

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON ISSUES RELATED TO TESOL

Amalia Lakebu

Abstrak

Tulisan ini akan membahas dua isu yang menjadi topik perdebatan di antara para ahli dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris bagi Penutur Bahasa Lain-*Teaching English to the Other Speakers of Languages (TESOL)*, yaitu apakah teknologi komputer dapat membantu pengajaran bahasa Inggris pada konteks Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing- *English as Foreign Language (EFL)* dan apakah bentuk-bentuk bahasa Inggris atau penggunaan bahasa Inggris yang harus diajarkan dalam konteks pengajaran EFL.

Dalam isu pertama, tulisan ini membahas beberapa pendapat para ahli TESOL/EFL tentang manfaat dan kendala yang dihadapi dalam penerapan bantuan teknologi komputer dalam konteks TESOL/EFL. Selain itu, tulisan ini membahas juga kendala-kendala yang dihadapi di beberapa konteks pengajaran EFL di Papua. Dalam isu kedua, tulisan ini membahas beberapa pendapat para ahli TESOL/EFL tentang kendala-kendala yang dihadapi dalam mengajarkan bentuk bahasa dan manfaat mengajarkan penggunaan bahasa dari bentuk bahasa dalam konteks pengajaran TESOL/EFL.

Dengan mempertimbangkan manfaat dan kendala-kendala yang akan dihadapi dalam penerapan bantuan teknologi komputer dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris pada konteks pengajaran TESOL/EFL, dapat disimpulkan bahwa bantuan ini dapat diterapkan pada konteks pengajaran mata kuliah English skills yang wajib diambil oleh para mahasiswa Fakultas Sastra, UNIPA, Manokwari. Selanjutnya, dengan mempertimbangkan manfaat dari kemampuan pragmatik bagi siswa, dapat disimpulkan bahwa para pengajar bahasa Inggris pada konteks pengajaran TESOL/EFL di Papua seharusnya tidak saja memfokuskan pengajarannya dalam mengembangkan kemampuan siswa pada bentuk bahasa Inggris, tetapi juga pada kemampuan pragmatik mereka. Dipercaya bahwa kemampuan pragmatik diajarkan untuk mengembangkan pemahaman pragmatik siswa dalam berbagai kesadaran mental dengan cara latihan yang kreatif. Dengan mempunyai kesadaran ini, siswa dapat secara tepat menanggapi istilah-istilah atau bahasa yang digunakan dalam berbagai situasi.

Keywords: TESOL, EFL, Computer Assist Technology, language form, and language use.

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject in junior and senior high schools and university as the first foreign language. It is also taught in elementary school and several kindergartens. At the Faculty of Letters, State University of Papua (UNIPA), Manokwari, West Papua Province, there are several compulsory English skills taught such as Structure I-IV, Reading I-IV, Speaking I-IV, Writing I-IV, and Speaking I-IV. Students in the Faculty of Letters should have passed these skills before taking the specific courses such as linguistics and English syntax preparing them for English tests such as TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS as a requirement for graduation. Students are introduced to these models and given the strategies for solving general problems faced while answering questions in these kinds of tests. They also practice some examples of the tests as their classroom activities.

Several debates have emerged during the history of Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The issues of the debates are in the ideas of English as International Language (EIL), English as a Foreign language (EFL), multiculturalism, linguistic imperialism, computer-mediated communication, and classroom discourse. These matters mostly relate to the influence and role of culture on certain TESOL contexts. This writing will outline most common debates in the writer's English teaching contexts, which whether computer assist technology is suitable for teaching English system in EFL contexts and whether language form or language use should be taught in EFL classrooms.

In discussing each debate, the writer tries to investigate a number of research findings on the issue of each debate. After discussing each debate, this writing will present the writer's personal position in relation to the issues in each debate with regard to her specific contexts. Finally, recommendations will be made for TESOL teachers in her context.

2. Discussion

2. 1 The Using of Computer Assisted Technology in English Teaching and Learning

The first debate covered in this writing is dealing with the issue on the adaption of modern technology called computer assisted technology in English teaching and learning process in the writer's TESOL context. There is a need for teacher to prepare students for the digital age since computerrelated technologies are commonplace in every facet of industrialized societies. In commerce for example, businesses rely on technology to operate. In the supermarket, we can find people using a self-checkout register to assist them in the purchase. On a personal level, many individuals rely on computers for personal correspondence, information gathering, business transactions and job searches, all of which make our everyday existence more efficient. According to Debell and Chapman (2006), "Since these technologies have the potential to improve access to information, to help get tasks done better and faster, and to facilitate communication, computer and internet use rates are indicators of the standard of living" (p.3). As technological tools are now almost indispensable for foreign language teaching (Sotillo, 2000), there is a fact that the number of

educational institutions adopting computer assisted technology to support the teaching and learning process in their institution has increased (Indrus, 1999).

However, there are several debates in this technology in terms of its social contexts. Several researchers think that this type of learning is useful and effective to be applied in TESOL/TEFL. Firstly, according to Carrier (1997), it allows for the authentic English as International Language (EIL) materials as the means of students' diverse cultural experience. The authentic EIL materials give the students a taste of real language in use and provide them with valid linguistic data for their acquisition processes (Swan, 1990). By using this technology, it is easy for the teacher and students to access various authentic texts that can be used in their language teaching and learning. Another advantage of having computer assisted instruction in the classroom is that the computer will solve many of the problems that teachers cannot. Teachers can only aid students in the learning process. Computers can assist the teachers and act as a tutor for the students. A report entitled *Computer Advantages: Tutoring Individuals*, states that "with computers as tutors, no student will be overwhelmed because he or she is missing fundamentals. The computer will repeat material until each lesson has been sufficiently mastered" (Bennett, 1999:3). Teachers do not have the time to repeat lessons. However, it is believed that it is important to give all students in the classroom the opportunity to adequately learn the lessons and computers can provide this. Furthermore, the use of computer technology in the students' learning plays an enormous role in helping students to achieve their full development potential and encouraging the students' motivation in learning since it offers students greater access to information and range of facilities to support their learning. For example, it provides various sources for students to easily practice their five skills. It also facilitates students' independent learning.

Although there are many advantages of having computer technology in classrooms, there are also some concerns of the people who are against computer technology in the classroom. Many people argue that the computer does all the work for the students, not allowing them the opportunity to digest what they have learned. Boyle (1998:618) argues that information technology "may actually be making us stupid". He argues that the computer takes the thinking process out of students. It is unarguable that technology is the main type of communication. However, Tracey (2004) argues that these communications can be less structured. In this sense, there will be a much different meaning, which comes up in the communication through these technologies as a result of the cultural distances. The message intended to convey can be different from the message received. It means that the learning objectives can diverge.

This learning strategy can also bring negative effects. In this case, there are three teaching systems classified by Oxford, Massey and Anand (2005): authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic-participatory. Each TESOL context has their teaching system and principles of education. The authoritarian teaching style is commonly adopted in the writer's TESOL context since the role of teachers is highly valued. This condition affects the students' learning style because they are dependent on the teachers' roles and values. The adoption of computer assisted technology can bring

negative effects on teaching and learning styles in writer's TESOL context. The computer assisted technology system requires the independence of the learners. Regarding the common teaching style of the teacher and learning styles of the writer's students, this can become an obstacle for her students as they may feel unenthusiastic because of their lack of self-assurance (Dornyei, 2001).

Moreover, several parts of society in the writer's place discards this type of learning strategy as it gives the students the chance for the unrestricted experience to the world as there are some websites (pornography) that can harm the culture of young generations in the writer's context. Considering the bad effect of technology to the young generation, the government has set up several regulations against pornography. Here, there is a censorship of websites. Considering these issues, the computer assisted technology is not suggested in the writer's TESOL context.

To support teachers in using technology in the classroom, Zhao, et al. (2004) suggest for being selective in choosing types of technology. For example, the teacher must be aware of the appropriateness to the culture of the context when deciding particular software to be applied in TESOL classrooms. According to Skinner and Austin (1999), computer conferencing software is helpful and successful in Japanese study. It was successful in motivating the students' interaction, especially through the writing, which was seen as the most difficult part to do. This is possible because the students are already motivated with their 'self-efficacy' in learning (Dornyei, 2001). However, this kind of technology is not appropriate for the writer's teaching context since students prefer direct interaction with the teacher in the classroom. The teacher's role is valued during the learning process especially direct teacher guidance. It is likely only a few students will participate if this technology is implemented because of their learning style and lack of capacity in using the language with this technology.

However, the writer realises the importance of introducing the students to the development of technology such as computer assisted technology because of its benefits in supporting their learning process. Therefore, this writing recommends the TESOL teachers in her teaching context to apply this learning system. The teachers can choose the best types of technology that are suitable with their teaching context offering modernized resources for the students. The teachers can also adopt the computer assisted technology as the way to evaluate students' attainment. To support the implementation of this learning strategy, both the teachers and the students need to be trained how to use the technology. The receptive and practical processes are best suggested to be carried out in classroom interactions because classroom teaching is highly valued in providing a good model for the students.

2. 2 Teaching About Language or Language Use

The second debate deals with the issue of whether to teach about language or teach language use in EFL teaching context. Wandel (2003) describes that EFL teaching and learning contexts usually focus their language learning objective on developing students' language proficiency towards American or British English. In the writer's teaching contexts, the students are more prepared to learn language form than the language use because the students need to follow English tests in each course. They also need to take TOEFL test before graduating from the university. Besides that, the

students should achieve the standard English test score of IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC to be successful in their further study and career. However, since in the class the students focus on how to face such tests, the writer saw that many students cannot use the language very well in their communication although they are good at explaining the English forms. Many of them obtain good result in their knowledge of English grammar but they are unable to use to communicate effectively with foreigner scientists who come to the university to conduct language research and seminars in Papua. Students from the Literature Faculty are chosen to accompany these scientists during their staying in Manokwari and conducting field trips. Some students become their respondents and others become research assistants. However, the writer's students face problems when they want to communicate their ideas or give response to these foreign researchers.

DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) highlight the importance of pragmatic competence in successful communication by saying that pragmatic competence will be helpful on the interaction between intercultural distances rather than linguistic competence since this competence will facilitate the students to become skilled language speakers. In this case, they will know what to do regarding certain expressions because they have knowledge to communicate interactively and the ability to engage in successful communicative interaction (illocutionary competence). They will also have the ability to know what to say and how to respond to a specific spoken utterance appropriately (sociolinguistic competence). Furthermore, in their article, DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) explain that language has a social role as a media for different people having social interaction. Therefore, the etic manifestations of each speech act are language specific and culture specific. In other words, they have their cultural meaning so when these speech acts are used and how they are expressed differ. The role of each person in social interaction is not static but always changes depending on their perpetual situations and relationships with others in their social communication. It is possible to face a range of differences due to different values and attitudes during the social interaction. Therefore it is important to have sociolinguistic competence since the successful communication is influenced by the understanding sociocultural factors rather than the shared language among the interactants (Kachru, 1999).

DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) assent that it is harder to acquire the pragmatic competence than grammatical competence since the cultural values are subliminal. It is necessary to cover the cultural differences in the materials given in the TESOL classrooms (Kachru, 1999; DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004). Here, it is believed that pragmatic competence is taught to develop the students' pragmatic sensitivity in a variety of cognitive awareness as the way to the creative practice. By having this awareness, the students are able to properly react to the terms or languages used in different situations.

Students learn English language not only know the structure of the language but also know how to interact. Considering this point and the arguments about the benefits including the pragmatic competence in the language teaching above, the writer would like to recommend the EFL classroom teachers to not only focus their EFL

teaching and learning on developing the students' grammatical competencies but also include pragmatic competence. Language is a part of social interaction. It is possible to face a range of differences in language use because of different values, beliefs and attitudes during the social interaction (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004). Therefore, it is also necessary to include the sociolinguistic competence in the teaching and learning practice. Including this competence will influence teaching methods, selective learning activities, and various materials applied in TESOL classrooms. For example, in speaking course, when the topic is about wedding, besides introducing the students to the western wedding traditions such as British wedding, the teacher can take a topic regarding the first language (L1) context such as about Papuan traditional wedding ceremony. Here, the students are led to a comparative and contrastive discussion where the two cultures and their practices are compared. However, it is difficult to grasp the wide-ranging cultural understandings in a restricted language course. It means that miscommunication during the interaction is unavoidable. Therefore, it is also necessary for the students to have intercultural competence because misunderstanding happens between two speakers as they share different linguistics and pragmatic competences (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004). Intercultural competence will facilitate the students to reserve the communication by negotiating the meaning, asking for clarification and referencing to the closest meaning while maintaining positive attitudes towards the different cultures (Liddicoat, 2005).

3. Conclusion

Several debates have emerged on the area of TESOL. Most of them relate to the influence and role of culture on certain TESOL contexts. Language is social uniqueness that requires negotiation of meaning when dealing with cultural differences. TESOL teachers need to modernize their teaching systems by involving cultural issues while preserving the students.

4. References

- Barnett, J and Antenucci, R. 2006. 'Learner Identity and the Professional Standards for ESL Specialists', in *Tales Out of School: identity and English Language Teaching*, eds. Kate, C and Kerry O. Adelaide: South Australia.
- Bennett, F. 1999. *Computers as Tutors: Solving the Crisis in Education*. Sarasota, FL: Faben Inc. Publishers.
- Boyle, F.T. 1998. 'IBM Talking Head's and Our Classrooms'. *College English*, Vol. 55, No. 6, pp. 618-626.
- Carrier, M. 1997. 'ELT Online: the Rise of Internet', *ELT Journal*, Vol. 53, No.3, July, pp. 279-309.
- Debell, M and Chapman, C. 2006. 'Computer and Internet Use by Students in 2003', *Statistical Analysis Report*, Retrieved December 27, 2007. (from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006065.pdf>)
- DeCapua, A and Wintergerst, A.C. 2004. 'Pragmatics and Communication', in *Crossing Cultures in the Language Classroom*. Michigan, USA: University of Michigan.

- Dornyei, Z. 2001. 'Motivation to Learn a Foreign/Second Language' in *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Graddol, D. 1996. 'Global English, Global Culture?', in Goodman, S. & Graddol, D. (eds), *Redesigning English: New Texts, New Identities*. Routledge, London and New York: The Open University.
- Graddol, D. and Meinhof, U.H. 1999. *English in a Changing World*. Biddles Ltd: Guildford, U.K.
- Ho, J.W.Y. 2000. 'Cultural Transmission in Literacy Acquisition: a Case Study in Chinese', in *Teaching Languages, Teaching Cultures*, eds. AJ. Liddicoat and C. Crozet, Victoria: Melbourne.
- Indrus, N. 1999. 'Towards Quality Higher Education in Indonesia', in *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 3, No 3, pp. 134-141.
- Kachru, Y. 1999. 'Culture, Context, and Writing', in *Culture in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, ed. Hinkel, E. Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press.
- Liddicoat, AJ. 2005. 'Teaching Languages for Intercultural Communication', in *An International Perspective on Language Policies, Practices and Proficiencies*, eds. D. Cunningham and A. Hatoss. Federation Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Rumania: Vivantes.
- Liu, G. 2005. 'The Trend and Challenge for Teaching EFL at Taiwanese Universities', *RELC Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 211-221.
- McKay, SL. 2004. 'Western Culture and the Teaching of English as an International English', *English Teaching Forum*, April, pp. 10-15.
- Oxford, R, Massey, R and Anand, S. 2005. 'Transforming Teacher Student Style Relationships: Towards a More Welcoming and Diverse Classroom Discourse', in *The Power of Context in Language Teaching and Learning*, eds. J. Frodesen and C. Holten. Boston, USA: Massachusetts.
- Radford, A., et al. 1999. *Linguistics: An Introduction*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Skinner, B and Austin, R. 1999. 'Computer Conferencing: Does it Motivate EFL students?'. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 53, No.4, October, pp. 270-279.
- Smith, L. 1991. 'Standard in the Word Englishes', in Tickoo, M. (ed) *Languages and Standards: Issues, Attitudes, Case Studies*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Sotillo, M. 2000. "Discourse Functions and Syntactic Complexity in Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication", in *Language Learning & Technology*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 82-119.
- Swan, M 1990, 'A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach', in Rossner, R. & B Bolitho (ed.), *Currents of Change in English Language Teaching*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Tracey, I. 2004. 'English Language', *EST*, September.

- Wandel, R. 2003. 'Teaching India in EFL-Classroom: a Cultural or an Intercultural Approach?', in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching and Learning*, eds. M. Bryam and P. Grundy. United Kingdom: Clevedon.
- Xu, ZC. 2002. 'From TEFL to TEIL: Changes in Perceptions and Practices: Teaching English as an International Language (EIL) in Chinese Universities in P.R. China', in *Englisbes in Asia: Communication, Identity, Power, and Education*, ed. A. Kirkprattrick. Victoria: Melbourne.
- Zhao Y, Alvarez-Torres AM, Smith, B, and Tan, HS. 2004. 'The Non-neutrality of Technology: a Theoretical Analysis and Empirical Study of Computer Mediated Communication Technologies', *J. Educational Computing Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1&2, pp. 23-55.