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# Critical Discourse Analysis: English as It Is Learned and Treated in Asia

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#### ABSTRACT

The English language teaching in Indonesia and some other ASEAN countries seem problematic. It can be seen from the low English proficiency of many school graduates despite years of learning English. Therefore, in the recent years, there has been a need of a new breakthrough in the English curriculum by considering local cultures and values so the English taught in schools is more contextual, practical and suits the local needs and usage. The curriculum is expected to reflect the English norms as a lingua franca in Asia, and not imposing native speakerism. This paper analyzes a newspaper article discussing how English is learned and treated in Asia, which was published in the Jakarta Globe, a popular local English newspaper. The analysis seeks further understanding on the discursive field of English, particularly in Asian context. Using Fairclough's (2001) framework encompassing three stages (description - interpretation – explanation), this paper analyzes both macro and microstructure of the text. The macrostructure is dealing with the ideology constructed in the text, while the microstructure comprises the formal property or linguistic components. With these definitions, this critical discourse analysis (CDA) looks to find connections between microstructures of the text and the macro structures of social institutions and societies where the text is distributed and consumed. From these three stages of critical discourse analysis, it was found that English is often portrayed as a prestigious language using specific labels and metaphors. Besides, the ideology of "standard" and "monolithic view" of English is commonly imposed, and thus influences the English language teaching in Asia.

Keywords: Asia, critical discourse analysis, English language teaching, lingua franca

#### ABSTRAK

Pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia dan beberapa negara ASEAN dianggap problematik. Hal ini dikarenakan masih rendahnya kemampuan bahasa Inggris dari anak-anak yang telah lulus sekolah meskipun telah bertahun-tahun belajar bahasa Inggris. Dengan latar belakang tersebut, perlu adanya terobosan baru dalam penyusunan kurikulum bahasa Inggris dengan mempertimbangkan budaya dan nilai-nilai lokal sehingga bahasa Inggris yang diajarkan di sekolah menjadi lebih kontekstual, praktis, dan sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan penggunaan lokal. Kurikulum pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Indonesia seharusnya mencerminkan norma bahasa Inggris sebagai lingua franca di Asia, dan tidak memaksakan "native speakerism" yang mungkin tidak sesuai dengan kegunaan bahasa Inggris di Indonesia atau Asia. Penelitian ini merupakan critical discourse analysis (CDA) atau analisis wacana kritis yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis artikel koran yang membahas bagaimana bahasa Inggris dipelajari dan dipandang di Asia, yang diterbitkan di Jakarta Globe, surat kabar lokal berbahasa Inggris yang sangat populer. Analisis ini akan memberikan pemahaman lebih lanjut tentang peran diskursif bahasa Inggris, khususnya dalam konteks Asia. Dengan menggunakan kerangka kerja Fairclough (2001) yang mencakup tiga tahapan (description - interpretation - explanation), CDA ini akan menganalisis struktur makro dan mikro yang terdapat dalam teks. Struktur makro berkaitan dengan ideologi yang dikonstruksikan dalam teks, sedangkan struktur mikro meliputi komponen linguistik. Dengan kata lain, analisis ini berupaya menemukan hubungan antara struktur mikro teks dan struktur makro institusi sosial dan masyarakat di mana teks tersebut didistribusikan dan dibaca. Dari ketiga tahapan analisis tersebut, ditemukan bahwa bahasa Inggris sering digambarkan sebagai bahasa yang bergengsi melalui penggunaan label dan metafora tertentu. Selain itu, ideologi "standar" dan "pandangan monolitik" bahasa Inggris yang seringkali dipaksakan memberikan pengaruh yang sangat besar dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris di Asia.

Kata Kunci: Analisis wacana kritis, Asia, lingua franca, pengajaran Bahasa Inggris

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## **INTRODUCTION**

"The teaching of English in Indonesia and many other countries of ASEAN has not been successful. Graduates of secondary schools, despite many hours of learning English over several years, often have little English proficiency. However, English has become the lingua franca of ASEAN and between other countries in East Asia. Thus, a new curriculum is required that concentrates on ASEAN rather than 'Anglo' cultures and local rather than imported native speaker teachers." (Kirkpatrick, 2002, p. 213).

The excerpt above explicitly states the failure of English teaching in ASEAN countries, seen from the low English proficiency in spite of the lengthy time of learning. Incompatible teaching content that imposes Anglo norms is believed to be one of the determinants. Thus, a new curriculum with local context seems to be a viable solution to meet the student needs. Kirkpatrick (2014) proposed a new approach of English language teaching as a lingua franca for a more successful ELT teaching and learning, which also promotes the status of Asian cultures and languages.

In ASEAN countries, English has become a lingua franca that enables people across the region to communicate and share ideas and cultures. Although communication with native speakers (NS) is possible, this is not the main purpose since interaction with NS is somewhat limited within ASEAN countries. With this fact, it is argued that the need of including native speaker (NS) norms in English teaching in Asia is less required. Promoting teaching materials with local contents and cultures is more likely to fit the learning context in Asia. In this case, Kirkpatrick (2002) suggests that ELT materials in Asian schools include Asian cultures and promote Asian standard English. However, English teachers may face a dilemma in operationalizing this idea due to institutional constraints and examination requirements, which focus on the monolithic model or the so-called standard English.

Beside Anglo norms rooted in the curriculum and imported English textbooks, the gap between native English speaker teachers (NESTs) and non-NESTs in Asia is noticeable. More essentially, NESTs, regardless of their qualifications and teaching experience, are more favorable than non-NESTs. This is actually contradicted with the current major roles of English in Southeast Asia as local varieties of English (which encode local cultures) and as a regional and international lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

English standard schools in Indonesia and English villages in Korea represent the privileged status of English, given that most of the students in these institutions pay more money. In Indonesia, the so-called international schools have promoted the use of English as the main medium of instruction and put some burdens on teachers. This may reflect over promotion of English that strengthens the English-only mentality and pedagogy (Le Ha, 2013). In this case, English reaches its prestigious status as students and parents believe that attending international school shows their social status due to the use of English in everyday interactions. This English-only mentality and pedagogy often leads to the endorsement of a monolithic view of English or the standardized version of English, which may not be suitable with the local usage.

The English usage in Indonesia and other Asian countries should reflect local cultures and interactions, which mainly focus on communication between non-native speakers who do not share the same mother tongue (e.g. Indonesians and Thai speakers). In this regard, McKay (2002) maintains that the education goal of English as a lingua franca (ELF, as used in Indonesia and other Asian countries) is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and cultures to others. In this case, L2 learners do not necessarily conform to native speaker cultural norms, particularly if the communication is taking place between L2 speakers. Likewise, McKay (2003) argues that the traditional English learning goal that emphasizes sole communication with native speakers should be reframed. She challenges the common notion that English should be linked to native speaker cultural norms, given that the number of the L2 English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds has notably increased. In a similar fashion, she contends that "what is appropriate will always be dependent on the dynamics of particular interactions (McKay, 2009, p.230).

Ekawati and Hamdani (2012) conducted a research on cultural materials used in some textbooks and found that the textbooks using international cultures "offers interesting culture mirror, the learning of culture and the development of intercultural skills" (p.57). Since the lack of understanding of different cultural values can result in cultural clash or cultural misconception, Gass and Selinker (2008) highlights the importance of understanding others' cultures by saying that "understanding how nonnative speakers use language allows native speakers to separate issues of cross-cultural communication from issues of stereotyped behaviour or personal idiosyncrasies" (p.5).

Kirkpatrick (2010) proposes an English language teaching (ELT) curriculum that contains cultural information and values that are significant for the speakers involved in the intercultural communication. Besides, "information about the cultures of the people with whom the learners will be communicating will also be essential" (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 38). He contends that the goal of English learning should be to communicate successfully in multilingual settings rather than to sound like native speakers. In other words, "Learners no longer need to sound like native speakers when speaking English" (Ibid, p.39).

Indeed, the challenge of English teaching in Asian countries is contextualizing the learning materials to suit the students' needs in terms of communication purpose and cultural values. To borrow Kachru's definition, Asian countries belong to the outer or even expanding circle, where English is used as a second or even foreign language. Therefore, the school system, especially for English teaching as a foreign language, must be interesting and give pleasure to students instead of torturing them endlessly with fear and hardship of mastering the language at the native speaker level. Instead, teachers need to help students overcome shyness, inhibitions and nervousness as students only have limited exposure to English and mostly use English as a lingua franca (Patil, 2008).

While previous studies criticized the use of English in Asia through case studies and teaching materials analysis focusing on Western cultures and the so-called standard English (i.e. American and British English), this current study offers a critical analysis on a newspaper article, which can be considered as an informal text that was publicly distributed through a popular English newspaper. Considering the informal and popular nature of the text, it is assumed that this type of text is commonly read, taken for granted, and accepted as a common sense. Hence, this study aims to unravel the hidden messages by critically analyzing both macro and microstructure of the text, which discussed how

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English is used and treated in Asia so it can offer a new and fresh perspective to the readers. On the one hand, macrostructure is dealing with the ideology constructed in the text. For instance, the ideology of how English is learned or treated in Asia is constructed by the writer of the text, where the readers generally take it for granted as an acceptable common sense. On the other hand, microstructure comprises the formal property or linguistic components. With these definitions, this critical discourse analysis is trying to find connections between microstructures of the text and the macrostructures of social institutions and societies where the text is distributed and consumed. Analyzing microstructure of the article will help to understand the macro components in the text and make it enable to interpret and explain the discursive field that the text producer is trying to create. By analyzing the linguistic components, some assumptions embedded in the text can be unraveled.

### METHOD

This is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) using Fairclough's (2001) threedimensional framework encompassing three stages: description - interpretation – explanation. First, the description stage focuses on the microstructure (linguistic features) of the text and their contributions to power relations and ideological process, comprising grammar, syntax, lexicon, phonological features, and literary devices (e.g. rhetorical questions). Secondly, the interpretation stage involves the cognitive process, combining the text properties and the interpreter's background knowledge or member's resource (MR) to find what type of discourse the text producer creates through the text and how the discourse is produced and distributed then consumed by the readers (i.e. the interaction that occurs). Lastly, the explanation stage tries to find the relationship between the discourse and the social structures and how the discourse influences and is influenced by the social structures. Through CDA, we can see how meanings and ideologies can be created with language and understand how power can be maintained and abused through language. But most importantly, CDA encourages readers to think critically and question what they read and not take the ideology imposed in the text for granted.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### The Description Stage

The analysis begins with the description stage, focusing on the linguistic components (grammar, syntax, lexicon, phonological features, and literary devices). The results of the analysis from this stage are summarized in Table 1 below, which will be explained comprehensively in the description that follows.

Classification	Euphemism	Rhetorical	Metaphor
Scheme	Euphennsm	Question	wietaphoi
Scheme		Question	
Theprivilegedstatus of EnglishA global language,cosmopolitanidentity,internationalidentity, language ofprestigeEnglishproficiency	Uttering local tongues in standard English medium schools <i>may not win</i> <i>too many parents</i> .	anything of the collective English	English literacy is
<i>Struggled,</i> <i>inaccurate, difficult,</i> <i>inconvenience</i>		Did the parents choose the right age-group video for the child?	<i>identity uniform</i> As these debates do
English education English literacy, teaching methods, teachers, grammar translation method, communicative language teaching, doubts, uncertainties		When do we start learning English in Asia?	English education makes an informal appearance in the forms of TV and comics in children's playrooms at homes.

#### Table 1. Analysis Result on the Description Stage

The first step of the description is intended to see the experiential value, as a reflection of the text producer's knowledge and belief. In doing so, the vocabulary use was analyzed to find the classification schemes of the discourse created by the text producer. In the article, a scheme for the privileged status of English is presented through

the use of such positive words, such as *global language, cosmopolitan identity, international identity, language of prestige.* These words are used by the text producer to justify the status of English as a modern, prestigious language.

Another scheme is for English proficiency. It is obviously presented through negative words: *struggled, inaccurate, difficult, inconvenience*. These negative words certainly express the low proficiency of the people in Asia, including Indonesia, and the difficulties to communicate in English using the so-called standardized English.

Furthermore, a scheme for English education is both presented through neutral and negative words and collocations: *English literacy, teaching methods, doubts, uncertainties, contradictory research findings, the Asian English teachers, grammar translation method, communicative language teaching, Asian schools, pupils, final examination, skills.* 

The second step in the description stage is to find relational value, which shows "how a text's choice of wordings depends on, and help create, social relationship between participants" (Fairclough, 2001, p.97). The relational value in the article is shown by the use of euphemism, a substitute word to avoid negative meanings. In the text, the use of euphemistic sentences is found in this sentence: *Uttering local tongues in standard English medium schools <u>may not win too many parents</u>. The underlined words contain euphemisms, as a substitute of the possible sentence "may disappoint many parents." It is used in order to reduce the negative impression of the effect of using L1 in English medium schools.* 

Another evidence of relational value can be found in the use of rhetorical questions, which indicate no expectation of answers; rather it is used to make a point or persuade the readers. For instance: *Does this speak anything of the collective English language skills of non-native speakers in Asia? Are literature and language complementary? Did the parents choose the right age-group video for the child? When do we start learning English in Asia?* 

The last step in the description stage is to find metaphors and larger-structure of the text. The metaphor is used to give English "power" and common status (uniform). It was found that some sentences include metaphorical words. For instance: *In some countries like India and in Southeast Asia, English literacy is also a touchstone to determine one's cosmopolitan identity. But the man on the street is yet to wear the international identity uniform.* In this sentence, the metaphorical representation of

English as a uniform one should wear illustrates that in order to be accepted in society (particularly the cosmopolitan elite group), one should wear a uniform (speak English) to mark his inclusion of such group. Another use of metaphor can be found in this sentence: *As these debates do not settle down with a specific result, English education <u>makes an</u> <u>informal appearance</u> in the forms of TV and comics in children's playrooms at homes. Through this sentence, English education is represented metaphorically as being able to deliberately come to teach children through TV or comics, thus powerful in giving influence on the children.* 

To describe the larger-scale structures of the text, the article begins with an actual fact of how literary works are growing steadily in Asia, followed by rhetorical questions about the English skills of Asians. The next paragraphs in the body present contradicted relations between the low English proficiency of many Asians and the stable growth of the literary works. Another contradiction is illustrated through the status of English as a determinant of the cosmopolitan identity and the small number of people who speak the language. Besides, the difficulty to learn and use English due to cross-linguistic influence (how L1 can affect L2 acquisition, either positively or negatively) is also presented. The subsequent finishing paragraphs highlight the English learning and teaching in Asia, including failure in the English education. However, no specific solution to the problem was given.

### The Interpretation Stage

It is important to understand the interplay between stages. Although it is argued that the description stage only meant to describe the linguistic component in a roughly descriptive way, in fact an interpretative way of describing is necessary in the analysis. The summary of the analysis result is presented in Table 2 below, which will be further elaborated in the following description.

Table 2. Analysis	<b>Result on the</b>	<b>Interpretation Stage</b>
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Strong,	positive	Monolithic view of	English	education	English
word of En	glish	English	failure		proficiency

English is needed by	A street vendor in a	Debates over	A bank official I
the modern society	touristy area in the	teaching methods	talked to in a
	same country did	are also clouded by	Southeast Asian
	not just talk but even	doubts,	country <i>struggled</i>
A society without	spoke to me about	<i>uncertainties</i> and	every moment
good proficiency of	local cultures in	contradictory	during our
English is backward	clear though	research findings	conversation over a
	grammatically		transaction
	inaccurate English		

The interpretation stage aims to look into the discourse type that the text producer is being drawn upon. This stage presents the macro structure of the text that derives from the wordings (micro components) in the description stage. In this article, the text producer draws upon the discourse of English, which, based on the description of its language property, is perceived as the global, prestigious language including in Asian context. The labels used to describe English (global, international, prestige) indicate that the text producer believes that English is needed by modern society. This way, there is an implicit assumption that a society without good proficiency in English is backward.

In addition to the privileged status of English, a monolithic model of English is also represented in the article. The monolithic view suggests that the NS model is the only standard model that should be used, and no other deviant varieties are acceptable. In the article, the text producer is presumably a non-native speaker (NNS) of English from Asia (indicated by the use of inclusive 'we' when talking about Asia), who believes that there is only one standard English (either British or American English), as being stereotyped in South East Asia through its English education system that mainly imposes Anglo norms. Hence, it is assumed that the text producer either deliberately brings the ideology of the so-called 'standard' English or takes the implicit ideology of the monolithic view for granted, thus taking it as a common sense. "When ideology becomes common sense, it apparently ceases to be ideology; this is itself and ideological effect, for ideology is truly effective only when it is disguised" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 89)

While the status of English is positively represented by the strong words as mentioned above, English proficiency and English education are both illustrated in a negative way. In this case, the text producer's contradictory and negative impression of the inability of the community to perform 'good and correct English' as well as the failure of English teaching is evident. In this interpretation stage, background knowledge or member resource (MR) considerably influences one's interpretation. In this current study, the researcher interprets the contested ideology from the text through the World Englishes framework, mainly because she has learned comprehensively and has sufficient knowledge of World Englishes and how the so-called standard English and native speaker controversies have arisen. It is shown that critical discourse analysis is fluid and can be interpreted from different perspectives and obviously not a static way to analyze a text or discourse.

### The Explanation Stage

Last but not least, the explanation stage aims to explain the relations between the text and the social structures, including the power relations at situational, institutional and societal levels that help shape the discourse. The summary of the analysis result can be seen in Table 3 below.

Status of English	English vs. English teaching	The needs of English	English proficiency
The status of	Positive image of	No immediate needs	Proficiency is
English influences	English vs. negative	of using English in	problematic
the English teaching	view of English	Asian countries	('standard' or
in Asia	teaching &	resulting in low	'Asian' English?)
	proficiency is a	motivation in	- /
	result of uncritical	improving English	
	adoption of	proficiency	
	incompatible		
	culture norms &		
	teaching methods		
	(Grammar Teaching		
	Method vs.		
	Communicative		
	Language Teaching		
	method)		

### Table 3. Analysis Result on the Explanation Stage

The English discourse in Southeast Asia is related to the social conditions of the society, where English is positioned as a modern language, and it influences the English teaching in Asia. Drawing upon the three salient aspects of the English discourse in the text (status, proficiency, education), it can be explained that the imbalance relationship of these three aspects results from the arbitrary adoption of the so-called language of

prestige in terms of incompatible cultural norms and ineffective teaching methods (either grammar translation method or communicative language teaching as mentioned in the text). Also, the absence of immediate needs of using English in many Asian countries contributes to the low motivation in improving English proficiency. In Xu's (2002) words, 'the actual daily need for genuine communicative use of English is still relatively low' in the expanding circle, not to mention Asian countries. However, speaking about one's English proficiency in Asia can be problematic since it is usually measured based on the NS standard as a result of sustaining the monolithic view of English. Walker (2021) disagreed with this monolithic view as English is now used extensively in many domains and serves as an international language and lingua franca, where the communication takes place not only among native speakers or between native speakers and non-native speakers. Instead, the users are mostly people who do not share the same mother tongue where English is not their first language. In this case, the concept of foreign, foreigner and native speakers is no longer acceptable.

With this condition, it is needless to say that English education in Asia should meet the learners' need, as lingua franca users of English which use the language not only to speak with NS but also with other NNS in the region. ELT materials should be authentic and contextualized in order to motivate students in learning English based on their contexts. Most importantly, paradigm shift from monolithic to pluralistic view of English needs to be developed within the community so the English proficiency does not necessarily depend on the NS measure, but can be based on the local variety which is intelligible among the Asian speakers. To put it in a wider perspective, Hamid & Ngu Yen (2016) suggests that this paradigm shift should be followed by the English language policy that considers the needs of the society and the linguistic point of view and meets the challenge of globalization. As Baker (2015) put it, the use of lingua franca requires a new approach in the education level that brings understanding about the relationship between language, culture and identity for the diverse and dynamic nature of ELF communication.

### CONCLUSION

The critical discourse analysis is so useful to see the relationship between language and power. It is shown that language is a form of social practice and can be used as a tool to transfer certain knowledge, ideology and power, which may be accepted by the community as a common sense.

By unraveling the hidden messages of the text through CDA, it can be concluded that the English status in Asia, including Indonesia, is overrated. Until now, it is still considered a modern, prestigious language and preferably spoken as "standard English" by adopting native speaker norms and neglecting the communication purpose as the global language or lingua franca. In this case, local identities, culture and history are often set aside from this communication as English remains an esteemed language spoken by the elites who have excellent proficiency of native speaker-like English. This phenomenon is actually contradicted with the fact that about 80% of English speakers are non-native speakers where the largest group of this percentage is from the expanding circle who uses English as a lingua franca. Therefore, the main priority of this communication should be effectiveness over correctness (Jenkins, 2014). Clearly, the misunderstandings of the English status and monolithic view should be repaired by empowering teachers to provide them with fresh understanding and broadmindedness so the students become highly intelligible in using English and maintain their local identity by adopting variability, richness, and creativity of ELF communication (Deterding, 2013; Cogo, 2012).

To sum up, this new paradigm shift of lingua franca (from monolithic to pluralistic view of English) should be promoted through the selection of authentic and contextualized ELT materials adopting the local norms and context (Kirkpatrick, 2014), stringent language policy incorporating social needs and linguistic point of view (Hamid & Ngu Yen, 2016), and language assessment considering the use of English for different purposes and various multilingual settings (Jenkins & Leung, 2017).

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