ISSUES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (TESOL): A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sri Rejeki Murtiningsih

University of Oklahoma,
The Graduate College, 731 Elm Avenue, 213 Robertson Hall ~ Norman ~ OK 73019

ABSTRACT

The article aims to review English language teaching to speakers of other languages and other related aspects such as the use of technology and the first language in classroom practices. As the need for English language competency develops, efforts to support students' learning also change. In addition to the teaching techniques, the technology development has also gained attention for improving effective teaching and learning. Because English is a language that is not used in daily communication and the variety of students' language competence, the use of first language in a foreign language classroom has also become another point to encourage the students' foreign language acquisition.

Keywords: teaching English, TESOL, teaching methods, CALL, first language use

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meninjau pengajaran Bahasa Inggris kepada penutur bahasa lain dan aspek terkait seperti penggunaan teknologi dan bahasa ibu dalam praktik di kelas. Seiring dengan berkembangnya kebutuhan untuk kompetensi bahasa Inggris, upaya untuk mendukung pembelajaran siswa juga berubah. Selain teknik pengajaran, perkembangan teknologi juga mendapatkan perhatian untuk membuat pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang efektif. Karena Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa yang tidak digunakan dalam komunikasi sehari-hari dan kompetensi bahasa siswa cukup bervariasi, penggunaan bahasa ibu dalam sebuah ruang kelas bahasa asing telah menjadi salah satu cara untuk meningkatkan akuisisi bahasa asing siswa.

Kata kunci: pengajaran bahasa inggris, TESOL, metode pengajaran, CALL, penggunaan bahasa ibu

INTRODUCTION

English has become the global language (Crystal, 2003; Murata & Jenkins, 2009). English is a language that is used in news, advertisement and films even in non-English speaking countries. In addition, English has become important in the world of employment. Many job seekers in non-English speaking countries are required to master English. They have to prepare application letters, other documents and interview in English. More and more non-English speaking countries use English for their daily communication as a second language, and even as the official language in academic settings and government offices (Crystal, 2003). For example, Singapore has used English in academic settings since 1816 and it has become more and more popular in other settings such as employment since 1900 along with Malay, which became Singapore's national language in 1959 (Lim, 2004).

People have always referred to English as British or American English, but since English has become global, there have been a wide variety of Englishes (Crystal, 2003). The English used in Singapore is usually called Singapore English or Singlish (Lim, 2004; Crystal, 2003). Singlish has its own characteristics such as its strong cultural influence, which make it different from English used in other countries. As the need for English language ability develops, governments in non-English speaking countries try to introduce English as early as possible. For example, the government of Turkey introduces English to fourth graders (Kirkgöz, 2008) and English language teaching has become a great industry (Crystal, 2003). In addition, the teaching of English to speakers of other languages has become of interest to a large number of researchers and there has been no agreement on the best way of teaching English. Teaching English in the 1960s and 1970s focused more on grammar lessons (Soler & Martinez-Flor, 2008). In the early 1980s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became popular because it focused on the communicative competence of the students rather than on accuracy (Widdowson, 1979; Hughes, 1983).

Technology has also influenced the way English is taught in schools. The development of the Internet has encouraged some teachers to take advantage of it. Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) has made big impacts on teachers' ways of teaching. In addition, many teachers use blogs, computer software, and other media to work on students' creativity and confidence to communicate in English because the media provides authentic materials for the students to learn (Yang, 2009; Mitchell, 2008). Because English is often a foreign language, not used in daily conversation, it has attracted scholars to do research on the languages used to teach English. Is the use of the first language recommended? What is the ideal portion of the first language in foreign language classes? Should English be used all the time during the lessons? How would teachers avoid misunderstandings in English classes?

This article outlines the three major issues in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The first part of the paper will discuss the techniques considered effective in teaching English. The next part will outline the use of technology in teaching English and the last part will explain the use of first languages in TESOL classrooms.

METHOD

The data in this literature review uses secondary data taken from databases and books related to the issues mentioned above. Most of the journal articles used in this paper are research articles or articles that came from classroom practices. When searching for the articles, the key words used by the writer included terms like [teaching English], [English language teaching], [computer-assisted language learning], [English as a foreign language], [teaching English as a foreign language], [first

language use] and combinations of the words. To keep this literature up to date, the articles were chosen based on their years of publication, which range from eight to ten years old.

The books were chosen based on their topics and their availability in the library. The books used were as up-to-date as possible. Although some books were published as long ago as the 1970s, the knowledge contained in them is still widely cited by other authors.

Techniques in Teaching English

Zimmerman (2010) asserts that there have been some comments saying that teaching English is just a matter of implementing a strategy that will work for all types of students. Although this may be correct, most English teachers realize there are many aspects to the students such as English competency, personality, and sociocultural background (Brown, 1980). Knowing all of these aspects makes the teachers more confident in finding the right strategies for teaching English. For instance, research conducted in Japan found that Japanese students tend to be quieter in the classroom (Harumi, 2010). She conducted the research with 197 Japanese students enrolled in English degree programs. Their English proficiency was at an intermediate level and they had received English lessons for 6 years before they were enrolled in the program. The research also involved 52 native English teachers and 58 Japanese English teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 1 – 35 years. The participants were asked to take questionnaires. The research gave similar but paraphrased questionnaires to the teachers. The results showed that the students tend to be silent because of linguistic and psychological problems such as a lack of confidence in speaking. However, the native English teachers thought that they were silent for cultural reasons and Japanese English teachers thought it was because they did not know the right answers. The research shows that there are differences in the ways that students and native and non-native English teachers see the causes of the quietness.

Other research conducted in China reveals that many Asian students underestimate their own English proficiencies, which leads to anxiety when they learn English and little class participation (Liu and Jackson, 2008). The research examined 547 participants who were enrolled in non-English departments for undergraduate degrees. The research used questionnaires to obtain the data needed. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between students' EFL anxiety and unwillingness to communicate in English.

These two Asian studies show that the best strategy for teaching these types of students may be involving them in group work so they can contribute more to their learning. The silence and low level of confidence are likely influenced by the sociocultural context where Asian students usually listen to their teachers and show respect by being quiet. In short, teaching English is more than implementing a strategy.

For strategies in English language teaching, theorists in language teaching and learning proposed the following methods: Grammar-Translation, Audiolingual and CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979). CLT has come into the spotlight because it focuses more on the integrated language skills of the learners (Liao, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 1986), unlike the first two methods, which see language separately and see the learners as passive actors in language learning. The Grammar-translation method focuses on translating word per word and the Audiolingual method is concerned with the students' exposure to English native speakers. In contrast, CLT focuses on grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competencies, which are believed to boost students' English competency and confidence (Liao, 2000). Because of its wholeness in looking at language competencies, CLT is considered by many teachers to be the most effective teaching English method. CLT encourages communication ability for speaking. Turkey's government promotes CLT for teaching English to young learners (Kirkgöz, 2008).

CLT is not without criticism. Kumaravadivelu (2003) criticizes CLT as a method that is "conceptualized by theorists, not those that are actualized by teachers in the classrooms" (p. 2). He mentions that CLT – and the other two methods – provide a set of principles to be implemented in a certain English classroom; therefore, they might not work in all types of classrooms. Apart from Kumaravadivelu's criticism, CLT is criticized by Swan (1985a, b) for neglecting the mother tongue in foreign language learning. In addition, CLT often confuses the teachers. For example, CLT recommends using authentic materials; however, Swan argues that teachers may be find this confusing because the materials are not especially designed for teaching and learning. They are designed only to convey information to the readers. Some English teachers, especially the non-native English teachers, may find it confusing.

The English teaching strategy proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) is the postmethod where teachers use "their local knowledge and local understanding" (p.549). He implies that teaching English does not need to apply a particular method. English teachers can use any method that they think is effective for their students' learning. That method is based on the knowledge and understanding that come from students' backgrounds, which consist of sociocultural, socio economic and students' competencies. To do this, teachers need to provide a considerable amount of time to study their students and the backgrounds.

Some teaching strategies may work for all types of students such as students with different ages, different language competencies, different personalities and different sociocultural backgrounds. However, teaching strategies will be more meaningful to the students if the students' conditions are taken into account. Local wisdoms are things that need to be considered by teachers who do not come from the same areas because it will make the English teaching learning process more effective.

Using Technology in Teaching English

Potential students who come from non-English speaking countries need to pass a certain score on the TOEFL test to study in many English-speaking countries such as the US. The Internet-based TOEFL test requires the students to work intensively with computers and the Internet. They have to read, write, listen and even speak to the computer connected to the Internet. This is an example of how technological advancement has influenced many aspects of life including the area of teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Conventional English teaching requires the students to come to English classes and do social activities in and outside the classrooms. Students are encouraged to work with their peers and interact with their teachers to improve their English. In this digital age, students can learn from computer software or the Internet and learn anywhere and anytime. One study conducted by Shang (2009) introduces animated computer software called Chatterbots, which "can engage the learners in the computer-simulated human-human interaction" (p.269). Unlike many computer software programs, which provide assistance in reading and listening skills, this Artificial-intelligence software understands human instructions and can answer questions given by a person in the English language. Although this software needs a high level of English proficiency, English class used CALL for the sake of students' learning. The research involved 15 volunteering participants who found that it was interesting to learn with the Chatterbots, and nearly half of them mentioned that the animation could answer some of the questions given by the participants. Most of them (73%) would like to have the software installed on their personal computer so they could learn independently.

Another study that took advantage of technological possibility was when Hamilton (2008) tried to use the technological tools to establish e-learning in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class. She, then interviewed the teachers and learners who used e-learning in the teaching learning process. The research reveals that the teachers and learners were concerned about using the technology because of the lack of familiarity with it in the beginning. But, as they engaged with the program, they found that it was helpful in developing their communication skills in and outside the classroom.

Kazanzi and Okan (2009) evaluate a number of software packages aimed at improving children's English competency in Turkey. They assert that these computer programs are a type of edutainment, the acronym of education and entertainment. However, their research demonstrates that the software programs only provide the entertainment part and lack the education portion. Kazanzi and Okan claim that the software programs had not supported the standards set by the curriculum, lacked higher order or thinking instructions, and lacked students' involvement in problem solving.

Technology development can be a problematic issue in teaching and learning. As Evans (2008) mentions that, in one hand, technology does provide teachers with enormous ideas and they can use it to enhance the classroom practice. On the other hand, not all teachers know how to make use of the technology to improve their teaching. However, the use of technology in the classroom is unavoidable in the future.

The use of First Language in Tesol

The argument that learning English as a foreign language is best conducted by exposing the students with as much English language as possible is currently challenged. There has been a growing number of studies on using the first language in foreign language teaching and learning. Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) argue that first language used in foreign language classrooms does give advantages. In addition, research shows that the use of the first language improves students' confidence to learn English, helps the students understand the cross cultural understanding between the native culture and English culture, and improves students' autonomy (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). Apart from that, students would be able to understand the teachers' instructions more easily. If only English is used during the class, the students may misinterpret the teachers' instructions. The use of first language can avoid misunderstanding between the students and teachers and improve the learning effectiveness.

The research has encouraged the codeswitching method in foreign language classroom practices. Codeswitching is defined as "the systematic, alternating use of two languages or language varieties within a single conversation or utterance" (Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2009, p. 131). So, teachers can use the first language and English at the same time in a class. This method can create a bilingual learning process, which may increase students' proficiency. Although there have been no particular studies that state how much the first language should be used in an English class, "small amount of first language use may indeed lead to more comprehensible input and target-language production" (Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009, p. 5). Even in an English class, students' English proficiency should be considered to decide how much first language should be ideally used. However, Macaro (2009) argues that the optimal use of codeswitching "only works in 'broadly communicative' classrooms, where predominantly the focus is on communicating meaning through the target language" (p. 39). Therefore, codeswitching may not be as effective in a content-based class as in a skill-based class. On the other hand, it is always good to remember that students need to see the ideal language model, someone who can speak English well that is usually the teacher (Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2009; Tyler in Madaus & Stufflebeam, 1989).

CONCLUSION

The fact that English has become global and used as official languages in a number of non-English speaking countries has made teaching English for speakers of other languages more and more interesting to research. Finding the right teaching methods to make the students learn English effectively has been a constant issue in this area of teaching. Many educators believe that communicative language teaching is the most effective way to teach English because it provides

"natural" language learning for the students and focuses on communicative competence (Hughes, 1983). However, the criticism that addresses this method claims that it does not pay sufficient attention to the prior knowledge the students bring to the table as well as the influence of the first language to their English learning (Swan, 1985). This is closely related with the current fact that as English has become global, each country has its own characteristics of what good English is. For example, the Singapore English, or Singlish, has its characteristics of being different from that of American and British English due to the influence of the mother tongue (Lim, 2004). Accordingly, Kumaravadivelu (2003) criticizes that the CLT does not take local knowledge and local understanding into account because the method tries to make the learners speak like native English speakers, which usually refers to American or British English. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that English teachers take the students' backgrounds into account. Consequently, teachers may use any teaching methods that work effectively for both teachers and students.

In relation to the use of technology in teaching, students and teachers sometimes find the technology overwhelming due to the lack of familiarity with the technology, and this may cause frustration (Evans, 2008). However, the anxiety and frustration are lower when teachers and students get familiar with the students. As a matter of fact, technology can make the learning more fun and effective because the students and teachers can have the learning at anytime and anywhere. On the other hand, teachers and students need to be careful in selecting the computer software or other programs because some programs do not provide learning. The use of the first language in an English as a foreign language class is viewed as an important part of learning. It is believed that using two languages in the form of codeswitching is very effective in teaching a foreign language because it can avoid misunderstanding between students and teachers. Although the portion is still questionable, the codeswitching can be optimally used in classes which focus on communicative competence and less optimally used in content-based classes.

REFERENCES

Brooks-Lewis, K.A. (2009). *Adult Learners' Perceptions of the Incorporation of their L1 in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*. Applied Linguistics, 30 (2), 216–235. Retrieved on December 14, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Brown, H. D. (1980). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Brumfit C. J. & Johnson, K. (1979). *The communicative approach to language teaching (Eds)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language (2nd ed)*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dailey-O'Cain, J. & Liebscher, G. (2009). *Teacher and student use of the first language in foreign language classroom interaction: Functions and implications*. In M. Turnbull & J. Dailey-O'Cain (Eds.) First language use in second and foreign language learning. (131 – 144). NY: Library of Congress.

Evans. M. J. (2008). *Foreign language learning with digital technology*. NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Hamilton, M. (2008). *Teacher and student perceptions of e-learning in EFL*. In M. J. Evans (Ed). Foreign language learning with digital technology. NY: Continuum International Publishing Group. 149 – 173.

Harumi, S. (2010). *Classroom silence: voices from Japanese EFL learners*. ELT Journal (10). Retrieved on November 9, 2010, from EBSCOhost data base.

Hughes, A. (1983). *Second language and communicative language teaching. In K. Johnson and D. Porter (Eds). Perspectives in communicative language teaching*. NY: Academic Press, Inc. 1 - 13.

Kazanzi, Z. & Okan, Z. (2009). *Evaluating English language teaching software for kids: education or entertainment or both?* The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 8(3), 30 – 38. Retrieved on December 13, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Kirkgöz, Y. (2008). Curriculum innovation in Turkish primary education. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education. 36, 309 – 322. Retrieved on October 6, 2010, from EBSCOhost database.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Critical language pedagogy: a postmethod perspective in English language teaching. World Englishes, 22 (4), 539 – 550. Retrieved on December 12, 2010 from EBSCOhost from Indiana University of Pennsilvania.

Liao, X. Q. (2000). Communicative language teaching: approach, design and procedure. Retrived on December 12, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Lim, L. (2004). Singapore English: A grammatical description (Ed). Philadelpia: John Benjamins B.V.

Liu, M & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. The Modern Language Journal. 92, 71 – 86. Retrieved on November 9, 2010 from EBSCOHost data base.

Macaro, E. (2009). Teacher use of codeswitching in the second language classroom: exploring 'optimal use'. In M. Turnbull & J. Dailey-O'Cain (Eds.) First language use in second and foreign language learning. (35 – 49). NY: Library of Congress.

Mitchell, I. (2008). The potential of the internet as a language-learning tool. In M. J. Evans (Ed). Foreign language learning with digital technology. NY: Continuum International Publishing Group. 32 – 59.

Murata, K. & Jenkins, J. (2009). Global Englishes in Asian context: current and future debates (Eds.). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (1986). Approaches and methods in language teaching : a description and analysis. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Shang, Q. (2009). AI-based chatterbots and spoken English teaching: a critical analysis. Computer Assissted Language Learning, 22(3). Retrieved on December 13, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Soler, E. A. & Martinez-Flor, A. (2008). Investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching and testing (Eds). NY: Cromwell Press Ltd.

Swan, M. (1985). A critical look at the Communicative Approach (1). ELT Journal, 39 (1), 2 - 12. Retrieved on December 14, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Swan, M. (1985). A critical look at the Communicative Approach (2). ELT Journal, 39 (2), 76-87. Retrieved on December 14, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Turnbull, M. & Dailey-O'Cain, J. (Eds), First language use in second and foreign language learning. NY: Library of Congress.

Tyler, R.W. (1989). Tyler's rationale for curriculum development. In G.F. Madaus & D.L.Stufflebeam (Eds). Educational evaluation: classic works of Ralph.W.Tyler. (197-207). Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Widdowson, H.G. (1979). The teaching of English as communication. In C. J. Brumfit & K. Johnson (Eds). The communicative approach to language teaching.117 – 121. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yang, S.-H. (2009). Using Blogs to Enhance Critical Reflection and Community of Practice. Educational Technology & Society, 12 (2), 11–21. Retreived on December 13, 2010 from EBSCOhost database.

Zimmerman, L. W. (2010). ESL, EFL, & Bilingual Education: Exploring historical, sociocultural, linguistic, and instructional foundations. NC: IAP – Information Age Publishing, Inc.