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A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF PREASSESSMENT FOR THE
SYSTEM OF TEACHING ENGLISH PROGRAM AT SCHOOLS
IN INDONESIA



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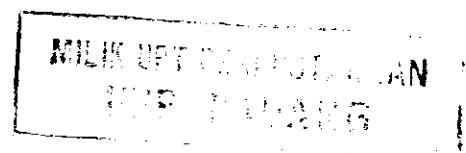
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1. Introduction

Not many researches have been conducted to trace the result of English teaching program in Indonesia, but the following facts pointed out by Subiyati (1989) are enough to reflect the unsuccessful achievement of English learning: (1) The students graduated from senior high schools are not able to use spoken English (in fact, this component is given priority), (2) vocabulary mastery is only around 700 words (Quin, 1972), and only around 1000 words (Subiyati, 1979), (3) the result of the test for job applicants is not satisfactory (the test for candidates of civil servants, (1987), and (4) reading skill as the goal of teaching English in Indonesia has not been achieved yet. This condition remains the same although some effort has been done to optimize the result by moving from one approach to another. It becomes apparent that the problem is not attributable to the methods because they are not the only determinant in achieving the success



of English teaching program at schools in Indonesia.

This paper purports to present some influential factors in learning English in Indonesia through a systemic approach. Factors to be considered are viewed from three different angles: political situation, societal demands, and career opportunities. In addition the basic principles of curriculum development are also considered: relevance of curriculum with the present, the future, and career opportunities, effectivity of the program, continuum of the materials, and flexibility in choosing the skills needed (speaking, writing, and reading). In the last account, a possible system of the program is described.

2. A Continuum of the Program at Three Consecutive Levels of Schools

The continuum of the curriculum for three consecutive levels of Indonesian schools can be divided into three parts: (1) the nine-year-basic level, (2) senior high level, and (3) university level. At the nine-year basic level, basic materials of natural science, social science, mathematics, and language beside other subjects for physical, mental, and moral development. The first four subjects are componential and are not broken into units of subjects. Dividing the components into separated subjects starts at the second year of the senior high level. At this level the subjects are grouped

into four majors which are labeled A1, A2, A3, and A4 respectively. A1 and A2 are related to the exact science; A3, social science; and A4, language and culture. At the university level, the students are directed to choose one specialty under the department of a faculty. A student can be more specialized by taking a certain specialization in his/her department.

The program of teaching English as a foreign language at Indonesian schools should be in line with the continuum of the school curriculum. In other words, the English curriculum ought to be a continuum from the nine-year basic level to the university level. Curriculum developers should think of the relevance between the subjects, majors, or specialties and the English materials. For example, at the nine-year basic level, the teacher begins to introduce mathematical terms according to the level of the materials of mathematics offered in the curriculum of the same level or one year below. The same thing is done to the relevant materials of natural science and social science. At the senior high level, for example, the continuum of the English materials must be kept in line with the materials of other subjects in the curriculum according to the major system is kept moving on into the specialties at the university level. This is kept to be a system of continuum streaming along from the nine-

year basic level to the university level.

One of the important thing to be put into question is programming. What is the continuum based on about language learning? Which comes first: basic sentence constructions or vocabulary development or both? Three trends in language development theory might be able to explicate the continuum of language development. This implies the programming of language teaching. The three trends are nativism, cognitive interactionism, and social interactionism.

Nativism and cognitive interactionism emphasize that linguistics forms and elements essentially accounts for language universal while social interactionism for language variety.

To nativism, the development of children's language is associated with the development of syntactic structures. One major question which is usually brought about is: What form is used by children to express different meanings in different levels of development? (Menyuk, 1991).

The theory that sees language as rule governed derives the idea that at the age of eleven the development of children's language is complete. The eleven-year-old's language structure is the same as the one of the adult. At the age of 3.5, children are able to create grammatical sentences and at the age of 5, there is an impression that a child language is perfect.

Social function of language is not accounted as language development process. The process of language development is complete at the age of eleven. The grammatical rules of language will never change any more. Natural critical period of language acquisition is over.

In cognitive interactionism, forms and rules of language are replaced by logical relationship among units of elements. At the age of 4, children are able to match propositional cases (agent, object, instrument, patient, etc.). The age of completing language development for cognitive interactionism is the same as the one for nativism. Nativism and cognitive interactionism put too much emphasis on the form and logical relationship among propositional cases.

Diller (1978), however, discusses the misconception of many linguists that a child usually masters his native language by the age of six or seven -- some linguists even say four. But in terms of sentence complexity, and sentence length, a child's language competence is greatly inferior to an adult's.

To social interactionists, the development of language is not completed until a child masters the basic process of sentence construction in that language. The development in mastering vocabulary and pragmatic function of utterances is also considered (Miller, 1979). For this reason, Diller (1978) argues that language mastery is not completed at the young

age; one will also have to continue learning the language even until adult time. For example, most people in the western world, no matter what their age, have learned the terminology of space travel and space technology during the last twenty years. Just to maintain competence in a language, one must keep learning new things in it.

Nativism and cognitive interactionism emphasize language universal by putting forward the basic process of sentence construction and language development is considered complete at the age of infancy. On the other hand, social interactionism put the emphasis on pragmatic functions of language. There are varieties of language which can be seen from different points of view.

In comparing children and adults in language learning, Diller (1978) describes that in the popular mind, age has become the most important factor for explaining success or failure in language learning. Diller points out controversies between inferiority or superiority of children and adults in learning a language. If a child becomes bilingual because he learns a language with much time of practice, people say he is successful because he is young. Then, if an adult fails to learn a language in some 300 hours of poor quality : school instruction spread over a period of two years, his failure is also attributed to age.

Macnamara (1973) in Diller (1978) argues that adults could be better learners than children if they were given optimum environments. He further argues

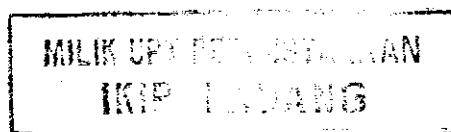
that we could not prove that an adult is less skilled in language learning unless we give him/her an opportunity equal to a child to learn a language.

The much denied fact is that adults are superior to children in all aspects of language learning except possibly pronunciation. That is to say that adults can master a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary in less time than children need, if both children and adults are given optimal learning situation. Burstall (1977) in Diller (1978) reviews that a British study showed that there was very little difference between 16-year-olds who had been studying French since they were eight and those who had been studying French only since they were eleven.

A study by Durette (1972) corroborates the fact that college students learn foreign languages twice as fast as high school students, and shows further that 16-year-olds need 5 years to accomplish what college freshmen learn in 1 year.

Research on vocabulary size indicates that educated American adults know four times as many words as seven-year-olds do--that adults know some 200,000 English words to the seven-year-old's 50,000. It reflects the superiority of adults in the development of their vocabulary mastery.

Yesin (1991) assumes that adults are more competent than children in the mastery of communicative



functions of language (e.g. polite requests, persuasion, topic switching, greetings, etc.) beside the mastery of vocabulary. From the evidence and assumption previously described, it can be concluded that mastery of language has been viewed from different angles. Nativists and cognitive interactionists claim that mastery of a language is associated with the mastery of basic sentence constructions that may be accomplished at the age between five and seven and at the age of eleven the mastery is perfect.

From different side, social interactionists view that the mastery of a language is not only the case of mastering basic language constructions but also mastering vocabulary and communicative functions of language.

Angles of views, from my point, can be synthesized that truth occurs in all. Mastery of a language may truly start from the mastery of sentence basic constructions while mastery of vocabulary and communicative functions can be derived from someone's being exposed into different fields and different extralinguistic context (i.e. cultural and immediate contexts (See also Yasin, 1991)).

As the concluding remark, in the early period of language development, children learn basic constructions of sentences and continued with communicative functions of utterances. Vocabulary development in different notions and fields is continued even in unli-

mitted time in human life.

Presuming a logical system of English teaching program at Indonesian schools, the notion of the continuum of the curriculum and theories of language development can be put into a rationale of designing a systemic curriculum from the nine-year-basic level to the university level.

The age to start, the aspects of language to be put into the curriculum (grammar and vocabulary), and the skills to be expected as the result of teaching program (speaking, reading, and writing) should be thought as a continuum from the basic level to the advanced level.

The discussion about language development above implies that the good age to start learning a foreign language is around ten and eleven. Even though eighteen-year-olds are some five times more efficient than two-year-olds (even five times more efficient than nine-year-olds, according to Durrete's data (1972)), this is no argument for a general postponement of language studies until age eighteen (Diller, 1978). At the age of ten or eleven, children are mature enough to reason grammatically, but are still young enough to learn correct pronunciation easily (de Souza, 1959 in Diller, 1978).

Grammar is the aspect of language that the students have to accomplish until at the first year of the se-

nior high level, so that from the second year of senior high to the university, the students are given opportunity to enlarge their vocabulary size in line with their majors and specialties.

Vocabulary should match the materials of the subjects in the curriculum. Basic vocabulary of mathematics, as mentioned previously, for example, is introduced along with the materials which the students have learned before.

How about speaking and writing? These two skills of language are proposed to be flexible choices offered through a special program which may be called "English Service" or something. This program will be described somewhere in the rest of this paper.

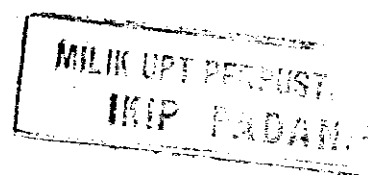
3. Environmental Support for Learning Opportunity and Continuity

Diller (1978) asserts that in practice, very few students are bilingual after five years of study. One reason is that language learning requires a certain concentration of effort. In an ordinary school year of 180 days, at the rate of one hour a day, it would take 5 years to reach 900 hours of instruction in a foreign language. For an American, to learn German, French, and other easy languages, it would take 1000 to 1200 hours. Chinese, Japanese, etc. require 4375 hours. We can safely conclude that a student cannot become bilingual in less than 5 years of study, at

only one hour a day. If one wants to be bilingual, it is not enough to learn the language at a young age; one also has to continue learning the language. For example, most people in western world, no matter what their age, have learned the terminology of space travel and space technology during the last twenty years. Just to maintain competence in language, one must keep learning new things in it. If a two-year-old wants to learn to speak a foreign language with a competence of a native speaker college graduate, he will need twenty years to accomplish the task. An eighteen-year-old can accomplish the task in four years (Diller, 1978).

The development of language continues throughout one's life, of course. College freshmen are capable of a great deal of grammatical refinement as their professors will affirm. The vocabulary development of school children and college students is nothing short of phenomenal. Slang, added to all the technical and scientific vocabulary, amounts to several thousand words each year. Twelve-year-olds have a recognition vocabulary of about 135,000 words. Bright high school seniors know 216,000 words. The typical thirty-year-old Ph.D. knows about 250,000 words. Vocabulary development continues in a natural, almost unnoticed fashion as long as one lives and interested in new things.

Schools in Indonesia give only three to four



hours a week of English. That amount is too little to be much of use. Increasing the amount of time for English in the curriculum is not possible because English is just one among other loaded courses in the curriculum and it is impossible to push English into more important position than the major courses of the curriculum. It presupposes that the situation is very limited for the students' learning opportunity and continuity.

To maintain the continuity of learning, it must be supported by an optimal environment. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) discuss two kinds of language environmental factors which research has shown are directly related to successful language acquisition: i.e. macro and micro-environmental factors. In macro-environmental factors, the features of naturalness of environment, the learner's role in communication, availability of concrete references, and target language models are pointed out. Micro-environmental features are characteristics of specific structures of the language the learner hears. These factors may affect second language learning only when learners have reached certain points in their language development such that they are ready to internalize a given structure. So far, micro-environmental factors do not affect language acquisition much. These factors are found in formal environment (as termed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen,

1982) or commonly called classroom.

One of the major distinguishing characteristics of an environment is the presence or absence of natural exposure opportunities. The foreign language classroom situation like that in Indonesia, on the other hand, usually affords little opportunity to discuss matters of interest to the students. Instead, focus is typically on the formal aspects of the language being learned.

In Indonesia, as stated previously, English is not a second language but a foreign language. Being a foreign language, in Indonesia, English is used to be the language of science and technology and to build our nation. It is in the highest position among any other foreign languages. No other foreign languages are effective as an instrument to excavate science and technology buried in university libraries. This consideration was taken as the base in issuing the decree that English was the first foreign language in Indonesia. A further emphasis was also stated by the Inspector of English Teaching Program at the Department of Education in 1955:

As for its function, English is not and will never be a social language in the Indonesian community. Neither is it nor will it be the second official language in the administration of this country. It is no more and no less than the first foreign language (Gregory, 1964 in Kalim, 1984).

Because English is just instrumental to Indonesian context, it is almost impossible for the students to achieve great success in learning a foreign language.

A clear implication of the situation is that in Indonesia, there is no natural environment to optimize the learning of English at schools and in the absence of natural environment, opportunity and continuity of learning is very limited.

4. Need for English for Future Career

The success of foreign language teaching is alluded to the learner's ability to speak the language. but when a student is good in writing or reading, he is not considered to be good in one language. For Indonesian situation, it is almost impossible for the students to be bilingual.

The success of an English teaching program should have been judged from the fulfilment of the need of individual student. Rivers and Melvin (1981) claim that "students' need in language learning are dependent on political situations, social demands, and career opportunity....." Rivers and Melvin exemplify need assessment for language teaching as market research which presumes that there are consumers of the harvest in modern terms. Who are the consumers of what we have to offer in language teaching, and what will they be wanting from us in a certain period of time?

Our consumers are not only students but also the society of which they are a part.

I am trying to analyze the students need for English at Indonesian schools. English is used for communication in two ways: (1) interpersonal communication and (2) intrapersonal communication (the latter is the process of communication within oneself in trying to express or understand something like in writing or reading).

Exclusively, writing can be under the rubric of both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. Writing for correspondence, for example, belongs to interpersonal communication but scientific writing belongs to intrapersonal communication. Speaking is on the tract of interpersonal communication and reading is classified into intrapersonal communication.

A judgement is that different person may need different skills or two or three skills simultaneously. A doctor in an isolated area might not need speaking and may be writing either. So what does a student of medicine need for his future career? He might not need speaking skill, and because he would not write reports or corresponds in English, he would not need writing, either. However, he would probably need reading to prepare for his career and to widen his horizon when he were active in his career by reading books written in English. What does a student who wants to

be a secretary need? Does she need reading skill? writing skill? or speaking skill? The answer may be "Yes" for the three points of question. She might need reading skill to understand foreign messages; she might also need the skill of writing business letters for correspondence; and she might need speaking skill, too, since many foreign counterparts would get in touch with her.

How would a teacher know the individual needs? They cannot be traced from the early time of learning English, i.e. from the nine-year basic level because they do not know exactly what they will do in the future. So, what kind of materials should be appropriate for the students at the nine-year-basic level? Why don't we start introducing vocabulary related to their subjects with appropriate level of grammar. The materials for natural science given in the curriculum, for example, should be taken partly into the English materials. The same should be done to mathematics and social sciences. This mode will offer an opportunity to experience the language since the early time.

At the senior high level, The materials for English are proposed to be in line with the materials of their majors (exact science, natural science, and language and culture). Their experience in the language of their majors will facilitate their learning at the

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university level. At the end of the senior high school period, the students begin to figure out their career opportunity. There should be career guidance personnels who play an important role in helping the students decide their specialty at the university level.

Speaking and writing would be flexible choices which should be taught through a special program separated from regular classes which have to be taken by all. The serving program for speaking and writing might be called "English Service" because this program serves the students according to their needs. A student might want to be a master of ceremony. The language of this world is one variety of language under the rubric of public relation. Another student might want to be a chemist. He might not need oral English but writing skill to make the report of chemical analysis, or he might not need this at all. since regular classes are sufficient to support his career.

At the university level, the students have a somewhat clear picture of his career but career guidance is still needed as it is at the senior high school. Personnels for career guidance should be available to serve the students consult their realistic needs for their career. The English teaching program still offers regular reading classes to improve their reading skill along with increasing their vocabulary. "Eng-

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lish Service" should be available to serve the students with the program of speaking and writing. Choices, of course, depend on the students' realistic needs as exemplified previously.

At last, motivation to learn will come if the students know whether they really need English for their career in the future.

5. Conclusion

The result of the English teaching program in Indonesia is not satisfactory. It might be attributable to lack of assessment for the program system. Factors to be considered in planning and designing the program are: (1) the position of English in Indonesian context, (2) societal demands, (3) career opportunity, (3) learning opportunity, (4) learning continuity, (5) the continuum of the curriculum from the basic level to the advanced level, and (6) flexibility in choosing skills needed by the students. It is assumed that with these aspects of assessment the students will be motivated in learning English.

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