effort for English learners in Indonesia to familiarize themselves with its meaning since the tree is nonnative to their area. In the past, however, one would be seen as a proficient English learner when he/she knew it and other similar words. L1 words that had no equivalent in the target language, on the other hand, did not gain any attention in the English discourse of Indonesian EFL learners or were simply regarded by most of them as another entity that did not belong to "their English". That condition often created discrepancies between students' L1 and L2 competence. The major cause of that condition seemed to be the lack of needs for learners at that time to communicate with each other in English.

With its rising popularity, the status of English in Indonesia—whether it is still a foreign language—is now somewhat debatable. As argued by Gilquin &

Granger (2011, p. 1), this paper agrees that the dichotomy between EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) should instead be viewed as a continuum. Following the definitions of EFL and ESL by Gass & Selinker (2001, cited in Gilquin & Granger, 2011, p. 2), the former refers to “the learning of a non-native language in the environment of one’s native language”, while the latter means “the learning of a non-native language in the environment in which that language is spoken”. This distinction between the two terms is blurring due to increasingly unclear boundaries between the so-called native speakers and non-native speakers. The varying degree and types of language exposure in both learning contexts, both of which may occur in Indonesia, make it even more difficult to distinguish one term from the other. By positioning the terms EFL and ESL in a continuum, the status of English in Indonesia is clearly on the move from what was known as a foreign language to a state where it is recognized as new second language. It can be indicated by the pervasive broadcasting and publication of English language mass-media throughout the country and the frequent code-mixing and code-switching between English and Indonesian done by both public figures and most young generations.

3. World Englishes: A New Phenomenon

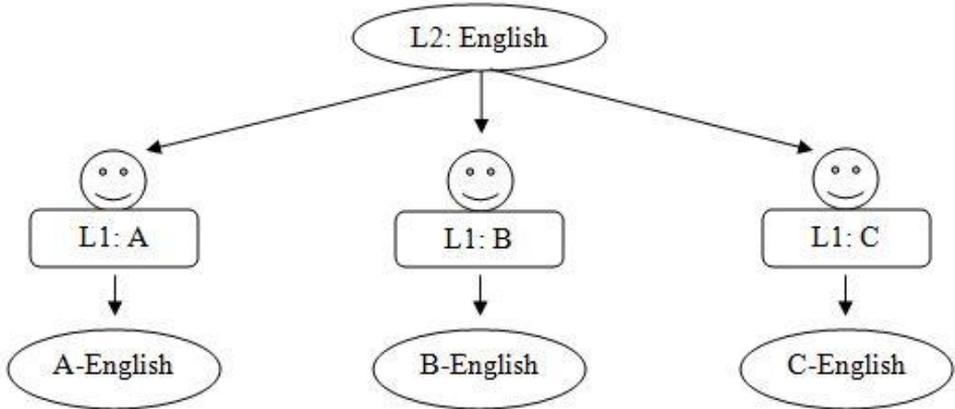
When a language becomes an international means of communication, it is adopted by people from various backgrounds most of whom are non-native speakers of that language. The adoption will usually trigger linguistic adaptation and the births of rich vernacular varieties of that language. This has happened to English. This language which originally came from England has grown into various varieties, from the well-known first languages such as British, American, and Australian Englishes to several forms of second languages such as Indian, Singaporean, and Malaysian Englishes. Since linguists started to share a less prescriptive view on the development of the language, previously marginalized varieties such as Black English or Caribbean English have received more attention and been looked upon as equal forms of English to other major varieties. Moreover, the multi-dimensional nature of all those varieties makes the linguistic

changes even more complex. In addition to national varieties, there are also regional forms of Englishes that differ from one region to another. The Englishes of the UK, for instance, can further be classified into regional forms such as Brummie, Glaswegian, Scouse, Cockney, Multicultural London English, Geordie and the Received Pronunciation (Ashton & Shepherd, 2013, cited in Endarto, 2016, p. 93).

These various forms of Englishes around the world are often referred to as “world Englishes”. According to the world-Englishes view, the goal of English language teaching should not be to make learners parrot native American or British English speakers but rather to expose them to various models of Englishes. It is due to the fact that the majority of speakers of today’s varieties of English are neither American nor British. Therefore, the current practices of ELT should prepare learners to communicate with not only those speakers but also ESL and EFL speakers from other parts of the world.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the emergence of world Englishes is indeed inevitable. In line with Endarto (2016, p. 94), whenever English is adopted by multilingual communities as either a second or foreign language, at the same time it is adapted into new varieties which tend to share few same features with and be influenced by the speakers’ mother tongues. In this regard, taking the world-Englishes view means including and describing these new varieties which mostly originate from ESL or EFL contexts.

Figure 1: How Language Contact and Acquisition Create New Englishes (Endarto, 2016)



As illustrated by the figure above, it can be inferred that L1 tends to play a role in shaping the production of L2. Therefore, analyzing certain features of ESL or EFL speakers' L1 would be the first step one needs to take in order to predict any possible formation of new Englishes. In the case of English in Indonesia, if there is one new variety that might exist in the near future, that will likely be the one influenced and shaped by the features of speakers' L1, which is either Indonesian language or the prominent regional languages in the country.

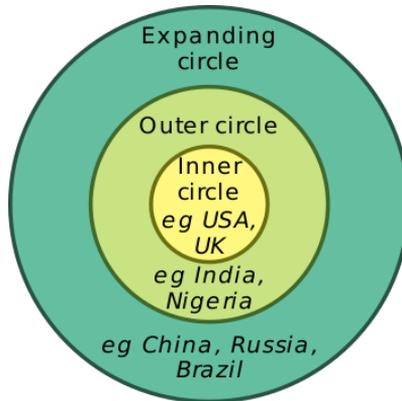
4. Indonesian English as Part of World Englishes

As an archipelagic state in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the 15th largest country consisting of more than 17,000 islands and ranks as the 4th most populous country on earth after China, India, and the United States (World Population Review, 2018). This country has more than 300 distinct ethnic groups and languages. Indonesian, or Bahasa Indonesia, is the official language used in business and social interactions, offices, schools, and on many other occasions. Apart from all those languages, English has been extensively learned and become the most frequently used foreign language in the country.

According to Kachru (1992), Indonesia can be categorized as a member of the expanding circle of English speakers. In his model, English in Indonesia

was considered a part of that group due to its initial status in the country as a foreign language.

Figure 2: Kachru's Three Circles of English (ChuaYT, 2010)



However, considering how English has progressively gained widespread acceptance from Indonesian learners thus far, its current status is actually quite problematic. It is even more ambiguous with the uneven distribution of wealth and the huge improvement in information technology that somehow create a proficiency gap between the novices and fluent speakers. As posited by Lie (2017, p. 8), in the context of Indonesia, Kachru's model might need to be revisited. She further states that "a country like Indonesia may be categorized as the Expanding Circle and the Outer Circle at the same time", making its people classified both EFL and ESL speakers at once. Most Indonesian students grow up learning English in school as a foreign language, but there are also quite many rich and average urban families whose members are fluent users of English.

With the growing popularity of English language mass-media in Indonesia, there has been another need for using the language to express ideas not only to English speakers of other nationalities but more importantly among Indonesians themselves. This need for the locals to communicate with each other about matters pertaining to their shared identity and their own culture in turn creates a new type of repeated discourse which, if maintained, tends to foster the

change from EFL to ESL. Lexically, when English is being used to express Indonesian contexts, it also tends to adopt and/or adapt certain words and lexical patterns that might be specific to Indonesian language.

Another aspect that makes Kachru's inner circle somewhat less relevant to the context of English in Indonesia is the idea of "nativeness". Cambridge Dictionary as cited in Endarto (2016, p. 95) describes a native speaker as "someone who has spoken a particular language since they were a baby, rather than having learned it as a child or adult". In urban areas, it is now a common phenomenon to see Indonesian parents who are ESL or even EFL speakers raise their children using only English as a medium of communication. As a result, those children become the first-generation native speakers of a new English variety: Indonesian English.

NOTE: All the research data used in this study were compiled from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/>

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