

## **ENGLISH SPEAKING PRACTICE IN PUBLIC PLACES: IS IT SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE OR AN ACT OF COCKINESS?**

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**Abstract:** As Indonesian people whose mother tongue is not English, we seldom use this foreign language for our daily communication. Its usage is confined within the walls of our classrooms in which this language may find its way to be recognized by the students. Under those circumstances, it is not surprising that English is rarely spoken on our streets or in any other public places. This kind of attitude, daring to use a foreign language in a place where all the other people do not use them, is sometimes met with unsympathetic glances or unfriendly stares. This may cause those energetic learners of English to think twice to use this language orally in public places. They are afraid of being mocked, ridiculed, or even considered snobs. This condition will lead to their losing courage to apply the theoretical English they have learned in their classes to the real contexts that may include those public places. This paper is, therefore, made to include a small research to investigate if this kind of discomfort and fear is unfounded. The research proves that most people do not object to hearing English spoken by other people of their own race or nationality on their streets or public places as long as these speakers can keep to normal level of loudness and appropriateness of speech and behavior.

**Key words:** socially acceptable, cockiness, mother tongue, foreign language, snobs, appropriateness of speech

No one would deny the significance of English and its fame throughout this country nowadays. It has been continually taught from the very early levels of education to the highest ones like universities. Experts on education are competing to find the best methods of teaching English and these methods have been tried out at schools, discussed among teachers, debated among educational practitioners, and constantly researched by other scholars to produce a variety of techniques to get people to communicatively use this language. All of this is making sense since English is considered an international means of communication. With that in mind, we would definitely not want to confine ourselves to a mere social interaction among ourselves within the scope of Indonesian territories. Getting ourselves deprived of the chances of international involvement is such an act of ignorance and unreasonable stupidity in this globalization era. Therefore, to embrace the future where boundaries among countries have begun to evaporate, people are racing to enrich themselves with communicative skills where English is placed in such a respectable position. Being able to speak English is not only thought to be advantageous, but it will also bring prestige to those capable of using it.

However, in a country like ours where English ranks the first in popularity among other foreign languages, we are not surrounded by it twenty-four hours a day. No one would wake up in the morning and find himself drowned in unceasing chatters in English unless he is the native speaker of English himself who happens to be living in Indonesia with his English family, for instance. Besides, how many percentage of news in English is aired on Indonesian television or printed in Indonesian newspapers? How many English movies shown on our national television for entertainment purposes without Indonesian subtitles? It does not take a genius to answer those questions because basically we are all well-informed of such data

through our daily lives of living in this technological era. Owing to that, we shall all agree on one thing that English, inspite of its popularity, is still deemed a foreign language in our country.

Another perspective reveals that English is right in the middle of two big poles of contradictory interest. One views it rather negatively as being an Indonesian language competitor and the other insists it be utilized for wider practical communicative purposes. One is inclined to fence off the incessant domination of English by labelling it as a “foreign” language which reflects no acknowledgement of its relationship to our identity while quite on the other line, the other makes every possible effort to make this language part of their lives. It is not rare that we find people mocking others who speak English as being westernized, but it is also not a seldom case that we come across those who would watch over their little children with bright eyes when their young ones speak English much more fluently than they do in their own native language.

This paper is, therefore, trying to bring up the issue on English speaking practice, especially when it is brought out to public places. Will it be considered rude or arrogant to speak English while all the other people around us do not use it? Will they accept this unusualness, or quite the opposite, show a sinical smile on their faces? Many more questions are yet to come and this paper has been written to discuss them. In addition, this paper will also share some information on how to improve our speaking ability for a start.

## **ENGLISH SPEAKING PRACTICE**

The following things are crucial to remember before you even think about getting others to practise speaking English with you, in public or in private (English, baby!, 2008:1):

### **Diction and Word Choice**

Words of English are so various that it is sometimes hard to memorize them all, especially those with almost similar meanings. To overcome the difficulties of imprinting them on our memory, it is suggested that we expose them to use as often as possible. Make sure that the pronunciation is right to avoid fossilisation:

1. Find out which vocabulary and constructions are most suitable for you for practical use. Ten new words daily would be a good choice to put into practice.
2. Use and practise them in real situations through the conversations you are conducting with as many people as possible around you. Your fluency of using the words depends so much on the frequency of you using them. Six times at least in using the new words will put you to a fruitful effect. This will build your spontaneity in using them naturally later. Remember! Fluency is not all about speed, but it is accuracy with good pronunciation.

### **The More Accurate the Speech Is, the Clearer the Meanings Will Become**

English learners often complain about English constructions which are numourous in number and therefore they end up confusing them or mixing them up in speech. Their reasoning would be, when being asked, that it is the meaning that matters, not so much the structure. However, it may not slip off our mind that English structure gives a great deal of contribution to the meanings as well. Without a good management of word-order, English sentences or sentences in any other languages may not be able to deliver their messages:

1. Choose the right expressions for the right contexts

Even English people will not use all their phrases and words to describe a certain situation. They tend to be utilizing phrases they are accustomed to based on the situation they are in at the moment of speaking. It is a must to remember that eventhough there are thousands of English expressions which are alike on the surface, the inner meanings may vary to the extent that they contradict the literal meanings. With the richness of English expressions, we choose the right one for our present condition and store the others for recognition purposes only.

2. Avoid Pitfalls

Some words are subject to modification in use and it applies greatly in English. Unless you are exposed to frequent use of English, you will find it hard to get their distinctions. To avoid wrong use of certain expressions, try to choose the best English for universal speaking purposes. This will help to eliminate misunderstanding during conversation.

3. Use Correct Grammar

Grammar is not merely concerning the management of words all the time. Its functions go deeper to the implied meaning represented by verb-forms. Your fluency in speaking is not just the matter of how many words you can utter per minute but it is also strongly related to you putting your words in correct order and using your verb-forms properly.

4. Be careful with your pronunciation

Differences in pronunciation are the major cause of troubles faced by non-native speakers of English when it comes to pronouncing English words. Besides, A few cases where there is no equivalent sound involved make the English learners have to work hard with positioning the tip of their tongues to produce sounds unfamiliar to them. This takes some getting used to and extra time to practise. For instance, in Indonesian language there is no such sounds as thin, then, genre, ship, bad, fur, etc. Mispronunciation can be the cause of misunderstanding.

### **Overcoming Fear of Speaking English**

You could never start practising your English anywhere if you were too afraid to speak in English. Even if you were good at writing, this proficiency would not guarantee your speaking performance. The following strategy may help overcome the fear (Amal, 2011, p.1):

1. Try to speak more slowly!

As foreign English speakers, we tend to believe that matching the speed of native speakers' uttering their sentences is a sign of fluency. In fact, it may result in our making a lot of mistakes. Realizing this, we may become even more afraid and begin to stumble over words. It is very suggestible that you take a deep breath when the fear comes before a conversation, then refrain from making yourself sound like a speeding train. Just be slow but careful in choosing your words. If the previous does not really work, then:

2. Have positive Image of your ability!

If you begin to feel butterflies in your stomach, change your way of thinking. Leave all your fears behind and start the conversation. Convince yourself many times that even you make mistakes you will get nothing to lose. You will not care about what people think because you have already known that your English is fluent. Others who think the opposite are not relevant to you. If that still does not work, try the following:

3. Speed up a little bit.

This is quite the opposite to technique 1. The fear that comes to you may be triggered by the fact that you speak too slowly because you are analysing your sentences too much while speaking. This may also result in you making mistakes because of being too careful with your sentence management instead of the ideas. Pronunciation can be an obstacle too if you worry about it too much. Just relax when you pronounce your words because this will lead to the perfection of your pronunciation. Of course this would only be possible if you gave it a lot of practice in advance.

Being quite familiar with the techniques presented above, we have eliminated the possibility of being laughed at when speaking English in public places. As for how English is viewed and treated in our country, the following information can serve to provide the answer on which we may proceed with the possible responses to the question raised in the title of this paper.

## **ENGLISH IN INDONESIA**

- **Being Viewed As a Symbol of Advancement**

There are five factors that make English worth learning, especially in our country as cited in Lauder (2008, p.1):

1. Its internal linguistic features.
2. The large number of English speakers..
3. The wide geographical spread of where it is used.
4. Its importance in fields such as politics, international diplomacy, economics and business, science and technology, and culture.
5. The use of English by countries which currently dominate world affairs economically, politically and culturally.

English has a lot of words in its vocabulary. These words are the precise representative of the objects, materials, or technological things which may not have the exact equivalents in other languages like Indonesian. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise if a lot of Indonesian words are borrowed from this language. A brief survey of the historical and current status of English in Indonesia as written in Wiley Online Library (2007, p.1) reveals that English has few intranational functions as a dominant code of discourse in Indonesia. However, analysis of data from several sources demonstrates that English is nonetheless having a significant impact on language use, particularly through lexico-semantic and pragmatic contributions to Bahasa Indonesia, the widely spoken national and official

language. In complementary distribution with borrowings from other foreign languages, especially Sanskrit, English lexical items are officially or ‘spontaneously’ borrowed for use in specific domains. These borrowings are often semantically extended, restricted, or totally shifted to provide new registers for Bahasa Indonesia, to foreground a modern identity for educated urbanites and for those who aspire to be like them, and to express or neutralize new values and behavior patterns in Indonesia's rapidly modernizing society. Therefore, English is entitled to the respected position as the most influential language with its biggest contribution to Indonesian language.

To add to the positive image of this foreign language, it is estimated that there are 500 million people whose mother tongue is English and about 900 million to 1 billion total English speakers. (Answer.com, 2011, p.1). With all those strengths of English, it would be such a shame if a developing country like ours should lack of people with a good command in English. In other words, we shall be able to use English on the international level of communication. However, there is always the opposite of everything. Despite English having millions of admirers, some people tend to view English as a potential threat. We shall discuss this a little bit more deeply due to the novelty of the issue.

- **Being Viewed as a Threat to Advancement**

The term advancement here does not refer to the development of technology, but rather to a sense of nationality or patriotism. According to The Jakarta Post (2012, p.1), there has been a widespread belief that the enthusiasm to learn English, especially in big cities, might correlate to low nationalism. Those who speak English or code-switch between Indonesian and English are deemed to have a relatively lower nationalism than those who only speak Indonesian.

Logically, the above statement reveals some element of truth when related to our daily simple lives. A sign of affection can manifest in the form of strong attachment to the object being cared for, or there is an inclination towards making the object as part of our identity. This great enthusiasm of trying to use English in many aspects of lives is feared to induce the growth of excessive love towards another culture which basically is not ours. Besides, the new focus on character education for elementary school students also shows fear that exposure to English might adversely affect the characters of young Indonesian learners.

In line with that, the exposure of English on the young learners may result in less appreciation in our own language. The New York Times (2010, p.1) reports that Indonesia's linguistic legacy is increasingly under threat as growing numbers of wealthy and upper-middle-class families shun public schools where Indonesian remains the main language but English is often taught poorly. They are turning, instead, to private schools that focus on English and devote little time, if any, to Indonesian.

Not only that, there is another fear that English might have caught people's attention all for the wrong unrealistic reasons. Under such circumstances, Indonesian may suffer reduction to the level of second-class language in its own home. The New York Times (2010, p.1) has clearly reported that for some Indonesians, as mastery of English has become increasingly tied to social standing, Indonesian has been relegated to second-class status. In extreme cases, people take pride in speaking Indonesian poorly. This is bad news to the image of Indonesian language.

Catching the signs of a probable decrease in nationalism in this country, the Ministry of Education and Culture now wants all primary schools to remove not only English, but also

science and social studies subjects, in favor of lessons on religion, nationalism and Bahasa Indonesia from the next school year beginning in July. The new curriculum that is being revamped will offer English as a subject only from junior high school level (Jakarta Globe, 2012, p.1). This idea is supported by Deputy Education Minister who reasons as follows:

"It is too early to teach such hard subjects to the pupils. Elementary schools won't have English lessons because [pupils] haven't even learnt to understand the Indonesian language yet. Now, even some kindergarten pupils take English courses. I pity the kids," (Jakarta Globe, 2012, p.1)

With all the growing concern over a loss of "motherland-loving attitude" and the worry over the students being bombarded by too much English, there leaves this question: Is it wrong, then, to speak English in public places?

### **SPEAKING ENGLISH IN PUBLIC PLACES**

The writer is intrigued to know what the public think of others who physically are pure Indonesian but are found speaking English in public places. A true case below of a girl feeling uncomfortable receiving sharp glances from her surrounding when conversing in English is worth observing and discussing. Are Indonesian people so much in love with their own language that they consider speaking foreign languages in public places an undesirable attitude? Is their feeling of nationalism and patriotism disturbed by such practice? Or, to make it short, are they just jealous? That is why the writer feels the need of conducting a small research online with respondents on the internet where people would feel free to express themselves.

#### **The True Case**

When the writer surfed on the internet, he came across the following case which matches his interest. This is the actual wording of a girl perturbed by unsympathetic glances from others when she speaks English in a public place. A little revision on the structure has been made to suit the academic purpose of writing.

"Everytime I go to public places with my parents or my friends or when I am on the phone, people will stare. I don't know? Is it wrong or something? I just wanted to improve my English. No offense to nationalism or something. I know my English is not perfect since it's not my mother tongue, but what's with the stare? It feels uncomfortable! And I didn't talk to them, did I bother them by speaking in English with the persons who get used to it (I.E; my parents, close friends, boyfriend etc)? I know my face's so asian but that doesn't mean I should speak in my mother tongue all the time. And I think maybe here it's rude to speak in foreign languages.. But English seems like a common language at all and everyone should understand it. It doesn't mean I'm talking bad or something.." (Kaskus, 2010, p.1)

If you happened to be the one standing within arm-length from the girl, how would you react? Would you turn a sour face to the girl or would you just pretend not to care while in reality you were eavesdropping on every single word she was saying? Or maybe you would

just take off in disgust because you thought it was impudent to dare to speak English in public places if one's English was still below standard or one's skin does not even come close in the color to the Englishmen. Reactions can vary but still, there is no rule that prohibits people from doing so. It means that the girl in question is not to be blamed and she had every right to do what she did in her own private conversation. The followings are some relevant responses to the girl's outpour of complaint (Kaskus, 2010, p.1):

“Indonesian is a country with a lot traditions. Some people will find you cocky or arrogant when you speak in English, and because of that, whether you like it or not, we must speak English only in the right places and in the right situation, until English becomes the main language too, in Indonesia”

This response clearly shows objection to the use of English in public places. Nationality seems to be the reason. If there have been so many local languages in our country, why do we still have to cram it in with another language which bears no cultural background with us or have no relationship whatsoever with our heredity? Put English to the places where it belongs, English classes, English courses, English institutions or places of that sort where speaking English is required. We may go about filling the air with English words if English has managed to become our second language in this country, not a foreign language the way it is now. That is what the respondent above has in mind in response to the girl's complaint. Another goes as follows:

“I do stare at people who speak English in public places. But my staring is not to offend someone, just to fulfill my curiosity and to admire them. But sometimes, some people do annoy me, especially people who speak too loudly as if they want to show the entire world that they can speak English so fluently.”

The second respondent sounds a little bit more moderate in his opinion. For him, it is fine to use the foreign language even in public places, but there should be a limit to the level of loudness. Otherwise, the label of being arrogant will be attached to us as if we were the only persons with excellent English proficiency, if mediocre is too rude a word to say the least.

“Yes, you'll annoy people by speaking English in public places. Why? Because you are in Indonesia! in fact, you are an Indonesian. It's okay if you want to improve your English, the problem is...people have started to think to reduce the frequency of speaking in English to preserve our mother tongue! I'm sure that you do notice that many kids nowadays speak with their parents in English. and people start to think that this is the time to make changes. Make sure that English is like a 2<sup>nd</sup> language but on the other hand, make sure that our Indonesian language is still the only national language. so please..stop whining. think a bit more about your country! PS: do choose your place and time wisely if you need/want to talk in English, anyway”

This third response bears similarity to the first one; it is only much more stronger in terms of its disagreement, choice of words, and reasoning. At the beginning of his utterances, this respondent directly jumps to conclusions by telling us that people will get annoyed

having to hear English being spoken in public places by Indonesian people. He feels the threat of English to Indonesian language and he thinks that our language needs preserving as if it were in some kind of danger or very close to being extinct. However, no matter what the true fact is, we have so far come up with two rejections on speaking English in public places. Let us see what the others have in store.

I think it is still a common view that speaking English in public is considered cockiness. but here's another point of view. I think people who are not familiar with English will have higher chances of doing the staring. because maybe, they're simply curious and they're just not used to it (just pointing out another possibility). I can say that because I once did stare at two people who spoke in Mandarin. didn't really stare though, but I paid really close attention to what they were saying (although I couldn't understand a word hahahh). I was just curious and fascinated though.

There is some sense of friendliness and permissiveness in the above response. Although the respondent has the assumption that people in general consider it cocky to speak in public places while he may never have done the research himself, he still views that kind of activity with positive attitude. According to him, staring is nothing more than just a sign of curiosity and it is usually done by people who do not know English. So, there is no hard feeling involved.

From the responses above, we can draw a preliminary conclusion that speaking English in public places is still not met with enthusiasm or is encouraged in any way. However, the writer will go on finding more opinions on the site until the total number of respondents reaches 100. From there, the writer will make percentage of opinions on the basis of whether or not speaking English in public places is acceptable or if it is even considered an act of arrogance.

## **CONDUCTING A RESEARCH**

In order to find out if people are really uncomfortable about others speaking English around them, the writer has conducted a small research. The population consists of 100 persons who posted their opinions about the matter on the internet, or in the forum, to be specific. The age and sex do not really matter as we may just come across many kinds of people of different ages or professions on the streets.

In comparison to handing out questionnaires, using online source has more benefits. People are free to express themselves at any time in their own convenience because they are not required to give out their real names. They write out ideas and post them whenever they want to without feeling forced. As for the source of information, *Kaskus* has become the choice of online medium for collecting the data with a reason that It is an Indonesian internet forum site with the largest Indonesian online community. It ranks as the top 10 most popular website in Indonesia (Kaskus, 2013, p.1).

The writer wanted to know if English speaking practice in public places was socially acceptable or considered an act of cockiness. The data were classified into six categories labelled as 'agree with a condition', 'agree', 'strongly agree', 'abstain', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. Each of the classification has the following characteristics:

1. Agree with a condition  
It means that the respondents agree with the act of practising or speaking English in public places as long as that person speaks with moderate volume to avoid disturbing others or attracting attention.
2. Agree  
It means the respondent just writes that he/she agrees without providing significant reasons why he/she should allow such an act in public.
3. Strongly agree  
This goes to those who elaborate their reasons why speaking English in public places should not be considered cockiness. They also encourage others to keep on doing this and ignore any stare given to them.
4. Abstain  
These people really do not care if you speak whatever languages you need to or if you would rather not speak any languages at all.
5. Disagree  
This group of people cannot tolerate conversation in English in public places and label the people who do that as arrogant, showing off, or simply insensitive.
6. Strongly disagree  
This place is given to those with strong opinions, if not accusations, that speaking English in public places is a sign of the weakening of patriotism and the lack of spirit of nationalism.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Look at the following table.

1	2	3	4	5	6	Classification
45	12	8	2	25	8	Number of participants
45%	12%	8%	2%	25%	8%	

From the data above we can definitely say that speaking English in public places is fine as long as you do not disturb others with the volume of your voice. This is an era of globalisation, so speaking a foreign language would be quite in tune with the spirit of modern era. 12 respondents do not give much of their opinion but basically they do not mind as long as others mind their own business. 8 respondents find it necessary to practise English as much as possible, even in public places. They think that others who are staring are just jealous because they do not have the capability to speak English themselves. We also notice that two of the respondents are abstain. 25 are against speaking English in public places and consider those who do that as snobs. The other 8 go extreme by pointing out that those people have no sense of nationalism and love other cultures more than their own.

**CONCLUSION**

It is not a crime to practise speaking English in public places. You can do that in the malls, restaurants, on the street, or even in the waiting-room with your friends. The more you practise, the better it will be. As long as you apply the right method, you are bound to get a

success. However, you should be wise and more discreet in handling such things as social values and norms. You could not expect others to be very happy when their ears are filled with such high-pitched tones in a foreign language coming out of your mouth. You would not think that others would consider you very agreeable in manner when they could not even hear their own voices since yours dominates the air. Everything happens for a reason and it should be the reasonable one.

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