

TWO FACES OF ENGLISH HEGEMONY IN INDONESIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Mastering English which is currently an international language is one of the golden tickets to explore the world globally. As an educator, having an accredited research journal is an obligation. Nowadays, most international accredited journals are written in English. Therefore, having the ability of English language will help teachers to publish their articles or their writing internationally. Currently, almost all countries in the world prepare their human resources in English language skills. This paper argues that government policies, society, and English language teaching practices are students' environments which promote the emergence of bilingual euphoria phenomenon. Also, this paper will presents how this phenomenon will marginalize local languages together with some suggestions to overcome the situation.

Keywords : *Bilingual, Euphoria, Phenomenon, Local Languages, English, Global*

INTRODUCTION

English is becoming the world number one language which is spoken by most people all over the world. With its status as the world lingua franca in the area of economy, politics, education, and information and technology, mastering English may give benefits to people to gain some access to the global economy, education, and politics. For people in business, mastering English can make them expand their business overseas. Educators are required to publish their research articles in accredited journals, which are mostly in English. Mastering English is becoming one of the tickets to open to the global world. Many countries are preparing their human resources to compete in this global world teaching English as their second or foreign language learning at their schools.

Despite the positive influence of global role English to open access to the world economy and education to one country, English also harms a country. According to McKay (2002), the global

spread of English threatens the role of existing languages in a country. The languages will reduce in their functions, and if the reducing role of these languages happens simultaneously, the languages will soon be extinct. Graddol (2007) predicted that by the year 2050, there would be only 1000 or fewer local languages remain in the world. It may occur because people prefer to speak the global language.

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of language extinction is inevitably happening too. Four vernacular languages are going to extinct; they are Maluku, Maluku Utara (Kao), Nusa Tenggara Barat, and Papua (Republika, 2011). Moreover, AV (2011) also added that there are 746 local languages in Indonesia whose speakers are decreasing in the last thirty years because people instead speak the modern language or foreign language. The modern language, in this case, is Bahasa, our lingua franca, while foreign language is English. Being able to speak Bahasa or speak English is considered as being part of modern people. On the other hand, many people perceive

mastering local languages or vernacular languages as old fashioned languages.

English has been the primary foreign language taught in secondary education since 1984 in Indonesia. English, along with Bahasa and Mathematics, has a dominant role as the determinants of students' failure or success in their three-year study at High School. Those subjects are tested in the national examination at high school. Students need to pass specific scores in each subject so that they can graduate from school. Failing to meet the minimum score in one subject means they can not graduate from school.

The result of the national examination recently shows that the average score of English surpasses the score of Bahasa. Bahasa got the lowest average in National Examination in the year 2009/2010 in North Sumatra (Bahasa 5,22; English 7,74) (Antaraneews.com, April 25, 2010). Bahasa failed 70 % of students in Bali in the National Examination (Kompas.com, May 16, 2011). Out of 11,443 students who failed the national examination 2010/2011, 3% English, 38,43 % Bahasa. (JPPN.com, May 20, 2011). Anom (2011) called this situation *the* "Bilingual euphoria phenomenon." It is a phenomenon where students feel that they must excel in English. Students find out the importance of mastering another language or becoming bilingual for their better future. Indonesian people are naturally bilingual people. They can speak two languages. Their first language (L1) is their mother tongue, known as the vernacular language spoken at home. Their second language is Bahasa functions as their lingua franca. Bahasa is studied and used in schools and formal situations.

English is seen to give benefit to their future rather than Bahasa so that

students they put lots of effort and energy to study English harder than Bahasa. This perception triggers this bilingual euphoria phenomenon. This phenomenon is an indication of how the English language can marginalize the local ones. The local languages (both mother tongue and Bahasa) will exist but the role of those languages in students daily life will be reduced replaced by English.

METHOD

This study uses document analysis to seek the dominance of English in everyday life and in education. The author examines printed (a rector's decree, brochures of preschools), and electronic materials (online newspapers, social media status of 25 first semester students of a state university in west Kalimantan), and local billboards on the main streets in Pontianak. The author also did some observation concerning the students language for their daily conversation in and out of the classroom.

DISCUSSION

This paper argues that government policies, society, and English language teaching practices are students' environments that promote the emergence of bilingual euphoria phenomenon. Also, this paper will presents how this phenomenon will marginalize local languages together with some suggestions to overcome the situation.

Indonesian government takes part in promoting the bilingual euphoria phenomenon by issuing some policies that pose English over Bahasa and vernacular languages. Crystal (2003) states that "Government has an important role in influencing the world' world' linguistic future because they have the political

decision and made allocation resources for language planning." Ministry of education proposed English as a subject for local content for a primary school in 1994. Since then, many primary schools in all provinces in Indonesia have been teaching English as their local content subject. Some schools start teaching English from year one but some from year four. Almost preschools teaches English as their main subject. Local languages, on the other hand, are never taught at schools on the island of Kalimantan, Papua, Sulawesi, and Sumatra (except in Nangroe Aceh Darussalam). Primary schools in Java and Bali island are the ones that teach English, vernacular languages, and Bahasa at the same time.

The other government policy that promotes the critical role of English over local languages is Government decree no. 20/2003, which stated that establishing international-based schools is a way to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. English is the medium of instruction in mathematics, physics, and biology. There were 1110 international-based schools in Indonesia comprising 195 primary schools, 299 junior high schools, 321 senior high schools, and 295 vocational high schools (NggoKontes, 2010). These international-based schools also get some privileges from the government, such as receiving many grants from local government, acquiring many pieces of training both domestic and overseas for their teachers, and being able to draw extra school fees from parents.

The dominance of English in international schools may reduce the importance of learning Bahasa and local languages. Crystal (2003) claims that the emergence of English as the primary foreign language at school may displace another language in the process. The policy

that puts the English instruction school as more qualified schools may shape people's opinion that qualified schools and education should use English as the medium of instruction. Moreover, being able to be useful in English opens more significant access to qualified education. Thus, many students may dedicate their spare time and effort to study English to able to enroll in the international-based school. They may look down the role of Bahasa in determining their success in the study.

In society, the bilingual euphoria phenomenon also takes place through the promotion of parents. Nowadays, more young children vary from four to twelve years of age are attending private English courses. Kids'Kids' classes in private English courses are always full and stable in the number of students. Parents are so enthusiastic about bringing their children to the courses and learning English at the courses is the number one activity that most parents choose for their young children. The study made by Djiwandono (2005) shows that parents send their children to private courses because they want their children to earn good grades in English lesson (88 %), to get them to like English (72.22 %), to be easier to learn English at the young age (72.22 %), and to make their children able to communicate in English (38.89 %).

From the statistics, we can see that parents nowadays motivate their children to learn English. Unfortunately, there also tendencies in which most parents use Bahasa as their daily language at home. They seldom use their local languages at home, and some do not even teach their mother tongue to their children. Many children can speak English and Bahasa but less able to speak their mother tongue. This

condition will make the local language dies since a language may die if no one speaks it anymore (Crystal, 2002)

The use of English as the language of media such as popular music and movies, which are mostly from the United States, assists the global spread of English in Indonesia. Internet and social networking, such as facebook and twitter, is becoming a youngsters' lifestyle. Updating status in English as considered to be how to get engaged to the world for youngsters. Showing up a new identity as part of global citizen since the youngsters may make friends across the world. Outdoor media such as posters, billboards, electronic displays, shop signs using English such as "how low can you go," Kotabaru junction, phone center, mall A Yani and Jakarta porridge, school duck and many more, become parts of an everyday scene. Youngsters have excellent exposure to the English language unconsciously every day. They may absorb the language in their daily conversation. They sometimes replace Bahasa or their local dialects when speaking with standard terms in English, such as Goodbye (Selamattinggal), exit (pintukeluar), and try (coba) and many more. Currently, there is a trend to mix Bahasa with English as everyday language such as "Laguapa yang sedang *happening* saatini" (what songs are popular now), "dimanabisa di access informasiini?" (where can we access this information?).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as the methodology used in Indonesia since 1994 has restricted the role of L1 (first language) in the classroom. The basic tenet of CLT is that the use of the mother tongue should be discouraged as much as possible (Students are Limited use of mother tongue in the classroom because

of CLT (McKay, 2002). If teachers use other languages most of the time in the classroom, standards of English will drop so that English is best taught monolingually (Phillipson, 1992). Under those concepts, teachers consider the use of L1 by the students in the classroom as faulty. The teachers sometimes give any punishment for any students who speaks L1 in their classroom. According to Halliday (as cited in McKay, 2002), there are two versions of CLT - weak and strong versions. The weak version of CLT refers to the limited use of mother tongue in the class as applied by most Indonesian teachers.

On the other hand, the strong version of CLT allows learners to discuss the problem in their mother tongue, and then they must present the result of the discussion in English. In this strong version L1 functions as the bridge to facilitate the learners to understand L2 (second or foreign language). In this strong version of CLT, students will learn how their knowledge in their local language or Bahasa may help them to understand English.

The important of English over local languages in Indonesia is depicted from the obligation to have a certain minimum overall band score of TOEFL as a prerequisite to have a proposal- defense seminar for any bachelor, masters, and Ph.D. students in most states university in Indonesia. The score varies from one university to another depending and increases every year. Taken, for example, Tanjungpura University, undergraduate students must have a minimum overall band score of 430 and for Master students 450. Even if Students who get A (80 to 100 point) for his/her general English class and GPA (grade point average) is over 2.5 (out of 4 scales) as the minimum GPA to

graduate from university, but their TOEFL overall band score is below 450 can not have their proposal-defense seminar. They need to join the test many times or take TOEFL courses to get the minimum score required.

This type of assessment mismatches from the type of English class, General English class. University students only learn general English, which only prepares students to kind of English, which is used in everyday situations for two to four credits only in one semester. In contrast, TOEFL, with its standard American English, is administered for any second or foreign language learners who seek to study in North American Universities (Sharifian, 2009). TOEFL may not be a valid test to assess student's ability in English since it does not measure what kind of knowledge that students have learned so far and does not offer useful, meaningful information about a test-taker ability (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Regarding the role of English as international language nowadays, having a specific test as the sole measurement of someone's ability in English is contrary to what Graddol (2006, p. 82) claims there is no single way of assessing English proficiency, which provides the target of learning.

Also, the thesis and mini-thesis are written in Bahasa so that there is no correlation with English. The policymakers at the university level should concern about the student's ability to write a standardized Bahasa in students' thesis. Even though the students have learned Bahasa since primary school, it does not guarantee that they can write their thesis in good and write Bahasa. TOEFL policy in universities supports the dominance of English in determining students' success or failure from high schools to the

university level. This condition may motivate students to make joining an English course as their number one extracurricular activity.

TOEFL is also popular among senior high schools in Indonesia. Some principals in some prominent schools in Indonesia provide their students with intensive TOEFL training a few months before the national examination. This course prepares students for the examination as well as to boost the English score in the examination. Having good average scores of English and mathematics can elevate the prestige of school in society.

There are some possible suggestions to prevent the possibility of the marginalization of local languages because of the global spread of English. The first, the government of Indonesia should oblige all schools from elementary level to high school to teach their local language as the local content in their curriculum. So, even though parents do not teach their children their local language or mother tongue, children still can get exposure to the language. Also, the governments should actively hold many competitions that can raise both parents and children to master and to be proud of their local language. The similar competitions held in English, such as speech, storytelling, beauty pageant, singing contest, and writing contest, may enlighten the love of their local languages. Thus, we can foster local language maintenance because language is our identity and repositories of our history (Crystal, 2000, Van Hoorde, as cited in Crystal, 2000).

The second suggestion is changing the language teachers' belief that local language or students L1 is permissive to use in CLT. The teachers should be trained

on how to effectively use L1 for active L2 (English) learning through techniques like comparing and contrast. There is an interdependence of proficiency between L1 and L2 (Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukoma 1977; Tookomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas 1977; Cummins 1979 and 1984). Phillipson (1992, p.191) states, "the failure to provide educational conditions for the development of cognitive-academic proficiency in L1 as well as initial literacy in L1 may invalidate efforts to determine learners' effort to build up such skills in L2". It shows that academic proficiency in Bahasa may determine students' English proficiency in a similar skill.

The third, Amidst the market demand of specific average TOEFL band scores to some job vacancy in Indonesia, TOEFL, and any international tests, namely IELTS and Cambridge test should not be a stumbling block for students to get their final achievement in the study. However, those tests may be used to map the student's ability in English. The result of the test will inform the university about the learners' English proficiency. With this information, English lectures and

policymakers in university may be able to design ideal English programs and courses. Graves (2000, p. 103) stated knowing the learners' level of English proficiency can assist teachers in choosing the kinds of texts to use, which skills to develop, which elements of grammar to emphasize, and so on.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the world language ecology, the dominance of English globally may naturally reduce the role of indigenous languages in one country. Being proficient in English is a must nowadays since it will open us global access to this modern world. However, being part of modern people should not make people undermine their local language. Government, society, and educators must be responsible for reviving the proud feeling of being a bilingual person with the balance ability in both languages. Our mastery of English should not make us forget our local language since our local language can strengthen our understanding of the concept of a new language.

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