



Discussion about English as an International Language and Translanguaging in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: *In today's modern society, English has become an indispensable communication tool in many areas of life. The concept of Standard English is gradually being eliminated by the diversity in the use of languages in each country. It becomes an international language to connect friends, countries around the world and discover new knowledge, but still has its own characteristics in each region. On the other hand, using English sometimes makes it difficult for non-native speakers to understand the context of a situation so using their home language in parallel with English reduces the difficulty of understanding especially in teaching.*

Keywords: *English as an International language, Standard English, Translanguaging, Home language.*

I. INTRODUCTION

My teaching context is teaching English for the first year students at a Vietnamese university. Their major is English linguistics and they are trained to be future teachers. However, during my working time I realize they are confused with their major because of two following reasons. Firstly, the students suppose English at university must be Standard English (British or American English in pronunciation). They have a strong belief that English learners must pronounce like a native speaker to be called Standard English. As a result, this creates an invisible barrier in class and leads to several drawbacks. Particularly, some students whose pronunciation sounds like native speakers are much more confident to take part in class activities than others. Secondly, all of the learners are non-native speakers. Thus, teaching and learning sometimes have difficulties for explanations and instructions in a foreign language. Because of these problems, in this paper I will discuss two terms: English as an International language and translanguaging which relate to my teaching context above and suggest implications.

II. ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

We cannot deny the importance of English today. It has been used widely with variety of purposes: international communications, media, films or the spread of technology and education. People from different countries use English to serve their different purposes. It creates globalization so that English is called "an International language". Mc Kay (2010) explains EIL as "an umbrella term to characterize the use of English between any two L2 speakers of English, whether sharing the same culture or not, as well as between L2 and L1 speakers of English" (p.95).

Kachru (1986) classifies three kinds of users of English: (1) native speakers of English who use English in almost contexts, (2) non-native speakers of English who use English as a second language, (3) non-native speakers of English who use English as a foreign language in limited contexts. Therefore, it is hard to have a Standard English for everyone such as Singapore English, New Zealand English or West African English. These English users use different accents to communicate, which are different from two main English languages:

British and American because they want to keep their cultural identity (British Council, 1978). The users feel that while using English, they still want to include their regional characteristics to make listeners recognize where they come from. For instance, Ray Tongue (1974: IV) quotes Singapore's representative to the United Nation:

"When one is abroad, in a bus or train or aeroplane and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is someone from Malaysia or Singapore. And I should hope that when I'm speaking abroad my countrymen will have no problem recognising that I am a Singaporean"

From this example, we can see that English has "blended itself with the cultural and social complex" of the country (Kachru, 1983, p.139). Thus, people using English with different accents cannot be judged as false speakers. Although English is born in each country with new standard of English, its main purpose is still for communicative needs. The primary difference is only the way English is spoken up and used. There is not a specific Standard English for all situations; different contexts have different standards because of global appropriation and local contextualization. As Mc Kay (2010) states the ultimate effect of globalization on the use of English is a fluid mixture of cultural heritage.

Looking back to my teaching context above, the students come from Vietnam where English is used as a foreign language. It is hard to train them become native speakers because of Vietnamese social context and phonological features. Vietnam is a country where English is a foreign language so that the learners use English in limited contexts. Native-like English, which is considered American or British English, is not a standard for all speakers of English. Moreover, in case the students achieve native-like English, they might lose their own unique identity themselves. When students are aware of the meaning of English as an international language, they can feel confident about their English and have motivation to continue learning. English users should be proud of their unique accent which makes them become special in the English world.

III. TRANSLANGUAGING

For non-native speakers, it is difficult to comprehend all the teaching contexts such as learning vocabulary, listening to teacher's instruction or reading books. They need help from their home language to get the meanings. It reduces students' confusion. This approach is called "translanguaging".

As García (2014) defines "Translanguaging in education can be defined as a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discourse practices that include all the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new socio-political realities by interrogating linguistic inequality" (p.3).

Compared García's definition with my teaching context, it shows translanguaging assists learners to deepen their study when English is their foreign language and establish critical thinking. If teacher only uses English in class, the students might encounter difficulties. For example, English grammar classes require teacher's explanation in home language because English grammar features are different from Vietnamese. There are not any similarities between two languages. If the teacher always uses English for explanation, the students might find it difficult to master the knowledge.

Moreover, translanguaging supports teacher's instructions in the classroom to make sure students know what they need to do such as doing tasks or discussing topics. In reality, there are quite a lot challenging topics such as politics, environment or science for pre-intermediate students to comprehend content completely. Without the use of translanguaging, the students will not know what to do when teacher set a task or they may confuse what is being taught. As Heugh (2015) & Probyn (2015) point out translanguaging is a useful tool to enhance learning. By the same token, Baker (2011) agrees that both languages used in class are good to mediate understanding and learning.

Although there are benefits of using translanguaging, it still has a few disadvantages if translanguaging is overused. Particularly, students' goal is studying English, using too much Vietnamese may affect the process of learning a foreign language. Also, home language makes them feel they are not in a foreign language environment. At this point, the balance between the use of English and Vietnamese is necessary to ensure

teaching quality so that learners are conscious of the role of their home language. "The main language of the learner would be seen not as a threat, but as a resource to assist in the acquisition of the new language of the school" (Childs, 2016, p.26).

In other words, teachers use their home language to develop understanding of words or concepts in a second language to assist student's learning.

Furthermore, the advantage of translanguaging demonstrates learner's identities

"Translanguaging supports the ability of bilingual students to have multiple identities that are not exactly like those constructed in monolingual contexts or in other contexts. It actually buttresses the multiple and fluid identities of bilingual students" (García, 2012, p.3).

IV. IMPLICATIONS

In term of English as an international language, it can be better if teachers can introduce different types of English language to raise students' awareness of variation in English use today. This will give students a chance to prepare for their future communicative conversations with people who do not come from the same country and enhance their perception about English.

Also, teaching English should keep the local culture of learning. English as an international language leads to the development of various materials. Therefore, the learners normally learn English and its culture but do not know whether the manner of English is suitable with their culture or not. Thus, there is a need for the local culture of learning. In addition, there should be many interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers to reduce the gap of English users because of different cultures.

Last but not least, using only English in class does not ensure students' understanding and learning, especially non-native speakers of English. Therefore, translanguaging is a useful tool to support the teachers. It helps language learners create equal status and promote proficiency in English. For instance, teacher can write instructions in home language and English. Another example is allowing students to share ideas in their language about difficult reading texts.

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