

Some Insights on English Studies in Indonesia

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Abstract

The paper tries to offer some insights on English language studies in Indonesian universities. It seems that we need to reconsider the position of English studies in Indonesia. It is high time to respond to the need to prepare our students to realize there are many Englishes. For many decades, we have been focusing our attention to the West (British and American English) while the fact shows that English is no longer singular. Thus, focusing our attention to the West is not a wise choice. English departments in Indonesia should serve the interest of the students studying there.

Keyword : English studies, English literature

1. Introduction

In 1898 the English novelist, short story writer, and poet Rudyard Kipling published a famous poem titled *The White Man's Burden*. His poem discussed the importance of the white people to rule over and encourage the cultural development of the colonized nations. Kipling is still remembered for his celebration of British imperialism. According to Kipling, the white people should be the model of the non-white/ the colonized nations. The era of colonialism is long gone but the effect is still ubiquitous. People around the world suffer from inferiority complex when they have to face the white. The inferiority complex can also be felt and seen in the field of English studies in Indonesia. English studies in Indonesia have never been able to show their own identity. English departments all over the country are not brave enough to detach themselves from the canons set by the White/west.

Those studying and teaching in the English departments feel and think they are not capable of becoming good language learners/literature learners without the interference of the so called "native speakers" As a result, they feel that they need to hire "native speakers" in order to be able to master English or to learn English literature well.

The situation is well-understood by many parties. Consequently, it is not difficult to find English lecturers without sufficient English background in universities all over the country. Many white lecturers suddenly become experts in English literature or English teaching when they come to

Indonesia. People without sufficient knowledge claim to have the authority to be experts when they are in English Studies program in Indonesia. The time has come for us to revisit the position of English and English studies in our country. It is worth-doing to consider what scholars around the world have to say regarding the issue. Braj Kachru is a noted scholar whose opinion regarding English is worth-noticing. He coined a term " World Englishes" which has been widely discussed.

In 1985 Kachru categorizes the world of English in terms of three circles. In the inner circle he put the countries such as Australia, the United States, Britain, Canada ,New Zealand etc where English is the main language. The outer circle consists of countries where English had become an official or widely-used second language. These countries are India, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Nigeria, Malaysia, etc. The last circle is called the expanding circle consisting of countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Korea, China, Egypt, etc. In these countries English is learnt as a foreign language. Thus, it is obvious that the position of English in Indonesia is as a foreign language. The categorization made by Kachru is supported by the fact Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch so that English has always been a foreign language.

Tomlinson (2010:599) makes a very interesting comment regarding the fact that many learners of English are being tested on a variety of English they do not and never will speak. They are tested on British or American English not on the English they are going to deal with in their life. Much time has been wasted for nothing. The situation happens because the teachers or institutions consider English as a singular entity. While the fact shows that English is no longer a singular one.

Holliday (2005:4) describes another division in terms of "native" and "non-native speakers". One problem is that the use of "non" usually signifies a disadvantage or deficit. Braine (1999: citing Kramsch) suggests that "native speakers" themselves "do not speak the idealized, standardized version of their language". The ideology of native-speakerism is based on the assumption that "native speakers" of English have a special claim to the language itself, that it is essentially their property. But as Graddol (1997) demonstrates, the majority of English users are now outside the English-speaking West. Widdowson(1998) makes the major point that:

How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England, the United States or anywhere else....The very fact that English is an international Language means that no nation can have custody over it....But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it. (Widdowson 1998: 244-5)

There has been much effort to introduce English as a Lingua Franca. For Jenkins (2000), the evidence of English as Lingua Franca suggests that we should change what we teach. Instead of conforming to a native such as British English, learners need to learn not a variety of English, but about Englishes, their similarities and differences, issues involved in intelligibility, the strong links between language and identity, and so on.

Thus, the question is: is it worth-doing to spend much time to teach our students to speak like an American or British people? Isn't it better to teach intelligible English?

2. English Literature or Literature in English?

Referring to the situation in TESOL world above, now we can question the position of English studies in Indonesia; what should be taught in an English Language Studies program? Do the students have to study "English literature" or "literature in English"? If one refers to the opinion of Widdowson above it is clear that with the emergence of English as an International language and English as a lingua franca, no nations can be considered as the custodian of it. The statement is supported by the fact that Indonesia has never been directly colonized by the British. Thus, we have no emotional or historical attachment to the British as the Indians or the Australia do. I conclude that concentrating on English literature alone is a waste of time and energy. It does not mean that English literature should not be taught at the English Language Studies.

English literature should be taught as one of the elements in Literature in English. Butler (1987; cited in Walder) started her essay by telling a story about a Cambridge historian named David Cannadine who was leaving Britain for the USA. Cannadine wrote about the pointlessness of studying British history as no one but the British were interested in it. It is weird that in one English Department of a state university, there is a subject called "*Pranata Sosial Masyarakat Inggris*". Both the teacher and the students, in my opinion, are wasting their time. Knowledge about it can be easily accessed from the internet. Both parties do not have first hand information regarding the subject.

Butler also mentioned the trend in some countries such as Canada, Australia, Nigeria and others to start studying their own national literatures rather than studying that of England's and America's. Even in India, that has been a long-time supporter of English Literature, people start questioning the relevance of so much time and energy spent on studying literary works of a country located so far away from India. If those countries that once had strong emotional bonds with the British were critical to question the relevance of studying English literature, why would not we do the same thing? Indonesian learners of literature should be braver than those in the countries mentioned above.

The paradigm shift from English literature to literature in English must have some impacts on the so called English literary classics. The world "English" can be replaced by "Indian, Chinese, Indonesian, and Malaysia" or remains "English". The "new" literary classics are studied by means of English. Thus, English functions as a means of studying other literature.

The positions of Shakespeare, Milton, Yeats, Austen, Locke, Ruskin, and others can be replaced by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Yasunari Kawabata, Mo Yan, Chinua Achebe, Tolstoy, Naipaul and others. If not replaced, they should be given the same positions in the world literature; be it English literature or literature in English. By so doing, the learners of literatures will be more enlightened. Again, it does not mean that that English literatures should be neglected. English literature and literature in English must be given equal positions and none is above the other.

3. Looking at the Ideal Literature Pedagogy

Chambers and Gregory (2006) state that traditional pedagogy in literature classes has its roots in the pedagogy of classical language instruction. This was a pedagogy aimed mostly at "students' ability to get the right answer". They explain that the beginning stages of Latin and Greek do not provide occasions for student "interpretation". These roots in the pedagogy of Greek and Latin partly explain, why, literature pedagogy of "top-down" kind has had so much momentum and why it has taken so long to alter or modify it.

When Classics and Literature became separate subjects, and literature teaching was focused on students 'language rather than difficult and dead" foreign" languages, the pedagogy of Literature changed. The issue in reading literature was no longer "the ability to get the right answer" but the students were encouraged to develop their own interpretive opinions. However, the right interpretations and meanings came not from the student thought, inquiry or questioning, but from the teacher or lecturer.

Today, given the challenges the discipline of literature faces, there are even more reasons to jump outside the authoritarian frame that teachers and students may still have. Chambers and Gregory (2006) assert that good literature teaching demands two things. First, those students should be made aware of the central importance of the processes for their knowledge and understanding of Literature. Second, these processes should be taught explicitly, comprehensively and in ways that are intelligible, engaging and thought-provoking.

4. The Position of Literary Theory

It should be noted that there is no such things as "innocence" reading or theory-free readings in the study of Literature. Eagleton (1983: cited in Walder) states clearly that literature is an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power. Thus, the words used in a literary work are not transparent. In order to understand the hidden meaning of the words, the knowledge of literary theory is indeed very important. Chambers & Gregory (2006) posit that academic study of literature should provide four intellectual and academic traditions—philology, classics, rhetoric, and belle-lettres. Thus, the four traditions should exist in an English language Studies program.

Philology provides literary study with techniques for concentrating powerfully on all possible meanings and significance of individual words. It provides a model of methodology for interpreting individual words.

Classics provide literary study with two things; literary works to be studied and the model of a pedagogy of for teaching literature. Classic should not always mean English classic. It can be African Classic, Indian classic, and so on. Pope (2002) states that there is no need to limit the notion of classic. Significantly, the moment English Studies embraces the study of contemporary classics it tends to transform itself into Cultural Studies.

Rhetoric provides literary study with a large number of concepts, analytical categories and methodological strategies that are easily transferred from the analysis of speeches to the analysis of literary works of the writers. The last one is belle-lettres, includes not only literary works that are treasured and studied but also the fine writing about treasured texts produced by well-educated

readers, whose own refinements of sensibility and literary talent often rivals the sensibility and talent of the writer.

Based on the explanation above, it is important for the English Language Studies Program to found their interests and their methodologies deeply tintured by the intellectual roots from which they drew. By so doing, it is expected that the program can have a clear path.

5. Last Words about The Process

In the last part of the essay, it is necessary to quote some principles that should be used in the teaching of Literature. Chambers & Gregory (2006) propose a list of principles. Of course, the list is not an exhaustive one. However, they can be used in order to provide a good atmosphere in the process of teaching and learning literature.

The first one is called the principle of **engagement**. According to this principle, introduction to literature should not begin with the history of English literature, with the discussion of the major literary genre or literary critical movement. Rather, it should start by asking the students to reflect on what the students actually do and experience while doing. Thus, the principle connects the students with the material to be discussed.

The second one is the principle of **intelligibility**. It assumes that if students are actively to engage in processes of textual analysis-interpretation-evaluation-to be active "makers of meaning". This principle demands teachers to show and demonstrate rather than always explain matters. It demands teaching from example to explanation. Definitions come last, not first, because understanding them is a high-level ability.

6. Conclusion

There are some factors to be taken into consideration regarding the position of English Studies in Indonesia. The first one is the stakeholders of English Studies program should realize that there is a paradigm shift in the world of TESOL or ELT. Now, people assume that English language does not belong to a particular nation. It belongs to all users of the language. The concept of "standard English" is no longer relevant. Second, related to the situation, we, the stakeholders of English Studies in Indonesia have to choose whether we want to be engaged in English literature or Literature in English. Both should be given equal position. Third, after deciding our stance regarding English literature of Literature in English, ideal literature pedagogy should also be taken into account. Fourth, no matter what we choose; be it English literature or Literature in English, the position of literary theory must be maintained in the English Language Studies. There are no such things as theory-free reading in literature. Lastly, there are many principles offered by many scholars. The principles are not exhaustive one but they are worth-applying.

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Biography

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