THE IMPACT OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE MASTERY TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Teuku Azhari, S.Pd.I., M.Ed

Lecturer and Head of Language Center at Malikussaleh University
Lhokseumawe, Aceh

ABSTRACT

First language (L1) plays important role in second language (L2) learning. First language serves as basic foundation of second language learning. Skills and Concept of language in Indonesian can be used and transferred when learning English. Four language skills of and fundamental concept of Indonesian such as alphabet and sentence formation help L2 learners learn English. Thus, one with good Indonesian Language mastery basis will benefit in the English learning process and learn faster. This article will explore how Indonesian language mastery help English language learning. Aspects of language knowledge that can help the learning of English will be evaluated and laid out to see how they can help L2 learning. Aspects of language mastery of Indonesian provide fundamental basic knowledge to learn English. Indonesian students wanting to learn English need to take account of their L1 skills to support their L2 learning. Some basic skills of Indonesian language need to take account to are part of speech, sentence formation and sentence changes. Improving on L1 will certainly help L2 learning.

Keywords: First Language, Second Language, sentence formation

I.   INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language is the national language of Indonesia. It is the unifying language used in Indonesia. Almost all Indonesian use the language in their daily speaking. Having many ethnics and cultures, Indonesian language serve vital role to help communication among people of different ethnicities. Indonesian is also used in written and formal settings. Events, ceremonies, functions all used Indonesian language. In addition, text books and all other written material also used Indonesian language. All Indonesian also learn Indonesian language at school. We all learn it from Primary Education all the way up to University. Familiarity to the language in this country is very high. In short, we can simply say that Indonesian language is the common language widely used in Indonesia.

Indonesian language is the first language (L1) in Indonesia. First language is the first language one learns, usually from birth. They learn it from environment, parents or society. Indonesian and individual' ethnic language can either be one's first language. However, composed of so many ethnics, Indonesian people live in various bilingual or multilingual environments. Foreign language is a language indigenous to another country, not from the area, such as English in Indonesia. It is not indigenous to Indonesian yet spoken in

secondarily in many regions of the country. As the impact of this, almost all Indonesian develop more than one first languages. They learn Indonesian and ethnic language quiet at the same time.

Second language, however, develop after the first. Quoted from wiki on first and second language, it says "In a broad sense, any language learned after three has learnt one's native language is called second language. However, when contrasted with foreign language, the term refers more narrowly to a language that plays a major role in a particular country or region though it may not be the first language of many people who use it." (wikipedia.org). Crystal (2003) added that *first language* is distinguishable from *second language.* People use one as 'majority or dominant' language and the other as the 'minority'. In the case of many Indonesian, people are raised bilinguals and therefore are able to speak more than one languages. Later, as they go to school, they learn their foreign languages, English and or Arabic.

Most schools around the world teach at least one foreign language and most colleges and high schools require foreign language before graduation. (Wikipedia.org). likewise, Indonesian national curriculum also had one to two compulsory languages from junior high schools. Students at public school have to study English and Islamic public schools have English and Arabic. Therefore, many Indonesian have more than one L1 and L2. They have Indonesian and ethnic language as their L1 and English and Arabic as their L2. This situation is both interesting and challenging at the same time. Interesting to notice many varieties of language use and challenging to master. This article will explore and introduce aspects of L1 that can be used by L2 learners to make learning faster and easier.

1.1. English Learning in Indonesia

Before we discuss more English language learning in Indonesia, let's see the definition of language learning itself. "Language learning is the result of direct instruction in the rules of language. And it certainly is not an age-appropriate activity for your young learners. In language learning, students have conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about that knowledge". http://www.everythingesl.net/ accessed in March 27, 2016.

English is one of the required subjects in Indonesia. All students learn this international language from secondary school level to university. Living in a bilingual environment, Indonesian and ethnic language, many people take English as their third, if not fourth, language. Some students get mix-up with those languages and some even took it as an advantage. Some get confused with their third language as the languages get mixed-up with each other. However, some others take it as advantage as they have been exposed and experienced with bilingualism. (slideshare.net/RonglinYao).

Teaching English in Indonesia is rather unique. Taught as the foreign language but uses it more extensively in many areas, social and political. Teaching English in Indonesia often relies on Bahasa Indonesia as language of delivery. Therefore, it is still very common to find that teachers/ lecturers teach English in Bahasa Indonesia in the class. However, regardless the debate on language use, still L1 is very helpful in L2 teaching. Schweers, in Yao, Ronglin added, "Consistent positive results are reported from practitioners, researchers, and learners when L1 is used (p.18f). As a result, "there appears to be an increasing conviction that L1 has

a necessary and facilitating role in L2" (Schweers, 1999, p.1). Furthermore, Ringbom (1987) added "an L2 word is easily matched with a phonologically and semantically similar L1 word (p.38f). Swan (1985) argues that if we do not establish links between vocabulary items in L1 and L2, we would never be able to learn L2." This shows how Bahasa Indonesia can actually help them in language learning.

1.2. English Learning in Asia

English is very common in Asia. Many people in Asia, Asian, can speak English, some even with high proficiency. In line with this, in her article, English as a Multicultural Language in Asia and Intercultural Literacy, Nobuyuki Honna said, most Asian countries recognize English as an indispensable language for intranational or international communication (Nobuyuki, 2005).

Use of English has advanced and developed to almost all part of the globe. Many countries in all continents are familiar with the language. Spread of the language can happen via media, internet, movie, music, social, political, and economic communication, etcetera. Increasing spread also impact to increasing needs of the language. People, regardless age and social status, learn English for their respective purposes.

So far, at least there are two pattern of English spread in Asia, specially: one is global spread itself. English has globalized and widely learned and used all over the world. In Indonesia for example, people start learning English from minimum of Primary schools all the way up to university. This of course showed the intensity of attention given the government towards the mastery of the language. Two is diversification of English. As English has internalized, it went through the process of adaptation and adoption. Later, it creates styles of language uses. Take for example, Singlish or Singapore English. English in Singapore has its own pattern and styles different from one used in UK or USA. Likewise, India and Malaysia have their own styles and uniqueness in the use of English.

II.   BILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Indonesia is a very pluralistic country, probably among the most pluralistic. Ethnics and languages are still alive and used all over the country. Acehnese, Javanese, Balinese, Javanese are just among few examples. Each ethnic has language specific to their own with unique language pattern and grammar and are not creoles, pidgins or dialects. It's a full language with a complex grammar system. Ethnic language mastery (one L1), to some extent, impact second language learning. The degree of one language mastery affects second language learning understanding.

Generally speaking, children grow up with ethnical language and Indonesian language. They are raised with two language systems. This makes them bilingual by nature. Along the way, they may also pick up or learn other language(s) either another ethnical language or foreign. It is not surprising, therefore, many Indonesian are able to speak in 3 languages or more. Cobas (2001) added that learning second language generally does not interfere with first language. This explains why we can easily find bilingual in our neighborhood. However,

even though people posses two languages or even more, they tend to have 'majority' and 'minority' language. Majority language is the language which they feel most comfortable. (Cobas, 2001).

There is also considerable evidence that many key literacy-related skills, including phonological awareness, print concepts, decoding skills, and extended discourse, are transferable from an L1 (first language) to an L2 (second language). (Wikipedia.org). Many students use their L1 as the base for their L2 learning. This has been useful and serves as one of the great tool one can use for L2 learning. In addition, similar grammatical procedures and vocabularies also help learning process. One whose first language is Bahasa Indonesia, for example, may use their first language skills as foundation to learning their second language, such as English.

Recent trends and cultures play significant role in many aspects of the change including language learning and teaching. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been integrated into foreign language education and computer programs with varying levels of interactional relationship between computer and the language learner have been developed. Students exposed to these media will find language learning easier than those who are not. Students familiar with computer and English-based games will, therefore, learn the language while doing what they are doing.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE MASTERY TOWARDS SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

3.1. The influence of First Language Mastery towards Second Language Learning

Students with good first language mastery will find it easier to learn the second. They can use their first language knowledge will serve as strong platform for the second one. Strong foundation of first language helps learners learn the second one. Indonesian, for example, has strong similarities with English. Many aspects of the language are similar with English grammar. One with good understanding of Indonesian language will definitely find it easier to learn English and English grammar. They can use their language understanding, both in term of grammar and language uses, to learn the second language. Beside this, as noted by Aron, 1984 and Connor 1986 in Durgunoglu and Hancin-Bhatt (1992) that background knowledge play very important role in information processes.

One who is familiar with the topic or them discussed with understand easier than one who are not. Durgunoglu and Hancin-Bhatt (1992) proposed that when reading, mind process will determine how being bilingual can be positive or negative to someone. As pointed out by Lado (1957), in theory of Contrastive Analysis (CA), the two languages similarities and differentiation will later determine whether and how one will benefit or even burden by bilingualism. They also talk about how reading can be hard when done in L2. They explain further that this may be caused by "inadequate L2 knowledge" thus hinder the process of noticing cues and markers in L2. This is true because reading is a combination of subcomponent processes.

Below, I will discuss impacts of Indonesian language mastery towards English language learning:

3.1.1. Similarities

In this article, I would like to bring up similarities of Indonesian and English so that we will perceive the two languages as near. I want to have mental shift of language learners. They need to move from thinking that English is a strange and difficult language to Indonesian-like and easy to learn one. This hopefully will make learning easier and faster and thus creates a better result.

a. Alphabet

Both Indonesian and English language share similar alphabet. Not only similar, the order of alphabets is also the same. On top of that, the way we pronounce the alphabets is also very close. This certainly brings high benefit to students. Students can easily understand and relate to the language as there are near. No significant effort should be given to master the alphabet. Use of variety of method such as using song and alphabetical pictures does help making learning easier. However, knowing the fact of their similarities is the first key to faster learning.

Not all languages share such similarities. Other languages such as East Asian languages, South Asian, West Asian countries have totally different alphabetical systems. Take Arab for example. Their alphabets are not the same in any way. Pronunciation is also not the same. English alphabet starts from left while Arabic starts from right. This fact has made the Arab people worked harder than that of the Indonesian to master English alphabets.

b. Numerical systems

Like the alphabets, numerical systems of the two languages are also the same. Both of Indonesian and English use same numerical systems. On top of that, both also acknowledge ordinal and cardinal systems, under almost the same rules. Interestingly, they also share systems of arithmetic such as plus, minus, divided by, equal to etcetera. Should Indonesian students/ learners understand this in their native language they have greater chance of understanding this in English. In this regards, they only focus on shift of language and not the systems, as they are the same. Understanding this will ease down learning to vocabulary and basic use of numerical systems. Simple illustration can be seen as follows:

> 125.500.233,-

English : One hundred twenty five *million* five hundred *thousand* two hundred thirty three.

Indonesian : Seratus dua puluh lima *juta* lima ratus *ribu* dua ratus tiga puluh tiga.

The italic words (million – juta & thousand – ribu) show how the systems are the same. Both Indonesian and English group numbers in three. The way we count and calculate numbers are also the same. Such as:

> $2 \times 3 = 6$

English   : 2 times 3 = 6.

Indonesian   : 2 kali 3 = 6.

All we need to do is know the vocabulary then we are good to go.

c.   Vocabularies

Indonesian adopts many words from other languages. Having no such words in Indonesian dictionary has made the country *borrow* it from other languages. In the past, Portuguese, Dutch, Arabic had been three major source of the languages that Indonesian adopted. History, culture, and religion has been the main reasons why those languages become the source.

Modern era, however, has shifted to English. Many words from English have been internalized into Indonesian. Many have been widely used by the people in their daily speaking. Some people did not realize that those words came from English as they had been used very often. Some of the adopted words are adjusted and some are used the way it is. Some of those adopted words are:

Fully adopted   : meeting, hand phone, computer, browsing, internet, call, helm, lift,
                   etcetera.
Adjusted   : televisi, karaoke, apartemen, kalender, plastik, botol, etcetera.

These are among the few words adopted from English into Bahasa Indonesia; there are many more. Other fact on vocabulary is how the words are formed and changed from one type into another, which also available in both languages systems. Both English and Indonesian acknowledged word changes. Ending or suffix for examples changes the words. Likewise, Indonesian languages have suffixes too, such as:

English

> mature (adj) – maturity (n)
>
> clean (adj) – cleanliness (n)
>
> explain (v) – explanation (n)

Indonesian

> dewasa (adj) – kedewasaan (n)
>
> bersih (adj) – kebersihan (n)
>
> menjelaskan (v) – penjelasan (n)

I will not go long on this as there are actually huge variety of words change in both languages. If understood well, Indonesian will understand how English vocabularies change from one type into another. This in turn helps widen the horizon of learners and improve their diction.

d.   Sentence Formation

How sentence is formed is probably the key essence of this article. I believe that all Indonesian wanting to learn English must understand this. Understating these parts will shift mental look on the language and ease language learning.

i. *Part of Speech*

Both English and Indonesian recognize various part of speeches. These parts define the language and how they are used. Part of speech in English and Indonesia are close. Understanding part of speech will help language learners learn English better and faster. Part of speech in English are: *noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, conjunction, preposition, and interjection*. Both English and Indonesian language shares this system. Systems of sentence formation and how one word fit in a sentence. Systems of why one word and not other can be placed after certain other word. Understanding part of speech will help learners learn much faster and easier.

ii. *Subject, Predicate, Object, Complement*

Sentence comprises of minimum subject and predicate; true in both English and Indonesian. Object and complement are additional not elemental parts. They may come and go, in part or all. Students learning English need to understand this fact. They need to understand what subject and predicate are. They also need to comprehend how one part of speech fit and serve as certain role; subject, predicate, object or complement.

As they are the same, both English and Indonesian recognize similar sentence formation (subject + predicate + object + complement). Many regulation of sentence formation are also the same. For example on the use of adverb at the beginning of the sentence, such as in:

> Before going to school, Syarifah always drinks milk.
> Sebelum pergi ke sekolah, Syarifah selalu minum susu.

Before going to school, Syarifah always drinks milk (Sebelum pergi ke sekolah, Syarifah selalu minum susu). Both of the sentences start with adverb then marked with a comma. Subject emerges right after comma then followed by predicate. It's all the same system, both English and Indonesian.

Indonesian students should see this as opportunity to learn English better and faster. Our students should understand how sentence is formed in their own language (Indonesian) then adopt that when learning English. They need to understand how sentence is formed, part of speech used, what to place after certain word, etcetera. Understanding these will certainly help English language learning.

iii. *Positive, Negative, and Interrogative*

Other aspect of language that I will try to lay out here is forming positive, negative and interrogative sentences. Both English and Indonesian recognize the concept of positive, negative and interrogative sentences. Interestingly, both form it in the same way; negative with 'not' and interrogative with 'question words'. Recognizing how they are formed in Indonesian helps students do the same in English. Should students know what they need when forming positive, negative and interrogative sentences, they will find it easier to form them in English.

3.1.2. Application In Language Learning

Knowing the above information, we can apply this in language learning. Both teacher/ lecturer and students are suggested to take this into account when learning English. Below are some suggestions of what needs to be done when learning English language:

1. Learn about part of speech

2. Learn about sentence formation

3. Learn about sentence changing; positive, negative, and interrogative.

4. Memorize vocabularies

These four basic steps are needed to be considered when someone wants to learn English. One will have good basic foundation to build new language systems upon it. Having strong language foundation will also help student learn English faster and easier. Students will think that English is not difficult and possible to learn.

3.1.3. Impact On Teaching

Teaching and learning of L2 can be tricky, especially when participants have little to no prior L2 knowledge. Ways to convey information should be found in order to make the process possible. Some common ways of conveying the meaning of an unknown word can be seen as follow. Definition in the second language; teacher uses his skills to elaborate meanings in the target language. Demonstration; trying to demonstrate how the meaning 'looks like' in motion. Picture or a diagram; 'showing' the meaning using the media of picture or diagram. Real object; taking real object that can help defining the meanings.

In a more exposed class, students with little or some L2, other approach such as translating using L1 can be used. However, this approach can never be applicable in the previous situation. Non-verbal approaches are often used to pass the information to students. However, no method is superior over the other. All methods and approaches are wonderful in their own way and settings. Teachers will just have to find one that work best in their situation and target of participants (Lado, Baldwin and Lobo 1967; Mishima 1967; Laufer and Shmueli 1997).

To help speed up the process of learning, some adjustment in term of language use should be made. However, the more students interact with the target language (L2) the better and faster the learning would be. Students will benefit even more from personal and intense interaction of L2. This is true because all skills are acquired through a process; and the process of learning an L2 is actually using the language itself. Though using the language, students will learn to apply their knowledge of the language. They can also learn from their peers or speaking partners while using the L2 itself. They can also self-analyze their learning performances. They, along with their peers, will witness their learning progress and ability. Similarly, on the side of teachers, they will be able to detect students ability and weaknesses and continue from there. Teachers can also use practice as grading moments, more reliable than many other ways.

IV.   FIRST LANGUAGE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

I have discussed above that first language (L1) plays important role in L2 learning. One with good L1 foundation will have weak foundation to build their L2 understanding. It is safe to assume that a child from city area who is very familiar with L1 (Bahasa Indonesia) will learn their L2 easier from child living in urban area and has little interaction with Bahaasa Indonesia. This is due to proximity of the two languages in term of vocabulary, grammar, and other language aspects. However, further interaction with L2 will determine their L2 mastery.

In classrooms where the learners all share the same L1 or national language, there is a tendency for tasks which should be done in the L2 such as conversation activities, discussion of intensive reading, preparation for writing etc to be done in the L1. There are many reasons for this L1 use. Firstly it is more natural to use the L1 with others who have the same L1. Secondly, it is easier and more communicatively effective to use the L1, and thirdly, using the L2 can be a source of embarrassment particularly for shy learners and those who feel they are not very proficient in the L2. Towards the end of this article we will look at a range of options for overcoming this reluctance to use the L2, because as a general policy it is important to have strong strands of L2 meaning focused use and fluency development in a course.

There are however some times when use of the L1 can have very positive effects on learning and we will now look at these in relation to the four strands. Interestingly enough, research also found that in some bilingual settings, the use of L2 can influence L1, an up-side down approach. Kaushankaya, Yoo, & Marian found that, bilingual students who are used to their new environment may have difficulties understanding writings on their own language (L1). This issue may be caused by the shift of L1 from dominant to minority language.

4.1.   Encouraging Target Language

Needless to say, many students in Indonesia face challenge of L2 learning. Many still find it complicated and hard to acquire. Many still find L2 as a specter. Some even fail in L2 and cannot advance to higher level. This issue is not only true at school levels but go up higher level to university levels. Many university students understand very little of English. For them, English is hard to study and understand. They can only read, speak, listen, and write in English at the very basic level. On the other hand, fact shows that English is very important. As noted from a research conducted by British Council, Research conducted in South Asia confirms a link between quality education and economic development. (http://www.britishcouncil.org.np/). Therefore, serious effort needs to be taken to ensure English proficiency of our people.

One of main case for arduous learning process is not using the L2, both in and out of class. Students are not familiar with any forms of L2, not even during the learning process. In the class, during the teaching, teachers often use L1 when speaking with students. Out of the class, the odd of using the target language is even smaller. This situation is actually contra productive and against the findings, "teachers need to use a range of options to encourage learners to use the L2 as much as possible (Nation 1997)." Teachers often excuse themselves

for not using the L2. Students' abilities are common *scapegoat* to tackle the matter. However, should we dig deeper more options can be found to help facilitate a good teaching and learning process. Internet actually provides ample and up to date approach to good teaching. Teachers just need to look up there and they will surely find them. Hands out and free copies can also be used to help break the ice of L2 use. Students will be brought to the gate of active conversation and interaction, step by step process.

REFERENCES

Brisk, Maria Esteala., Proctor, C. Patric. Challenges and Support for English Language Learners in Bilingual Programs.

Cobas, Victoria Veirro., Chan, Eugenia, 2001, *Language development in Bilingual Children: A Primer for Pediatrician.* (18:7) Contemporary Pediatric) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_language

Durgunoglu, Aydin Y., Hancin-Bhatt, Barbara J. *The Role of First Language in Second Language Process. Technical Report.* (1992) Center for the Study of Reading. University of Illinois.

Kaushankaya, Margarita., Yoo, Jeowon., Marian, Viorica. *The Effect of Second-Language Experience on native Language Processing.*

Knight, T. 1996. Learning vocabulary through shared speaking tasks. The Language Teacher 20, 1: 24-29.

Lado, R., Baldwin, B. and Lobo, F. 1967. Massive vocabulary expansion in a foreign language beyond the basic course: the effects of stimuli, timing and order of presentation. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.: 5-1095.

Lameta-Tufuga, E. 1994.Using the Samoan Language for Academic Learning Tasks. UnpublishedMA thesis,Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Laufer, B. and Kimmel, M. 1997. Bilingualised dictionaries: How learners really use them. System 25,3 : 361-369.

Laufer, B. and Shmueli, K. 1997. Memorizing new words: Does teaching have anything to do with it? RELC Journal 28, 1: 89-108.

McKeown, M.G. 1993. Creating effective definitions for young word learners. Reading Research Quarterly 28, 1: 17-31.

Mishima, T. 1967. An experiment comparing five modalities of conveying meaning for the teaching of foreign language vocabulary. Dissertation Abstracts 27:3030-3031A.

Nation, I.S.P. 2001. Learning Vocabulary in Another Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nation, Paul (2001) *The Role of First Language in Foreign Language Learning.* ASIAN EFL Journal. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nobuyuki, Honna. 2005. English as a Multicultural Language in Asia and Intercultural Literacy. Intercultural Communication Studies. XIV:2. 73-89.

Ringbom, H. 1987. The Role of the First Language in Foreign Language Learning. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters