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# THE RHETORICAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS IN ONLINE ENGLISH COURSES ADVERTISEMENTS

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## Abstract
The superior image of native English teachers portrayed in ELT professionalism has been heavily criticized among scholars by raising awareness on the expertise than nativeness or races. However, the study is scarce regarding how online discourse such as web-based advertisement of English language courses rhetorically depicts their language instructors: a native speaker and local teachers. To fill this gap, the purposes of this study are to examine the attributes of language instructors and any potential discriminatory or privileged presentation evoke in the online ads. The initial analysis was done within twenty English course sites to view overall trends of English instructors' attributes in several websites in Indonesia. I then closely explored two websites, WSE and TBI, and how they textually and visually privilege and discriminate the competences of native English teachers or local teachers. The result shows the dominant rhetoric of native English teachers as English language experts. The findings of this study reveal that despite the scholarly effort to challenge native English speaker/teacher orientation, the educational institutions still perpetuate the hegemony of native speakers as the ideal model in English within online platforms.

Keywords: Online discourse, expertise, language course, native English teachers, local teachers

## Introduction
In recent years, the online marketing of English language courses in Indonesia has mushroomed with attractive advertisements such as eye-catching images, color schemes, and compelling phrases on their websites. Online visitors are drawn with the rhetorical strategies of the advertisement from their images to texts. In one instance, online visitors are welcomed on the English First course website with an interesting question: "How about learning English from the Expert?" Another site, Golden English, attracts its visitors with the reward of course learning: "Bonus from learning in our English course is talking to our Native Speaker whenever you like." These two online website ads rhetorically lure their online visitors into being their prospective students by promising them the exposure of expert instructors with the image of smiling faces of Caucasians. Thus, the visit becomes a journey for the online visitors in exploring the appealing

services and products of English language courses. The detailed information and visual presentation work as references for online visitors to suit their needs and interest in selecting courses.

How English course ads in online discourse present their rhetorical move on images and texts should not leave uncriticized. Hall (1997) addresses the representation of media as "the way in which meaning is somehow given to the things which are depicted" (p.6). There is a potential that meanings can be distorted and biased prompted by the hidden agenda of the powerful institutions, in this case, language courses as educational institutions, to propagate the ideological meaning of the knowledge to society (Hall, 2006). The rhetoric of English course ads that circulate Caucasian images and compelling narrative of the ideal native English teachers as the expert can potentially create favoritism and unfairness for local English teachers.

Some previous research in ELT revealed the existing social discrimination of professional language instructors not only in the classroom (Ba Doan, 2015; Selvi, 2011) but also in the job recruitment in online platforms (Mahboob, 2010; Ruecker, 2011; Ruecker et al., 2015; Selvi, 2010). This type of online discourse site, such as job recruitment, becomes a new venue to create the dominant ideology of native English teachers as the ideal teacher and contribute to structuring the hierarchy of racial professionalism. As a result, it widens the discrepancy of 'native' competence and image by exhibiting favoritism on native speakers. These studies call for attention among the educational institutions to revisit their discriminatory practice in recruiting teachers. At the other end of the spectrum, there are limited investigations on the representation of English instructors -native English teachers and local teachers-- in the online discourse after they have been recruited from online job recruitment. Thus, this paper aims to extend the previous studies by answering the following questions:

1. What are the attributes indexed to native English teachers and local teachers in English course websites?
2. How do English course websites privilege of discriminate the competence of native English teachers and local teachers?

These questions are to examine the prevalent discussion of the native English teachers' hegemony in the area of ELT and space. Thus, the website becomes a spatial construct where discursive practices interact with the ideological propaganda of the language institution that creates professionalism structures and struggles for local teachers.

### *The production of native English dichotomy*

In the current context of globalization with the celebration of multilingualism, the field of ELT is facing the prevalent fact that the native English speaker or teacher discourse is still replete. The affiliation of nativeness is taken from Eurocentric colonialist ideology, emphasizing native speakers from English-speaking countries who carry standard English and whiteness as a property to make them legitimate speakers of the language (Amin & Kubota, 2004; Ruecker, 2011). Tabouret-Keller (1997) argues that language like English turns to be a trait for the community members. This identification label is given to make boundaries between the in-group members (native speakers) and the out-group (non-native speakers). As a result, it essentializes native speaker identity as unitary and single

with particular linguistic identity and depriving the social world's coexistence (see Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

This production of the language speaker based on nativeness category has created an immense "hierarchy of power and dominance" (Rucker, 2011, p.406), such as the dichotomy of native vs. non-native speakers with the language standard. Although this native speaker ideology has been continuously challenged by scholars (Amin & Kubota, 2004; Cook, 1999, Holliday, 2005; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007), inevitably, for some language institutions, native English teachers still overtly attract the interest of students to learn English. Thus, Rampton (1990) suggests using language expertise as the substitute for nativeness by referring to teachers' professional experiences and backgrounds. Likewise, Cook (1999) advocates the way to view local teachers as the muticompetent teachers who can engage in the first and second language in the classroom.

The optimism of multilingualism enhances the growth of the World Englishes, signifying the hybridization of English varieties (Kachru, 1992) and the use of English as lingua franca in a multilingual and multicultural society (Jenkins, 2014). It is projected that multilingualism creates a pluralistic atmosphere for the users of English varieties equally once overthrowing the monolingual power of language. Paradoxically, Cook (2015) argues that there is not much change in monolingual norms of native speaker practice. Local teachers still suffer from prejudice in their institutional context due to the ideology of English as the language of native English speakers with standard form (Tabouret-Keller, 1997).

Being critical of the romanticism of the notion of multilingualism, Blommaert et al. (2005) argue that "multilingualism is not what individuals have and don't have, but what the environment, as structured determinations and interactional emergence, enables and disables" (p.197). The environment is reinforced and circulated by ideological practice through "any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, along with the knowledge and power they carry" (Foucault, p.64). The education system reflects ideological state apparatus that produces and reproduces ideology like native speakers as dominant ideology throughout education (Althuser, 1977). As a result, the critical discussion to identify the ideological root of the native speaker educational institutions is necessary for any platform, including online ads.

### *The identity construction of native English teachers vs. local teachers in the English course*

The process of identity construction creates a social hierarchy of native English teachers and local teachers in English within courses online. Hall (1997a) suggests that "identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse" as it is" produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices…" (p.17). Space is not a passive background but has an active role to "influence the discursive production of identity" (Keating, 2015) and becomes an "agentive force in sociolinguistic process" (Blommaert et al., 2005). In other words, space actively creates social reality through the power that has been diffused within. Philips (2001) points out that "reality-creating power [like native-speaker ideology] lies in discourse itself so that all of us are dominated by discourse and subordinated to it" (p.191). These typical spaces are run by

institutional apparatus such as language institutions to root ideology in one's mind like students and control their response to submit to this ideology and heighten its power (Althusser, 1971; Blommaert, 2007).

The scale represents the "vertical metaphor of distribution, spread, and flow together hierarchical ordering" framed in indexicality (Bloomaert, 2007, p.1). Indexicality works as the system that reinforces possible lexical labels and yield meaning to the individual (Blommaert et al., 2005). In this process, Bucholtz and Hall argue that "indexicality produces ideology through practice" (p.380) based on signs such as texts and images. The attribution by the scale in the form of indexicality is marked in "meaning, value, structures, characteristics" represented in different spaces like in online ads (Blommaert et al., 2005, p.202). When society perceives this markedness as unmarked norms due to the frequent exposure, power becomes inescapable and invisible. This ideology creates hidden discrimination among different social groups like native English teachers and local teachers (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004).

The indexicality practice frequently appears in online job advertisements (Selvi, 2010). There was a preference for hiring native English teachers over local one, which signifies "power and exclusion" (Hall, p.18). Whiteness and language markers such as accents are the physical properties codified by native speakers as vital features. This practice leads to racial discrimination due to the hierarchy of language teachers (Ruecker, 2011; Sewell, 2016). In addition, the competence of teachers, such as their background, becomes significant property to hire teachers. However, the term of competence turns into a paradox. Competence is reified "whenever one has stepped into a particular space with its regime since competence is relative to scale-based agentive- what is valued and devalued in given environments" (Bloomaert et al., 2005, p.212). Competence is more about how an individual is "being positioned" and nothing about "general or open-ended potential" (Blommaert et al., 2005, p.211). If the environment encounters a competence that does not have structural determinations and interactional purposes, the competence can be overlooked. In a similar vein, English course sites potentially promote professional teachers by essentializing cultural traits such as race and speech community or competences and ignoring the existence of multilingual and multicultural society (Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

## Method

In this study, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the lens to scrutinize the ideological discourse of professional instructors across online platforms. CDA works as a critical paradigm to unravel the hidden ideology and power relations embedded in texts generated by social interactions. The aim of CDA is "analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001, p. 10). Fairclough describes the process of CDA to analyze "the dialectical relationship between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practice" (2001, p.123), which can be practically found in different types of public texts and personal communication.

With the rise of digital media use, the perpetuation of the ideology of native English teachers within online texts is irrefutable. This momentum has extended the attention on CDA methods by Phillips and Hardy (2002) on political speeches, conversations, television programs, non-verbal interaction, symbols, and artifacts

into web text (Gee, 2015) with a potential to influence people's perception of the social reality. However, the influence is based on the ideology rooted in the belief of the educational institutions (Althuser, 1977).

The English course websites discussed in this study are responsible for constructing the image of its language instructors through their display on their websites. In this study, I used google.co.id as the regional search generator in Indonesia to narrow my search and typed the keywords English course and native speakers to navigate some English course websites. I narrowed down my search of English course websites based on the following criteria:

1. The site advertised an English course for Indonesian learners
2. The site consisted of both or either English or Indonesian language
3. The site had information about the teachers or provided hyperlinks to the job requirement
4. The site had images featured as the promotional aspects of the course.

I then came up with a total of twenty websites that offered English courses in several urban cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and Denpasar, for general analysis. Next, I created an initial list of features including name, types of course (international partnership or local), course goal, location, types of teachers offered (native English teachers or local teachers), description of teacher's qualification, and significance of the courses (see appendix 1 for details). I did this process by using WebCorp, as the web corpus program to seek particular terms on the website such as instructor, native speaker, etc. In addition, I did a conventional search and note-taking for each site.

Next, I analyzed the discursive practice through the attributes of language teachers. I then identified the scaling process of instructors' hierarchy (Blommaert, 2005) by viewing how each website promoted their instructors by generating overall trends from those twenty websites. I then chose two particular sites that fulfilled almost all the criteria in my topoi, and I put the foci of my textual analysis to represent my small corpus. Following Phillips and Hardy (2002), who define a text as any various forms including signs, symbols, images, my textual analysis included visual and linguistic representations of each website.

## Findings and Discussion

### *General trends of English teachers*

This study focuses on overall trends in the representation of both native English teachers and local teachers across the twenty sites. The first impression of each website is its layout featuring images and texts to attract online audiences to browse. Based on the preliminary analysis, I drew five topoi: the website's origins, the preference of phonological features, teachers' academic qualification, teachers' character traits, and visual presentation (See appendix 1 for details). Five English courses were in partnerships with various well-established international English courses, while fifteen were nationally found.

Regarding nativeness, only three courses validate local teachers as the main instructors in their course. Being established as an international-based course, some courses like English First employ native English teachers as the main assets because of their phonological features through their accents to attract potential students. As an illustration, English First and AlfaBank courses described that

their courses offer daily use of English with native English teachers making students' pronunciation "perfect." At the same time, the Real English site claims the advantage of native English teachers is to give students an environment "to speak English naturally." The promise to provide a more natural-like environment and native speaker engagement for learning English is the rhetorical move of promoting the courses.

In the light of academic qualifications, interestingly, only nine courses gave detailed information about the qualification of their teachers found in the teachers' profiles or the job vacancy section. The international franchised English courses provided bio and academic qualifications for all their teachers, native English teachers, and local teachers, while some courses left the information unstated. Some courses like Golden English and Wall Street English employed local teachers as language mentors or tutors to accompany native English teachers who featured friendly and adaptive teachers. Bahasa Corner course immersed native English teachers and their teaching approach within cultural discourse through the package of native English teachers in the English Ramadhan program for their Muslim students.

Further, most of the visual presentations by all the course sites promote the anecdotal image of the interaction between Caucasian teachers and either Caucasian students or local students. However, some courses aim to promote their authentic activities in several settings, such as outdoor sites, tourism destinations, or cafes. At the same time, only one course has web texts without any pictures of the instructors.

For the next step, I chose two English course sites with detailed information of qualification and presentation of their teachers through images and texts that inform their language instructors' rhetoric construction. I specifically selected Wall Street English as a language training course and The British Institute as a national language training course because these two courses filled all the categories or topoi of this study.

### *Wall Street English (WSE) and The British Institute (TBI)*

The homepage of the WSE course offered qualified English instructors accompanied by tutors to assist students in learning English. The TBI homepage highlights "English with the best" as their motto, offering Cambridge Teachers Training as the first and only international language certification program in Indonesia.

### *Visual analysis*

In this analysis, visual features are vital to building the discourse of online sites. I examined images from all pages by focusing on the pictures of teachers, students, and class activities depicted on the sites. I excluded images of logos and unrelated pictures for this study. The data shows that the trend of TBI is the inclusion of local teachers in the course. In the section of teachers in TBI sites, there are six photos of mixed Caucasian and local teachers with smiling faces. Also, there are some images of a class setting, showing the class activity of local teachers with local students. Despite the authenticity of teaching instructors, the image of Caucasians with casual and formal suits are covered on this website and mixed pictures of Caucasian and local students. In comparison, WSE has fewer images than TBI (See appendix 2), yet this site provides several animated videos

to give a general overview of this course and its programs. Surprisingly, no authentic pictures of native English teachers are available but only the authentic image of local teachers in the classroom interaction setting.

***Textual analysis***

The section of the instructor in WSE is called "our English expert." With the synopsis of the qualification of the native English teacher. The passage has an appealing sentence, "We hire the best Native level English teachers who love to help you learn!" showing that the native English teachers have the best qualification to be hired in this course. Native English teachers are described as proactive and responsible for the learning process of the students: "They get to know you individually…They see the areas you need support …" This page also enumerates the characteristics of the native English teachers, such as inspirational, effective, fun, and supportive. In contrast, their section of employees on this site focuses on the local employees. There is a testimonial by a local tutor and her picture, stating how happy she was when working to help students achieve their learning goals. However, the details of work as a tutor are found in the "Join WSE" section. The job vacancy for a tutor is described for anyone who "will take full responsibility for all activities in the Speaking Center (Computer Lab) and passionately provide helpful information, motivation and learning support to our students and guests." The tutor role is an essential part of accompanying NEST working individual students with the service called "personalized attention."

Interestingly, TBI provided the informative data of several teachers from different regions in the "Teacher section." The teachers are portrayed as "the credible and certified instructors" with detailed academic backgrounds and professional training and certification along with their research interests. I was intrigued that I found nothing when searching the word "native speaker" in the site's search engine, but it provides the link for hiring native English teachers on the other sites. This fact shows that this site intends to have external recruitment for native English teachers but is prone to give less attention to the advertisement of native English teachers and the benefits of having them as teachers.

**Discussion**

From the general trends of the findings, there is an emerging discrepancy between native English teachers and local teachers marked by their cultural and linguistic markers and professional attributes. The language hegemonic discourse results from historical discourse such as the dichotomy of NESTs and NNESTs that leads to discrimination (Tabouret-Keller, 1997). This dichotomy appears through the labelling for native English teachers and local teachers, setting the boundaries of in-group (native English teachers) and out-group (local teachers). The findings of this study favor the existing preference on native English teachers coming from English-speaking countries to teach in Asian countries (Amin & Kubota, 2004; Mahboob, 2010, Ruecker, 2011). Native speaker teachers are regarded as the investment for the language course as they signify "political and economic hegemony (Althusser, 1971, p.150). The political motives of Native Speaker as the ideal model in a language course is a form of advertising tactic to increase profits by having more consumers or potential students. Therefore, they are interested to learn with native English speakers.

Most sites associate native English teachers with better pronunciation and accent, resulting in a natural environment for English communication. These site findings purposefully ignore any language varieties that local teachers might carry and force the preference for inner-circle varieties of English speech like British and American pronunciations. Blommaert et al. (2005) call this space an "agentive force" to impose a dominant linguistic regime (p.50). This phonological-preference is rooted in linguistic identity with phonological features and particular nationality (Radwanska, 2008). Rampton (1990) argues that an in-born member of a specific cultural group does not automatically make them a proficient language speaker. The membership, including social and familial ties, will change over time and space, and so will language. By maintaining the supremacy of native speakers within the landscape of language courses, there is the naturalization of a linguistic marker and the removal of the language varieties of local teachers (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Sewell, 2016). The linguistic features on the course websites perpetuate the legacy of native English teachers as the privileged group and local teachers as a less privileged group. Despite the multicompetence of local teachers (Cook, 1999), the course sites adhere to native English teachers as the linguistically competent instructors (Tabouret-Keller, 1997).

Expertise, according to Rampton (1990), is a better choice of benchmark in standardizing the qualification of native English teachers and local teachers. The profile of language teachers' qualifications in some courses index the significance of language expertise than nativeness. Bloomaert et al. (2005) argue that expertise or competence is not something universal since it is restricted to a position in particular circumstances and assessed based on the language used. TBI shows that teachers' qualifications are more valuable than racial or linguistic markers because they offer a Cambridge teacher training program to the international community, requiring high-competent teachers. Teachers' certification displayed on its website conveys their academic experiences and competences.

While TBI promotes the qualifications of local professional teachers, WSE clearly indexes the expertise of local teachers and native English teachers. The word "expert" for NEST indexes the hegemony of native speakers as the ideal model of an effective teacher with a good personality. In contrast, the local teachers are positioned with the lower professional rank called "tutor." The words "expert teacher" and "tutor" denote different responsibilities that require other competencies. Apart from the textual description of the native English teachers such as loving, fun, and cooperative, the term expert teacher associates with a group of students in the classroom. On the other hand, a tutor provides a personalized mentorship for an individual or small group and can run a computer lab. Drawing upon Blommaert et al. (2005) argument, a tutor should not be identified as less competent. Competence is "being positioned," and it is not about "general or open-ended potential" in the space, such as online sites (Blommaert et al., 2005, p.211). WSE put little attention to the competence of local tutors with the justification that local tutors can give personalized attention to local students.

Both native English teachers and local teachers are labelled as caring and loving with students. However, native English teachers are explicitly described as adaptive to the local cultures through their immersion in the religious English program. Tabouret-Keller (1997) argues that identity features can be from the adoption and imitation of another person. In this case, native English teachers adopt the local cultures by exchanging cultures and values with the local students.

This representation is a paradox since it overlooks the potential of local teachers as the insiders, who share the same values, and cultures, thus they can quickly assist the students in learning English. Therefore, native English teachers are more privileged than local teachers despite the cultural affiliation they belong.

Some authentic pictures of Caucasian and local teachers interacting with the students depict professional engagement and relations within the courses for the visual presentation. Apart from this, the anecdotal Caucasian images in the sites produce and reproduce the association of English and the Caucasian race. It is very intriguing to find the image of Caucasian teacher-students interaction to polish the websites, although the class is for Indonesian students. This visual presentation illustrates native English teachers as the centre of the imagined community offered to prospective students once they join the course. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) call this representation an unmarked sign of the naturalization of racial discrimination. Ruecker (2011) emphasizes that discrimination and native speaker hegemony works hand-in-hand "if they are constantly reinforced through daily discourse [such as fixed images of anecdotal Caucasian images] that make them seem natural, increasing their power through making them invisible and less likely to be challenged." (p.407). The appearance of images, together with the appealing texts, sustain the ideological production of native English teachers as the ideal instructors in ELT.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, I have come up with several points of conclusion. First, the advertisement of language course sites contributes to ideological production and reproduction of native English teachers as the better investment over local teachers. Second, the process of indexicality through texts and images in the course sites evokes the social reality of discrimination within institutions and online discourse. Third, it is essential for further study to critically explore for prevailing ideology of native English teachers which continually emphasizes on races and phonological features by aiming to expand any anti-discrimination of native English teachers and local teachers in online platforms.

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