ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: AN OVERVIEW

Anita Dewi

Monash University

ABSTRACT

As indicated in the title, this paper provides a brief overview of English as an International Language (EIL) by elaborating it as a paradigm and discussing concepts that are closely related to it. In doing so, the paper covers sections of English in relation to globalisation, linguistic imperialism, other languages, identity, its varieties, language ecology, and its impacts. Prominent theories and previous research results are presented throughout the paper.

In general, EIL as a paradigm suggests that the spread of English is no longer a simple result of migration or colonisation rather it involves multiple reasons, backgrounds, and issues. In the context of communication, EIL requires appropriateness and negotiation in the use and function of English among other languages, which would ideally lead to a "contemporary global linguistic ecology" (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, p. 20).

Key words: English as an International Language (EIL)

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a brief overview of English as an International Language (EIL), a new paradigm of how English is positioned (or perhaps positions itself) in the current era. In discussing the paradigm of EIL, one must always keep in mind that the paradigm does not refer to any specific English variety, rather it addresses how English is used in intercultural communication across the globe (Sharifian, 2009, p. 2). This clarification is deliberately provided at the beginning of this paper in order to avoid misunderstandings about EIL as merely teasing out varieties of English that have already occurred, are emerging, or will emerge.

In its presentation, this paper is divided into several sections which are expected to provide a series of clear explanation about EIL and concepts that are closely related to it. Apart from Introduction and Final Remarks, the sections

capture English in relation to globalisation, linguistic imperialism, other languages, identity, its varieties, language ecology, and its impacts. Included in the elaboration are prominent theories and several findings of previous research on EIL.

ENGLISH AND GLOBALISATION

EIL paradigm is indeed very much related to globalisation. In itself, the term globalisation has been variously interpreted by different scholars. One of these scholars is Guillen, who suggested that globalisation leads to "greater interdependence and mutual awareness (reflexivity) among economic, political, and social units in the world, and among actors in general" (2001, p. 236). A year after Guillen's idea above was released, Arnett provided a definition of globalisation as "a process by which cultures influence one another and become more alike" (2002, p. 774). Regardless of the different definitions given by different scholars, mutual awareness seems to always appear in almost all definitions of terms related to globalisation. Guillén, for instance, defines globality as "a network of relationships that creates mutual awareness" (Guillén, 2001, p. 244).

The different definitions of globalisation are results of three different ways in viewing the global situation the "hyperglobalist hypothesis", "sceptical hypothesis", and "transformationalist perspective" (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010, p. 79). The "hyperglobalist hypothesis" view suggests that the concept of nation state no longer exists as nations have become borderless. The second view, that is the "sceptical hypothesis", holds the belief that globalisation is simply one of many common phenomena in historical movements. Meanwhile, the "transformationalist perspective" views globalisation as the driving force of the current social, political and economic changes. A sharp contrast is found between the "hyperglobalist hypothesis" and the "transformationalist perspective. The "hyperglobalist hypothesis believes that globalisation leads to a more homogeneous world, whereas the "transformationalist perspective" believes that globalisation results in greater diversities.

Clearly, there has been a continuum of different interpretations of globalisation. The undeniable fact is, however, that globalisation has a strong impact on English. The impact is closely related to the role of English in the delivery of information across countries (Guillén, 2001, p. 252). In other words, it relies on the fact that "English functions as a global lingua franca" (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339).

In being a lingua franca, the case of English is different from that of any other languages as it is used "over most of the world" (Chew, 1999, p. 43). There has been no other language having such a broad coverage as a lingua franca in the history of human being. The composition of English users has also shifted tremendously. The number of the so-called non-native speakers of English has reached three times the number of native speakers. As a matter of fact, the population of the so-called non-native English speakers continuously increases while that of the first language speakers decreases (Crystal, 2006, p. 425). This has brought English into its new role as a "global currency" (McKay, 2002, p. 18), where its "usage is beyond control" (Crystal, 2004, p. 46).

In interpreting this situation, Kachru divides the global areas of English spread based on the motives. According to Kachru, there are three circles of English spread, namely the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1985, 1986; Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). English was spread from the Inner Circle because its speakers migrated to new geographical locations, while English was spread to the Outer Circle countries because of colonisations. In the case of Expanding Circle countries, foreign language learning is responsible for the spread of English.

In general, English has become global in its status either by being made an official language in Outer Circle countries or being prioritised in Expanding Circle ones. The situation has also driven EIL speakers to not conform to any Inner Circle Englishes, because English is mostly treated and viewed as a tool for communication. In expressing so, McKay uses the term "re-nationalized" instead of "de-nationalized" English to characterise the situation (McKay, 2002, p. 5).

ENGLISH AND LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM

As mentioned above, colonisation has had its influence in the spread of English around the globe. According to Pennycook (2001, p. 72), three aspects need to be considered in making sense of postcolonial English spread "the need for an historical understanding of language use", "a view of culture, identity, and global politics that avoids essentialism and instead looks at forms of resistance and appropriation", and "a need always to work contextually". As a matter of fact, colonisation has revealed two categories of English varieties native and nativised (Kirkpatrick, 2007, pp. 5-6). In Kirkpatrick's view, English varieties have existed for a long time, have influenced newer English varieties, are spoken by native speakers, and are often seen as superior to the nativised ones. Meanwhile, the

nativised varieties developed in new areas where English was not the main language, and they are very much in negotiation with local languages and cultures (Kirkpatrick, 2007, pp. 5-6).

Picking up the abovementioned last point that local influences take part in developing English varieties, it can be said that English spread is not a simple realisation of linguistic imperialism. English represents "a complex process brought about both by those who actively promote the language and those who consciously choose to learn it" (McKay, 2002, p. 24). As Widdowson suggested, the phrase "English spread" can be interpreted in two ways, either as a natural event where "English has spread" or a form of deliberate imposition where "English has been spread" (Widdowson, 1997, p. 136). This multi-interpretation of the phenomenon is in line with Chew's explicit statement that fully accepting the spread of English in the global era as imperialism is an overestimation (1999, p. 46).

Indeed, there are significant differences between simple imperialism and the current global situation. The rationale behind imperialism is the centrality of Europe and America. This is not the case of English in the global era, where many countries become central or key players in the international arena. As a matter of fact, it can be seen in the current international arena that China, Russia, Japan, and Islamic nations have become more and more prominent.

Results from some research on English and imperialism conducted throughout the recent years actually strengthen the argument that the global spread of English is no longer a simple form of linguistic imperialism. One of them is a study in 1995 by Bisong. In his study of a Nigerian context, the findings suggest that parents did not feel imposed in sending their children to school to learn English and become bilingual (Bisong, 1995, p. 131). The finding was used by Bisong to oppose Phillipson's claim in 1992 that "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47).

As a matter of fact, later in 1999 Phillipson redirected his theory and coined the possibility of a linguistic ecology to exist in different societies. Indeed, in a more recent study on perception of whether English is a form of imperialism in an Indonesian academic community context (Dewi, 2012), it was found that Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas' idea of "contemporary global linguistic ecology"(1999, p. 20) was preferred by the majority of participants. In one of the finding sections, perception of the relationship between English and the West was

presented. An extremely paradoxical term of "positive imperialism" was found among some of the participants where these participants suggested that even though English is somewhat imposed to the Indonesian society, "the benefits and advantages gained thereby are believed to outstrip the imposition" (Dewi, 2012, p. 11). This is strengthened by a later study of another Indonesian context, where the participants believed that "the level of Western influence within the English language is believed to be diminishing across time" (Dewi, Forthcoming, p. 24).

ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES

Indeed, recent findings have brought about new perspectives on languages in the global era. Globalisation leads to a world that is rich of flavours, since "different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 17). This richness of flavours can be viewed as both positive and negative. It cannot be denied that there are occasions where people feel helpless in facing globalisation. Nevertheless, the common pattern of attitudes shows that people are aware of the need of English, should they want to participate in the global arena.

Within the framework of English being in negotiation with local influences rather than merely a form of imperialism, local languages are definitely at play. The learning of English along with other languages does not reduce the great importance and prominence of English in the world. As suggested by Pennycook (2010, p. 676), language learning is "not a zero-sum game more learning of one language does not necessarily mean less of another". This confirms the role of English as an international language which does not necessarily threat other languages. In fact, the rationale behind EIL paradigm is for people of different backgrounds to be in charge of using and appropriating the language in relation to other languages surrounding English.

Actually, long before today Larry E. Smith has indicated the consequence of English spread by introducing the concept of "English as an international auxiliary language (EIAL)" (1976). In his proposal, Smith suggested that English is an "international" language used in communicating with other countries, while it is also an "auxiliary" language used in communicating within nations. As early as 1976, Smith already indicated his view that EFL, ESL, and ESOL no longer described the realities of English use, thus suggested them to be replaced. He also believed that English could no longer Westernise anyone, since the language was

already "a language of the world" (1976, pp. 38-39). Unfortunately, Smith's inability to provide a straightforward explanation of why English was globally prominent has postponed the acceptance of such framework until later years. Even at the moment, there are still pros and cons about how English in the world is viewed.

Revisiting Smith's idea of EAIL, it must be admitted that the shifting paradigm from EFL/ESL/ESOL to EAIL was not simple. As stated by Smith, "affective, structural, and rhetorical consequences" (Smith, 1976, pp. 41-42) are involved. First and foremost, English teachers need to identify themselves as owners of English rather than looking at it as a foreigner's language. Regardless of its long history prior to be considered seriously in the academic debate, Smith has long acknowledged the existence of diverse English varieties that do not conform to any single standard.

The current development is most likely to be in favour of Smith's proposal. As Kirkpatrick pointed out, "the majority of English speakers are now multilingual people who have learned English and who use English to communicate with fellow multilinguals" (2007, p. 1). Negotiations between English and local languages are continuously at play. Even though developing countries struggle through economic and political inequalities, the awareness of the need for English remains strong. This might seem to be a form of linguistic imperialism, yet it is definitely not a simple one. The fact shows that people in developing countries "have their say" both through the emergence of new English varieties and the use of different languages for different purposes. This has become the basis for such a counter argument to a simple linguistic imperialism mindset.

ENGLISH AND IDENTITY

In addition to people's uses and views of English and other languages, another issue that is worth to be discussed is its relationship with identity. One of the aspects closely related to identity is language policy. In line with the current development of English across the globe, it is not policies of the English speaking countries that are important. In fact, policies of governments of non-English speaking countries in support of the use of English across various areas are actually more significant in relation to the spread of English.

The policies themselves are strongly influenced by political and economic considerations, thus they are not "pure linguistic" ones. As Liddicoat and Baldauf

argued, macro policy is of less importance than local language policy (2008). This is indeed a proof that English spread is not a pure imperialism, since the economically and politically less powerful countries initiate their policies rather than being imposed by more powerful countries that happen to be English speaking countries. Indeed, English has gone through social, political, economic, and linguistic changes through global use and interaction.

In relation to bonds to languages, Pennycook suggested that there is a tendency for "overlooking diversity within regions and the scope of change within globalization" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 681). In fact, many studies of English have taken diversity for granted by positioning the language as representing individual nations. What researchers need to be aware is that they need to "think about English and globalization outside the nationalist frameworks" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 682). Thus, the connection between English and one's national identity is not as simple as it used to be, since national identity has become "borderless identity" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 684).

ENGLISH AND ITS VARIETIES

The abovementioned emerging changes of English, identity as well as economic, social, political, and cultural situations have made up the forces behind the development of World Englishes. It is about time for English to multiply and become more diverse (Widdowson, 1997, p. 138). The emergence of new varieties of English is somewhat different from that of the Roman languages that was originated from Latin in the past. The new varieties of English, which are now frequently termed as World Englishes, are mutually intelligible and recognisable because of the intense ongoing communication among them. As suggested by Guillen (2001, p. 252) information is delivered inter-countries. In its delivery, the information accommodate codes within a multilingual society (Bamgbose, 2001, p. 35). All in all, English has fulfilled the requirement of being an international lingua franca, that is globally intelligible (Crystal, 2006, p. 422).

In the new way of viewing English, the language varieties are not seen as asserting national identities. The emergence of New Englishes is based on certain ideologies that it is even feasible for varieties of English to emerge at local levels. In other words, the emergence of an English variety is not determined by national boundaries, rather by the ideology informing the varieties. It is the "language ideologies underlie the visions of plurality" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 685) that becomes the starting point.

In Indonesian context, for instance, prospective varieties could emerge locally. It is possible that Javanese English, Balinese English, Madurese English, Papuan English, and so on could emerge, rather than a single Indonesian English. This is closely related to the history of the Indonesian language which was politically launched instead of naturally emerged. The political nature of the language has resulted in the people to not have as strong bond of identity with the language as they are with local languages.

What needs stressing is that the global spread of English leads to "localization of the language" (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008). Seen in this light, English spread is not simple since it happens in a historical moment where borders between local and global are becoming less and less clear.

ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

It cannot be denied that should English be spoken in every corner of the world, it is highly likely to co-exist with national and/or local languages. This is in line with Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas' proposal of a "contemporary global linguistic ecology" (1999, p. 20). As such, the situation demands for a careful consideration on other languages surrounding English when conducting research on English. As Bamgbose suggested, the global development of English is a "reciprocal development" affecting other languages around it (2001, p. 361).

Not all scholars, however, agree with such an idea. There are some who believe that strong languages, such as English, will cause other languages suffer, or even die (Dornyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, 2006, p. 7). Regardless of these contradictory views of experts, a consideration should be put on the views of the so-called non-native speakers of English. More attention needs to be paid on their views about the language as they now make the majority of English users. It is more likely to be up to them whether the spread of English is viewed as "a blessing or a threat" (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1997).

Overall, it cannot be denied that globalisation involves such a "collective mode of life" (Guillén, 2001, p. 254) where actions and events happen in trans-national, trans-continental, and international contexts. In this regard, English cannot act as one language expressing a universal culture, rather English and its varieties hold and allow the existence of multiple cultural expressions. One example is Achebe's proposal of "a new English" (1975, p. 62) for Africa, where it should be adopted from Britain but adapted to local site.

ENGLISH AND ITS IMPACT

Indeed, English has gone through a dual development becoming various Englishes as a result of "natural evolutionary process" and becoming an international language as demanded by the practicalities of "global communication" (Widdowson, 1997, p. 142). In fact, it is frequently unclear when the language is "a variety of the same species" or is in fact a "new one" (Widdowson, 1997, p. 140). As Burridge (2004, p. 111) puts it, "Today's weeds may become tomorrow's beautiful and rewarding species". In order to accommodate both developments, English should be allowed to bloom into various dialects. Thus, international users of the English will not treat the language as a means of identifying themselves with the language's countries of origin, but rather as a means of engaging in international communication.

The change of paradigm into EIL has allowed people of different backgrounds to use the language in a different nuance rather than in a follower mode. What needs to be done is acknowledging strengths of bilingual teachers who make up the majority of English teachers in the Expanding Circle countries, where the majority of English speakers are situated. These bilingual teachers are positive "double agents" with capabilities in the areas of pedagogy, linguistic skills, and problem solving. The capabilities put each bilingual teacher as a "model of a good language learner" (McKay, 2002, p. 45).

However, similar to other aspects of EIL, this is not a simple goal to achieve. The use or non-use of English as a medium of instruction in any country is largely determined by "political and ideological grounds rather than educational ones" (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 71). The dominance of Inner Circle Englishes in teaching and testing areas, which is highly due to economic reasons, cannot be stopped easily.

FINAL REMARKS

The spread of English is no longer a simple result of migration or colonisation, rather it involves multiple reasons, backgrounds, and issues. In Indonesian context, McKay has put Indonesians as "unique in how they make use of English" (McKay, 2002, p. 37). It is appropriateness and negotiation in the use and function of English among other languages, both national and local ones, that is required. Ideally, the goal should be realisation of a "contemporary global linguistic ecology" a la Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1999, p. 20).

REFERENCES

Achebe, C. (1975). *Morning yet in creation day*. New York: Doubleday.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2002). The psychology of globalization. *American Psychologist*, 57(10), 774-783.

Bamgbose, A. (2001). World Englishes and globalization. *World Englishes*, 20(3), 356-363.

Bisong, J. (1995). Language choice and cultural imperialism: A Nigerian perspective. *ELT Journal,* 49(2), 122-132.

Burridge, K. (2004). *Blooming English: Observations on the roots, cultivation and hybrids of the English language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chew, P. G.-L. (1999). Linguistic imperialism, globalism, and the English language. *The AILA review: English in a changing world,* 13, 37-47.

Clyne, M., & Sharifian, F. (2008). English as an international language: Challenges and possibilities. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31(3), 21-28.

Crystal, D. (2004). *The language revolution.* Cambridge: Polity Press Ltd.

Crystal, D. (2006). English worldwide. In R. Hogg & D. Denison (Eds.), *A history of the English language* (pp. pp. 420-444). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, M., & Jenkins, J. (2010). English as a Lingua Franca in the Global Context: Interconnectedness, Variation and Change. In M. Saxena & T. Omoniyi (Eds.), *Contending with Globalization in World Englishes* (pp. 72-92). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Dewi, A. (2012). Is English A Form of Imperialism? A Study of Academic Community's Perceptions at Yogyakarta Universities in Indonesia. *Asian Englishes,* 15(1), 4-27.

Dewi, A. (Forthcoming). Perception of English in Relation to Communication and Identity: A Study of Indonesian Lecturers, Teachers, and Tertiary Students. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*.

Dornyei, Z., Csizer, K., & Nemeth, N. (2006). *Motivation, language attitudes and globalisation: A Hungarian perspective.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Guillén, M. F. (2001). Is globalization civilizing, destructive or feeble? A critique of five key debates in the social science literature. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 27, 235-260.

Kachru, B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kachru, B. (1986). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions and models of non-native Englishes.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2006). Which model of English: Native-speaker, nativized or lingua franca? In R. Rubdy & M. Saraceni (Eds.), *English in the world: Global rules, global roles.* London: Continuum.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). Introduction. In A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching* (pp. 1-3). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liddicoat, A. J., & Baldauf Jr, R. B. (2008). Language planning in local contexts: Agents, contacts and interactions. In R. B. Kaplan & R. B. Baldauf Jr (Eds.), *Language planning and policy in Asia* (pp. 2-17). New York: Multilingual Matters.

McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language : Rethinking goals and approaches.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction.* Sydney: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Pennycook, A. (2010). The future of Englishes: One, many or none? In A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 673-687). New York: Routledge.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1997). Linguistic human rights and English in Europe. *World Englishes,* 16(1), 27-41.

Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1999). Englishisation: One dimension of globalisation. *The AILA Review: English in a changing world,* 13(19-36).

Seidlhofer, B. (2005). Key concepts in ELT: English as a Lingua Franca. *ELT Journal,* 59(4), 339-341.

Sharifian, F. (2009). English as an International Language: An overview. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *English as an International Language: Perspectives and Pedagogical Issues* (pp. 1-20). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Smith, L. E. (1976). English as an international auxiliary language. *RELC Journal*, 7(2), 38-43.

Widdowson, H. G. (1997). EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests. *World Englishes,* 16(1), 135-146.