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Who Owns English?: Interviews to the Indonesians

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Abstrak

Karena bahasa Inggris tidak hanya milik penutur aslinya untuk menyebut orang Amerika, orang Inggris, Kanada, Australia, atau penutur pertama bahasa Inggris lainnya, tetapi juga mereka yang berbicara bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua seperti orang Singapura, Malaysia, India, dan penutur bahasa Inggris kedua lainnya yang sekarang akrab dengan istilah "varietas baru bahasa Inggris", persepsi dan sikap orang-orang perlahan-lahan berubah; dari cara berpikir bahwa berbicara bahasa Inggris harus seperti bahasa Inggris Amerika atau Inggris British ke paradigma baru bahwa berbicara bahasa Inggris harus dapat dimengerti dan dipahami. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan sikap masyarakat Indonesia terhadap paradigma baru kepemilikan bahasa Inggris saat ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Tiga orang Indonesia dengan latar belakang yang berbeda dalam hal generasi usia, pendidikan, dan tempat tinggal diwawancarai. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sikap mereka terhadap bahasa Inggris telah berubah secara positif terhadap kepemilikan bahasa global ini. Sebagai kesimpulan, bahasa Inggris masih memiliki hak istimewa sebagai bahasa Internasional, tetapi metafora tentang siapa yang memiliki bahasa Inggris tidak lagi menjadi masalah besar.

Kata Kunci: Kepemilikan, Penutur Asli, Bahasa Inggris Varietas Baru, Orang Indonesia.

Abstract

As English does not merely belong to its original speakers to mention Americans, British people, Canadians, Australians, or other first speakers of English but also to those speaking English as their second language such as Singaporeans, Malaysian, Indians and other second speakers of English which are now familiar with the terms 'New Varieties of English', people's perceptions and attitudes are ostensibly changing; from a way of thinking that speaking English must be like Americans or British people to a new paradigm that speaking English should be intelligible and understandable. This study was aimed at delineating Indonesian people's attitudes on the new paradigm of the English ownership at the current time. This study applied the qualitative descriptive design. Three Indonesians with different backgrounds in terms of age generation, education, and residence were interviewed. The findings indicated that their attitudes towards English have positively changed towards the ownership of this global language. To conclude, English still holds its privilege as an international language, but the metaphor of who owns English is no longer a great issue.

Keywords: Ownership, Original Speakers, New Varieties of English, Indonesians.

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INTRODUCTION

The prominently indigenized Asian varieties of English being the topic of the debate in the world of English as an International Language recently are Chinese English, Singaporean English and Indian English. From the three intensely discussed varieties, Chinese English is a variety coming from a country of Expanding circle. Compared to China, Indonesia, also coming from one of the Expanding circle countries, seems to be still far away to emerge as a new variety of English not mainly because of a great difference of the total population only, but also for at least two other reasons that I recognize. First, English in Indonesia does not receive a particularly high priority of concern from the government as in China, where English is highly promoted, receives a lot of support from the government as well as general public, being localized and appropriate to the social structure by the Chinese government (He, 2017). In China, an increasingly large population is even using English in daily lives, which gradually develops a new variety of English with its localized linguistic feature, making the country have the largest English-learning and using population in the world (Bolton et al., 2011; Bolton & Graddol, 2012; He, 2017).

English does not apply to any significant roles in Indonesia. It was even merely seen as a foreign language that was mainly used when people wanted to study of find a job abroad. Although a lot of Indonesian people speak English, there is no English community speakers in the country that causes English to stay as a foreign language (Rini, 2014). However, many private companies in Indonesia nowadays require English as one of the main conditions to procure the positions in the work slots. Foreign investors are also making growing investments in the country in which they preeminently seek for English speaking employees. Such conditions gradually make people keen on learning English for a better future.

Another main reason that makes a new variety of English difficult to emerge in Indonesia is apparently a big number of colorful ethnics bringing along the diverse mother tongues in Indonesia affecting especially the various accents people have. It will cause the term "Indonesian English" (to so call the possibly coming new variety of English) tend to be unclearly defined. Unlike Chinese English, in which people all over the world can recognize this particular variety characteristically from the people's uniquely similar accent, Indonesian English will appear to divide into 'Indonesian English' (to refer to the accent of those who speak Bahasa Indonesia without bringing in their mother tongue accents or only speak Bahasa as their first language), and those with strong accents to mention Javanese English, Batak English, Malay English, and other sorts of Indonesian Englishes. Furthermore, the process of creating this Indonesian accent along with its varieties will likely be still problematic because of some crucial reasons. Indonesian people apparently prefer to sound more like a native speaker than like an Indonesian (Rini, 2014). Speaking like a native speaker is seen to boost their confidence and pride. In addition, the English teachers in this country are still largely unaware of the potential of English as an International Language (EIL) for the teaching and the fact that they still depend on the native speakers as the standard or benchmark (Vodopija-Krstanović & Marinac, 2019).

Regardless of the possibility of the "Indonesian English" emergence, English is being spread in Indonesia and it surely affects the way the people perceive and react to that international language. Formerly, English was absolutely seen as a language of British or American in Indonesia (Jenkins, J., Cogo & Dewey, 2011). Speaking like those native speakers is a prestige. It was often the case that adults that time felt reluctant to learn English simply because they felt they could not switch their tongue with the expected pronunciation of the language. However, nowadays, as the Indonesian people seem to realize the importance of acquiring English and the fact that they cannot easily change their endowed accents, they begin to slightly change the way they perceive English, at least in a basic stage such as acknowledging that they do not need to be British like or American like to speak English. The significance of acquiring English does not lay necessarily on the accent, but on the fluency and on how one can accommodate to comprehend my interlocutors and being comprehended as well. The perspective and attitudes toward the use of English in Indonesia may slightly be

represented by the result of the interview to my three Indonesian friends. Although the responses cannot be used to generalize the whole view of Indonesian people, they can at least significantly be viewed as a sign of Indonesian generation's attitude towards English in the present time.

METHOD

The method applied in this study is qualitative descriptive. In this paper, three Indonesians with different backgrounds were purposively chosen to be the subject of this study to find out their perspectives and reactions about the ownership of English in the globalization era. They have been involved in learning and/or speaking English for years and have followed the issue trends happening to English.

The interviewees were named by their initials as FB, MZ and SI to protect their confidentiality. FB was a 32-year-old male, staying in Indonesia as a government officer and had never been in any of English speaking countries. He speaks English quite fluently for he joined English courses for a couple of years. The second respondent was a 17-year-old boy studying in grade 10 of a secondary college in Australia, MZ. He had received his Australian permanent residence for his mother was working in Melbourne. He had been staying in Australia for two years when the interview was being conducted while he also had previously lived for two years in that country when her mother was taking her master degree. He undoubtedly speaks fluent English. If the two interviewees were questioned through e-interviews while at the same time we were having a chat via Facebook discussing further about the issue, the last interviewee, my 34-year-old housemate at that time, SI was interviewed face to face. SI was taking her final semester for a Master degree in International Development and Environmental Analysis at Monash University. SI speaks English fluently.

One-to-one interviews were conducted to obtain personal perceptions towards the issues identified within the questions. In order to expand information from the participants, this study employed open-ended interview formats. There were 8 main questions in the interview. Each interview was conducted in English and lasted for between 45-60 minutes and was audio-taped. The interviews were then transcribed and shown to the participants for verification and additional comments were added. Some comments from the interview have been edited for clarity.

RESULTS AND RESEARCH DISCUSSION

All interviewees unanimously agreed that English plays an important role in Indonesia. According to FB, English is important because it is an international language. He also stated that Mandarin actually tops the list of most popular world languages. While English is generally claimed as the most widely spoken lingua franca, it is also a common cliché that Chinese is the most widely spoken mother tongue standing in the even each very thin layer (Pennycook, 2012). FB continued that its importance in the international role is because English is the official language of many powerful countries and is the most widely used by countries in the world. Therefore, he suggested that people in Indonesia need to master English for more opportunities in work and education. McKay (in Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019) suggested that Mandarin, English, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic, the most widely spoken mother tongues in the world today, might be considered international languages. However, McKay also argued that unless such languages are spoken by a large number of native speakers of other languages, the language cannot serve as a wider communication, that in this sense, English is the international language *par excellence*. Crystal (2012) also maintained that a language achieves global status when it develops a 'special role that is recognized in every country' and that this special status can be achieved either by making it an official language of the country or by a country giving a special priority to both learning English as a foreign language and testing English in job requirement.

Having the same view with FB, MZ also responded that English is important in Indonesia due to its role as an international language. He simply added that "we can communicate easily to other people from other

countries" which is indeed the absolute fact as English is the lingua franca, especially in the global era. Meanwhile, according to SI, English is important in Indonesia because it is a part of education and there is a lot of knowledge using English as the means of conveying the knowledge. She added that if people want to read books, there are many books about knowledge written in English. This response may be in line with what Crystal (2012) claimed that most of innovations of the Industrial Revolutions were of the British origin. Crystal also added that because of the fact that these innovations derived from an English-speaking country meaning that those from abroad who wished to learn about them would need to learn English. Learning English is undoubtedly critical when one wishes to gain knowledge, which is transcribed in English. However, it does not necessarily mean s/he has to cover the whole aspects of English skills when s/he only needs to read English materials for instance. In fact, those who can read and understand English reading materials do not necessarily speak fluent English, instead, being passive users of English is sufficient in this case. However, when one wishes to be fluent in English and be a proffessional user, s/he is supposed to cover the whole skills of English. After all, learning English now is more likely to adjust to the learner's need than to meet a conventional stiff goal such as speaking must be like British or Americans.

English is viewed as an important language in Indonesia. This view was taken by the two interviewees, MZ and SI, while FB took a slightly different idea by stating that it is the most popular foreign language in Indonesia since it has been taught since elementary school. However, it can simply be concluded that because of its importance, English becomes popular in Indonesia. English has actually been introduced to elementary school since 1990's, especially after the Competence-based Curriculum was implemented (Alwasilah, 2013), but it was not compulsory, so every elementary school could choose whether to include English or not in the curriculum. At that time, English was usually taught in the upper grades such as grade 5 or 6 of Elementary school. But since 2003, English had been a compulsory subject of Elementary school in many provinces in Indonesia as the government expediency (Depdiknas, 2003). It was expected that most children in Indonesia, if not all, started to acquire their English in the young age. However, as the Indonesian government revised the 2013/2014 curriculum, English has now been an elective subject in elementary schools. This was applied to create more effective environment to learn English and avoid the incompetent teachers to teach in the schools (Kasim as cited in Prasetyo, 2013). Nevertheless, the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadim Makarim is planning to re-include English subject in the elementary school level considering the importance in this New Media Age (Putra, 2020).

SI also pointed out that English is viewed as an important skill in Indonesia and that because so many people now are learning English, it is no longer a privilege for someone learning English. People now are learning English for various reasons. There is indeed a variation in choosing English as the most preferred foreign language. The reasons are not only because of the political expediency, the desire for commercial, cultural or technological contact that Crystal (2012) included in choosing a particular language as a favored foreign language, but also the desire of being recognized in society or a particular group, or simply a natural tongue flavor of pronouncing such as expressed by MZ, the young boy who even added that English is a kind of "a cool language".

Regarding who is learning English in Indonesia, everyone in the interview mentioned students as the most learners of English with similar reason that it is a part of education. According to them, students did not have any choice because English was a compulsory subject in most schools. Other than students, SI also mentioned people from business for business purposes are also learning English. Since English had ever been a compulsory subject in Indonesian schools, and nowadays it is also seen as a very important language to learn, many parents in Indonesia send them to English courses to allow their children to have more practice in English. As in Pare, one of cities in East Java which is more familiar with the name 'Kampung Inggris' or 'English Village", the community speaks English each other because so many English courses are established there and the people's motivation to learn English is enormous in that area. It can be identified that such condition can contribute to the emergence of a new English variety in the future someday. Platt et al.(as cited

in Low, 2018) mentioned that if English has developed through the education system which means that it has been taught as a subject, it fulfils one of the four criteria of creating a New English.

The metaphor of the ownership of English may seem to no longer be enjoyed by especially the English 'nativeness' lovers to delegalize the right of Englishes users to keep continuously changing English discourses. I can see this good news from the responses shown by at least two of my interviewees, FB and SI who stated that English belongs to the global world. FB stated that English is 'owned' by the world. He said that "because it is now the most popular International language so it belongs to the world". SI, saying the global world may own English, even argued that English is not like a flag or a national anthem that needs to be possessed. This smart statement is indeed to represent that more people start to realize that no particular group of speakers is supposed to have sole authority over English (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019). Meanwhile, according to MZ, the 17-year-old boy, White people especially British people and next Americans own English. This is really similar to what Widdowson (Jenkins, 2015) mocked about English being found, preserved and listed like "a property of the National Trust". Such an answer possibly appeared because he was still young and still enjoying the glory of Anglo-Saxon speaking English people, just like many Indonesian people in old times.

English is now used merely as a foreign language in Indonesia. Parents especially are sending their children to English courses because English is becoming the absolute requirement of procuring qualified jobs. Because of more Indonesians now are learning English, there is a curiosity and expectation that English may someday become a second language in the country. To react whether there is a possibility towards the language position from a foreign language to a second language, the three interviewees delivered various responses. SI simply replied that it is possible for English to function that way. FB pessimistically responded that it is difficult for English to become the Indonesian second language but if it really happens, he will feel happy. I believe that many Indonesians, especially those coming from educated backgrounds will most welcome the changing function of the language, just like FB because such condition will create an Englishconditioned environment that allows us to acquire English easily and compete fairly in any aspects of life, especially in this digital media era. The last interviewee, MZ says "Maybe, because Indonesian people are dominated by Americans who speak English." He reasoned those American movies are being watched by lots of people in Indonesia which makes it plausible for English to become a second language. There is a widespread exposure to the American English dominating media and film industries around the world (Jenkins, 2015). Nowadays, children are much exposed with digital media that teachers take advantage of this situation to utilize these media in their teaching even in the primary level to increase their motivation to learn (Ismiyani, 2020; Syupriyanti et al., 2019). With this condition, it is expected that these children will be exposed with Global Englishes in their early age.

Regardless of whether English will become a second language in Indonesian only because of people watching American movies as MZ believed, American movies indeed is the most favorite entertainment watched by mostly Indonesian teenagers and adults, especially in urban cities. They also often follow some slang from the movies. Mass media indisputably plays a major role in the communication and transmission of social values and the propagation of national culture (Muhartoyo & Wijaya, 2014). There is just an idea coming across my mind that why not the new varieties of English introduce their intelligibly unique accents and social cultures through movies. Chinese or Indian people can create movies in English Language so that people, especially those from Asian where Chinese and Indian movies are widely shown on TV, recognize the existence of 'New Englishes' and will be exposed to those varieties and other emerging varieties of course. As the time passes by, people all over the world will gradually admit and accept that there are New Englishes spread out.

The general fact that Indonesians admire English from the inner-circle countries affects the way they choose the preferred native teachers and high-stake tests for even the internal use (Karim & Ismiyani, 2014; Pudyastuti & Atma, 2014). It is essential to discover how actually Indonesian people in general view the

function of English nowadays that the academicians could wisely select the best method for the use of English in either teaching or testing, without maintaining to make the English of native speakers become the standard. In this way, the emerging of World Englishes in Indonesia will soon be realized. This study has indicated that the way the Indonesian people think towards English as an International language has been ostensibly changing.

This study highlighted the view of Indonesians with different backgrounds in terms of age generation, education, and country residence towards the ownership of English to promote World Englishes that was not found in the previous studies conducted for World Englishes in Indonesia (See Endarto, 2018; Gunantar, 2015; Halim, 2016; Karim & Ismiyani, 2014; Pudyastuti & Atma, 2014). These three Indonesians have shown changing attitudes towards the ownership of English, which means that more people realize that English belongs to the world, not only those from the inner-circle countries to mention USA or UK. This condition is an absolutely good news for the future of English language teaching because it will provide learners with teachers from a wider range of identities, augmenting the legitimacy of English teacher whether native or nonnative, and therefore making educational opportunities more promising (Norton & Pavlenko, 2018, 2019).

This study resulted in positive attitudes towards the ownership of English. However, all three participants interviewed were those from well-educated people and two of them even resided in Australia, one of the inner-circle countries, so that their circumstance might have influenced them to be open-minded instead of being parochial. Furthermore, the number of participants researched was a few that more studies on more people need to be conducted to support the result of this research. Although the responses cannot be used to generalize the whole view of Indonesian people, they can at least significantly be viewed as a sign of Indonesian generation's attitude towards English in the present time.

CONCLUSION

From all the responses given by my three interviewees, there are at least two general views to point out. Firstly, they agree that English is viewed as an important language due to its status as an International Language. Secondly, the metaphor of who owns English is no longer a great issue that two out of three interviewees state it belongs to the global world and not British or Americans. Finally, to presumably represent Indonesians' feeling towards the history of the spread of English and how it importantly functions nowadays, I would say if time can be reset to the past colonization period, Indonesian people may probably choose to be colonized by British, rather than by Dutch.

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