The articles presented in this book bring together educators' work and experiences from various teaching contexts (Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, and Australia) in the teaching English in EFL contexts. This publication, therefore, offers the richness and diversity of contexts and experiences to the readers. What sets this book apart from existing books is its balance between and explicit coverage of both research, theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. This project has been prompted by the increasing split between the fields of linguistics, literatures and English language teaching. The book will uniquely address this gap. Additionally, the book gives practical classroom applications on how to use theories of linguistics and literary texts in the classrooms.

This book provides undergraduate and graduate students, teacher-learners and practicing teachers, and teacher educators some theoretical and contextual knowledge of English language teaching practice and setting. Articles in this book can be used as supplementary texts for courses in the area of English Language Teaching, pre-service and in-service teacher education, applied linguistics, literature, and language and culture studies.

Nugrahenny T. Zacharias is an English teacher at the Faculty of Language and Literature, Satya Wacana Christian University, Indonesia. He has recently completed her PhD in Composition and TESOL from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include issues in teacher identities and World Englishes and the use of World English literature in teaching English.

Christine Manara has been an English Language Teacher for 10 years in Indonesia. She earned her MA degree in English Language Teaching from the IEU Assumption University, Bangkok. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation on teacher education at the Monash University, Australia. Her research interests include teaching methodologies, teachers’ professional learning and identity, and the use of literature in English Language Teaching.

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BRINGING LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS INTO EFL CLASSROOM
Insights from Research and Classroom Practice

Edited by
Nugrahenny T. Zacharias and Christine Manara
Bringing Literature and Linguistics into EFL Classroom: Insights from Research and Classroom Practice

Edited by

Nugrahenny T. Zacharias and Christine Manara
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CHAPTER TWELVE

PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM IN SOME CRITICAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE STUDIES

JOSEPH ERNEST MAMBU

Introduction

I was fortunate to have talked to my undergraduate student Adi Pratama who recently raised my awareness of the main difference between post-theories and “traditional” critical theory. While the former is overall pessimistic, the latter is relatively more optimistic. Typical of post-theories (postmodernism, in particular) is the tendency of relativizing things and rejecting a single, absolute “truth”. Concerning agendas of social change established by the optimistic critical theory, Adi Pratama suggests, postmodernism tends to turn down such optimism.

That said, postmodernist tenets have been pervasive in the works of scholars of general education or TESOL embracing beliefs in critical theory (e.g., Giroux, 1983; Janks, 2010; Kanpol, 1999; Lin, 1999; Mambu, 2010; Pennycook, 2004). The questions are whether (1) the pessimistic postmodernism is at all interfacing with the optimistic critical theory, and (2) the two are mutually exclusive. In particular, Janks (2010) and Pennycook (2004) seem to concur with the first. On the one hand, they are optimistic about the spread of critical approaches to language studies. On the other hand, they are pessimistic that critical approaches to language studies are at their final forms, resistant to further criticisms/problematisations/deconstructions/re-desings. In the following sections, optimism and pessimism are viewed through Janks’s and Pennycook’s lenses of Critical Literacy and Critical Applied Linguistics respectively and my own interpretations of their ideas in light of other critical approaches.
Jank’s Critical Literacy: Cognitive, optimism, bodily and affective pessimism as well as optimism

Janks (2010) with her interdependent theory incorporating notions of “domination”, “access”, “diversity”, and “design” has optimistically set the tone for research agendas in the field of critical literacy (see her chapter 2, in particular). The theory is optimistic as it allows scholars to have a better framework to inquire into issues of, (1) oppressions through and (a) domination by powerful groups in societies (cf. Freire, 1970), (b) lack of access to quality education, (c) ignorance about the fact that our society is so diverse that it cannot always be forced to comply with a dominant group’s wishes, and (2) designing better alternatives of (a) viewing the world in order to attain justice and (b) actualizing the justice through legal advocacy – to name but a few.

Interestingly, Janks (2010) provides some room for pessimism. While at the cognitive level people can be very critical, their critical thinking is at times at odds with their bodily (or, from a Christian perspective, “carnal”) desires (see Jank’s last chapter). It is much easier for some men, I think, to banish pornography on the grounds that it exploits women sexually, to the chagrin of feminists. It is the same men, however, that at times surreptitiously browse through porn websites to satisfy their unbearably resilient sexual desires or exchange sexist jokes with fellow men. Furthermore, citing Weber’s study, Janks reports that some feminist teachers were upset and pessimistic when their female students could optimistically show their feminism that vehemently opposed patriarchal values on the one hand but their desire remained to have slim and good-looking appearances typical of female models on the sexist advertisements these students attempted to deconstruct critically. In other words, from Jank’s perspective, identification with slender and beautiful model-like bodies is still pervasive even among many women involved in deconstructing patriarchy. As Janks succinctly puts it, “[w]here identification [with favorite models] promises the fulfillment of [these female students’] desire, reason cannot compete” (p. 212), despite cognitively critical, deconstructive reading of sexist advertisements.

How can humans (men, especially) live with these two contradictory forces: feminist optimism and “carnal” pessimism? This question is certainly too big for me but as far as language studies are concerned, we can explore humans’ paradoxical ways of thinking and behaving through examining specific discourse patterns that show ironies in (1) literary works (e.g., a British author Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel entitled Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and a Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel
like *The Double*¹), (2) religious texts (e.g., my discourse analysis of ex-paranormals claiming to have been converted to Christianity – see Mambu, 2009²), and (3) pre- or in-service EFL teachers’ narratives that comprise “inconsistent” stories: juggling idealism (or optimism about certain beliefs like Critical Pedagogy or Communicative Language Teaching) and pessimistic reality (e.g., hectic schedule, conflicts with friends, spouses, or relatives, etc. that prevent them from implementing their idealism). Why bother exploring these issues through the discourse lens? As a discourse analyst I am challenged to know how human beings express their cognitive and affective (or emotional) capacities in living their lives. In turn, more down-to-earth, day-to-day issues emerge and are worth discussing in language classrooms, e.g., humans’ hypocrisy, honesty, integrity, double-mindedness, face- or image-saving strategies in ordinary people’s and public figures’ lives, and pessimism as well as optimism.

Apart from sexually-oriented, bodily pessimism that seems to overcome cognitive optimism as illustrated above in Weber’s study, Janks (2010) implies that blissfulness beyond reason signifies some sense of optimism. Quintessentially, Janks (2010) makes a distinction between “desire” and “pleasure”.³ As she puts it: “While desire can consume us, pleasure can renew us. Critical literacy work in classrooms can be simultaneously serious and playful. We should teach it with a subversive attitude, self-irony and a sense of humour” (p. 224). As she also suggests, “[s]ocial action can take the form of parody, satire and caricature” (p. 220).

Humors are beneficial to our students regardless of age. Combining some degree of cognitively oriented critical literacy and affective pleasure,

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¹ On the back cover of Dostoyevsky’s (1972) English translation of *The Double*, Penguin Classics comments: “…in *The Double* … a government clerk encounters a man who exactly resembles him – his double, perhaps, or possible the darker side of his own personality”.

² One ex-paranormal’s discourse raises my pessimism about his true conversion. For example, claiming to believe only in Jesus Christ, the ex-paranormal kept referring to his non-Christian, shamanistic grandfather’s message to follow “The Light” and renounce his psychic inclination after seeing “The Light”.

³ Research on the link between language and desire (e.g., through their metaphors; see Deignan, 1997) has shown us that “desire” is often associated with negative attributes (e.g., “Desire is pain, … illness, … madness, … [with] the experiencer of [it being] an animal” [pp. 28-32]), although some desires are positive (“clean” or “healthy”; pp. 36-39). To me desire is neutral but it raises its negativity leading to “pessimism” when an optimistically cognitive belief in feminism against patriarchy is in opposition to bodily identification with some female celebrities’ “sexy” bodies, which I mentioned earlier.
I remember exemplifying how to make a humorous introductory paragraph for an expository-argumentative essay in my Academic Writing course in the Faculty of Language and Literature, Satya Wacana Christian University, last October 15th, 2010:

The former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (a.k.a Gus Dur) once stated on a TV show hosted by Jaya Suprana that all Indonesian presidents have their own lunacy. To begin with, President Soekarno, our first president, was crazy about women. Soeharto, Soekarno’s successor, was crazy about wealth. The third president Habibie was crazy about developing airplanes. Regarding his own self, Gus Dur thought of himself as crazy indeed. The history goes on beyond Gus Dur. From my perspective, the next president, Megawati Soekarnoputri has her own craziness: she was crazy about shouting “Merdeka!” [Liberty!] in many of her speeches. Our present president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), has been deemed crazy about preserving his good image in front of the public. SBY may neither be a flamboyant playboy like Soekarno, nor an ardent treasurer hunt like Soeharto, nor a techno-mania like Habibie, nor a highly impulsive president like Gus Dur, nor a female president lavishing on “Liberty” shouting but very quiet in many occasions. Despite more than 60% support from the Indonesian people as confirmed by the 2009 direct presidential election, SBY has an obvious weakness: he has been too much concerned about his image. In this essay, I would like to discuss (1) in what ways SBY usually attempts to build and maintain his good image during his presidency since 2004 to date, (2) how his politics of image has failed him, and (3) what he should do in order to survive well until 2014.

My example is certainly not final. My students and I are still able to revise or edit this written discourse. In fact, I have edited the 15-October first draft. Anyway, my point is how readers of my paragraph are supposedly forced to get attracted to the humor shared among Indonesians before I become “serious” again as reflected in the last sentence – the “thesis statement” of the essay – where I try to be balanced: pessimistic about his persistent image-saving politics and optimistic about his presidency notwithstanding people’s vehement opposition to him. Besides that, exploring jokes relevant to the Indonesian context is oftentimes more meaningful, especially to our Indonesian students learning English, than if we use many Western humors. In so doing, I practice Janks’s (2010) call for “subversive attitudes” through jokes. This was not safe during Soeharto’s presidency but Gus Dur ever since he was still a president in
1999 has set the tone for his people to make political satires in a fruitful – albeit controversial – manner.  

**Pennycook’s critical applied linguistics: Pessimism and optimism in problematizing practices**

While Hillary Janks (2010) has shared her considerable optimism in the cognitively oriented domination-access-diversity-design framework and a hint of pessimism as well as optimism through humans’ emotional and bodily desires or pleasures, Alastair Pennycook (2004) implies such optimism-pessimism interface in some other subtle ways. Emphasizing on “problematizing practices” in Critical Applied Linguistics, he views things in a much more postmodernist way than that of Janks. In other words, problematizing practices are relatively more pessimistic, on the whole. However, it may be optimistic in some parts of their applications. Following Pennycook, the unfolding discussion will touch upon the goal, politics, theoretical bases, focus of analysis, and weaknesses of problematizing practices.

**Engagement with difference: Pessimism about single-minded orthodoxy, optimism about diversity**

The goal of problematizing practices is “engagement with difference” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 798). The process of engaging educators with activities that celebrate diversity may be optimistically intriguing. However, Pennycook hints to the notion that educators are not pushy by imposing his own beliefs on students’ (or colleagues) lives from diverse racial, social, educational, or cultural backgrounds. This is certainly a pessimistic stance compared to “emancipators” from dogmatic (“conservative, evangelical”) Christians who are more (or too) optimistic in their agendas to convert the world from their one-sided perspective. But the degree of optimism is still there: Pennycook’s (and like-minded people’s) confidence in his/their good standing perceives righteousness as no so much as imposing one’s own beliefs than giving options for people to choose. Some other options are provided by politics that inspire problematizing practices.

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4 And I do hope we are still able to enjoy this freedom of expression – thanks to the “Reformation Era” starting in 1998 – in many years to come in Indonesia.
The case of feminism: Pessimism about naïve feminism, optimism about problematizing naïve feminism

The politics of problematizing practices is enriched by “feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, etc.” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 798) that somewhat optimistically challenge rigid patriarchy, colonialist mentality, and homophobia (extreme fear to homosexual people), among others. Let me focus on feminism here. Pessimism is shown by problematizing certain feminist frameworks that “approach men and women as… unitary groups” thus “obscur[ing] oppression in terms of class and race…” (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 54). Some feminists may be trapped in thinking of men as oppressors and women as the oppressed. While it may be true worldwide that a lot of women are oppressed by the patriarchal system, problematizing practices also encourage us to deconstruct an over-simplistic thinking that only women are oppressed and only men are the ultimate culprits. In reality, many men have been oppressed by women, either because wives are too dominant in their families that their husbands “shrink back” in trepidation or women are “mean” bosses in professional realms. Besides that, many women have been oppressed by fellow women. Recall how homemakers have tortured their maidservants physically or verbally, starting from a biblical story of Sarah and Hagar in the book of Genesis, not to mention Indonesian female workers abroad who are abused by housewives. Exploring how naïve feminism is critically deconstructed in a way boosts some degree of optimism for critical applied linguists who zealously yearn for constant problematizations.

Pessimism and optimism when dealing with post-occidentalism and anarcho-particularism

Close to politics, the theoretical bases for Pennycook’s (2004) problematizing practices are “post-occidentalism” and “anarcho-particularism” (p. 798). The former is similar to postcolonialism in that it attempts to go beyond the “Western” or former colonialists’ biases in viewing the world. There is an optimistic turn to the “non-Western” world from Africa, Latin America, and many Asian countries. Regarding anarcho-particularism, Pennycook further elucidates that it keeps questioning what is meant and maintained by many of the everyday categories of applied linguistics – language, learning, communication, difference, context, text, culture, meaning, translation, writing, literacy,
assessment – as well as categories of social critique – ideology, race, gender, class, and so on. (p. 800)

Similar to the politics of problematizing practices that deconstruct naïve feminism – an issue in gender, anarcho-particularism optimistically and vigorously addresses many questions regarding things listed by Pennycook above and beyond. For example, is democracy a panacea? Why democracy and not theocracy? Assuming democracy is used, whose definitions of democracy are we using in Indonesia? The “Western” or “Occidental” democracy? The Soekarno’s “Guided Democracy”? The Soeharto’s “Pancasila (Five national principles) Democracy”? These are anarchist and subversive questions, and one may wonder pessimistically if they are in any way useful to our language learners. Yes, when they are interested in exploring political issues. If not, anarchist thinking may be channeled through writing pensively in a language other than the students’ first language, just like what I am doing now, on issues they like to engage with, to be shared among themselves or to teachers who are committed to suspending harsh judgment and prejudice. This is how language teachers optimistically accommodate students’ pessimistic views of the world around them expressed in a foreign language like English. It all depends on them whether their pessimism may turn to optimism, when they find solutions to problems, or to more robust pessimism, when their optimism faces insurmountable hurdles that discourage them from continuing on being optimistic, especially when it comes to making a better world through emancipatory actions typically endorsed by “more traditional” Critical Pedagogy and Literacy. At this phase, we cannot force our students to keep their enthusiasm. At least, we have given them options to view the world more critically (or anarchically) and we have challenged them to share critical applied linguists’ optimistic passion in problematizing many of the givens or taken-for-granted things.

**Pessimism and optimism implicated in discursive mapping: Janks revisited**

Focus of analysis in problematizing practices involves “[d]iscursive mapping, resistance and appropriation…” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 798). These concepts are not clearly explained by Pennycook himself in the article but let me clarify them from my understanding. Discursive mapping may mean making tentative maps of critical issues. The mapping is sketched out individually or collaboratively in such a way that a sense of coherence (or logical flows) can be apparent. Janks’s (2010) domination-
access-diversity-design interdependent theory may be a good framework for such discursive mapping, especially if it is synthesized with Paulo Freire’s (1970) notion of thematic inquiries that allow dialogs between learning participants (be it labeled as “lecturers” or “students”) to discuss issues of oppressions mediated or triggered by a picture, for example.

In one session of my elective course *Critical Pedagogy in English Language Teaching* last September 2010, I gave a picture of four smiling dark-skinned boys of African descent in their funky clothing, typical of middle-class status. One boy, second from the left, holds a bowl of food, with the bowl representing the alphabet “O”. The first boy on the very left holds a tray with a letter “H” on it. Two other boys display “P” and “E” on their trays. Altogether, a word emerges: HOPE. Under the picture of boys are captions that read: “When you fill their cup, you don’t just fill their belly; You fill their mind and feed their future”. The ad was designed by the *World Food Programme*, with a slogan “fill the cup” inside a circular logo embellished by a picture of red cup. Under the logo is another slogan: *Fighting Hunger Worldwide* (see the last page before the back cover of the *Newsweek* magazine, 24 & 31 May 2010 edition). After explaining Janks’s (2010) fourfold theory, I asked them to read the picture to find issues of domination, access, diversity, and design. When talking about domination, students were relatively pessimistic. They began to be more aware of social classes that divide societies of the world, e.g., “the haves” as the dominant group vs. the “have-nots” that often are at the mercy of the affluent through humanitarian aids. It is necessary that poor children, presumably represented by the four boys in the picture, can taste a better life through access to more quality education, for instance. Regarding diversity, many students of mine lambasted the design for it degrades the black people. They rightly suggested that not only children of African descent who suffer from hunger and poverty. Therefore, in terms of design, they recommended that children of various ethnicities and of a different sex (girls) should have been represented in the picture. Designing is an optimistic process, whereas discussing domination only often restricts students to pessimism. A balanced mixture of optimism and pessimism is arguably acceptable and discursive mapping allows this to happen. The above example of applying Freire’s (1970) and Janks’s (2010) to do discursive mapping in my class also makes it possible to incorporate issues of resistance (i.e., resisting domination and diversity
blindness) and appropriation (e.g., appropriating access to a better life through education), plus re-design.⁵

Pessimism and optimism through the “weaknesses” of problematizing practices

With regard to their weaknesses, Pennycook (2004) mentions that problematizing practices run the risk of “[p]ossible relativism, irrealism, and over-emphasis on discourse” (p. 798). Regarding irrealism, Mautner (2001) elucidates that it is a theory that repudiates “the idea of an objective reality and of the idea of truth” (p. 284). Inherent in irrealism is hence postmodernist pessimism that paradoxically adores relativism in an optimistic way. In my opinion, relativism is not an omen which critical applied linguistics should fear too much. In fact, relativism allows flexibility. Discursive mapping is so adaptable that not only theories of Freire plus Janks but also other critically inclined scholars who may enrich our ways of critically viewing the world. I understand that relativism and irrealism may lead scholars, educators, and students to pessimism, thanks to the tendency of criticizing anything taken-for-granted, making almost if not all things relative, that they lose sight of an overarching (and optimistic) vision to transform the world. Put another way, without an optimistic vision, anarcho-particularism may end up with compartmentalized problematizing practices that have no clear-sighted future for a greater good of humanity. It is my contention, however, that optimistic visions are still possible and safer at an individual level; otherwise, the tendency of imposing one’s values on others is too great to avoid. If personal values are at all shared, it is up to those who listen to or read the values to accept or reject them. Those who accept our views may collectively work on the same vision (let’s say, Communicative Language Teaching/CLT), but ideally we do not oblige others to not have the same vision to think and act like us. Even when at the same group of CLT believers differ in their views, relativism is appropriate because it is not about “right” or “wrong” but which side (e.g., Jack C. Richard’s [2003] version of CLT and Sandra

⁵ Regarding design, one group in my Critical Pedagogy in English Language Teaching wrote: “Things that we’re going to change from the advertisements are [a] change the picture – includes other ethnicities in the picture □ portrays the real conditions world wide. [b] The contradiction between the picture of the children and the message of the ads – The kids picture state of happiness but the message conveys such deep sorrow” (copied verbatim).
J. Savignon’s [1997] version of CLT\(^6\) is believed by each individual, regardless of which CLT version, to have more plausibility to the individual.

To compensate the irrealist determinism, relativism provides some room for individuals with optimistic visions to transform the world to relativize absolute relativism. Once relativism is negated by relativism, individuals doing problematizing practices like me are free to optimistically believe in reality considered to be “objective” or “true”. And those irrealists rejecting my individual belief in “objective” or “true” reality (of God, for example) mean they have absolutized their irrealism, which contradicts the very irrealism they are supposed to respect: no absolutism. Notwithstanding my individual stance, optimism does not necessarily correlate with certainty. Optimistic people often encounter uncertainty but with hope they persevere to venture into uncharted lands and waters. Nevertheless, optimism in “emancipatory modernism”, as shown in (Neo-)Marxist critical theory, is too certain about its belief in “its own rightness... that an adequate critique of social and political inequality can lead to an alternative reality” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 800). Citing Widdowson, Pennycook states that such a belief in “its own rightness” has made emancipatory modernists “ideologically committed to a single perspective”. As a Christian involved in problematizing practices, I will be trapped in emancipatory modernism if I impose my Christianity on others interacting or working with me. As I said earlier, I may be optimistic about my personal belief, but I would rather keep it for myself unless others are willing to listen to (and follow) my Christian values.

In language studies, over-optimism about one perspective is more debilitating than empowering. For instance, Pavlenko (2004, p. 66), citing Abu Odeh’s study in the Arab world, rejects occidental (and a biased) view of feminism. Whereas for Americans wearing Western attire makes non-American people (especially women in Arab cities) look “civilized”, “empowered”, and “feminine”, such attire only subjected Arabic women to more rampant sexual harassment. Reverting to traditional Islamic dress with a veil successfully prevented Arabic women from sexual harassment. While Americans may view feminism as women’s individual freedom to wear anything they desire to show their existence, such a view falls flat in the Arab world. More at issue there is that feminism means no or minimal sexual harassment, even at the expense of relegating individual freedom so much idolized in the Western world. In essence, Arab feminism has led Arabic women to live more optimistically.

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\(^6\) Interestingly, they do not cite each other’s works.
Another kind of over-optimism is shown by many (applied) linguists often labeled as Western, including those from the Eastern world adopting Western values, who put their excessive trust in the Standard English. It is true that mastering some degree of the “standard” English may empower speakers whose first language is not English because their voice(s) will be more attended and listened to by advanced English users worldwide, “native” or “nonnative”\(^7\) (see Mambu, 2010, chapter 4). Starfield (2004) in her introduction to concordancing for students completing their Ph.D. dissertation in Australia avows the benefit of concordancing (cf. corpus linguistics). Informed by concordance outputs showing how advanced English users in a corpus compiled by Thurstun and Candlin (as cited in Starfield) construct their arguments, these students learned how to experiment with using certain expressions often appearing in the corpus (e.g., “according to”, “suggest”, “claim”, “my research is also concerned with…”, “considerable attention has been paid to…”, and “this section attempts to challenge the underlying assumption that…” that allowed them to profess academic authority more convincingly (pp. 152-153). If Starfield stops here, she would have perpetuated the dominant role of the “standard” English. Her own article is limited to her findings of how the “standard” English has empowered Ph.D. students participating in her study. Fortunately, she seems to be aware of the issue of identity apart from “native”-oriented corpus construction. She aptly contends: “The constitution of the corpus… raises broader and more critical questions as to who counts as legitimate speakers of the language and of who has not only the right to speak, but the right to be heard…” (p. 147, italics added). By saying so, Starfield implies that over-optimism to “native”-oriented corpus of English overlooks how English is appropriated by its users worldwide. Pennycook (2007) has extensively exemplified hip-hop lyrics from Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea, and Japan that blend English and local languages in highly creative ways that international intelligibility often ensured by mastery of the “standard” English is not at all the issue. Let me use an Indonesian rapper Saykoji’s hip-hop excerpted lyrics of his composed song *Copy My Style* (downloaded from http://lirik.kapanlagi.com/artis/saykoji/copy_my_style_%2528english_version%2529, November 2, 2010):

\(^7\) Double quotation marks indicate my reservation about the terms. McKay (2002) asserts: “… it is foolish to accept the construct of native speaker as a model of competence” (p. 31, emphasis added).
See i know some people just dont like me
But i never knew anybody would bite me
Make lirik persis cuman diubah dikit

Some words were changed but the rest he keep it “Make lirik persis cuman diubah dikit” (using very similar lyrics, only some have been changed) is not at all an English sentence. But it is all fine in its own right because Saykoji tried to maintain the rhyme “it” for his last two lines (… diubah dikit / … he keep it). I believe Many English “native” speakers (or orthodox [applied] linguistics) may be pessimistic about upgrading hip-hop lyrics such as this to be legitimate English. Scholars like Pennycook, at least, will probably agree with me to constitute another set of corpus comprising (inter)national hip-hop lyrics which will allow critical applied linguists to optimistically appreciate hip-hoppers’ rights to be heard, free from prejudice and linguistic or cultural discrimination from the so-called English “native” speakers.

In addition to relativism and irrealism, Pennycook (2004) laments over the limitation of problematizing practices as overemphasizing on discourse. Probably he is aware of postmodernist/poststructuralist tendency of problematizing practices which imply “discourse determinism”, analogous to the traditional Marxist critical theory on “economic determinism”. Whereas economic determinism seems to oversimplify social relations in terms of class struggles between the capitalist class and the proletariat class, discourse determinism appears to position discourse above individuality/subjectivity. Citing Burkitt’s idea, Vitanova (2005) implies that Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory – which shares a similar interest in discourse, just like poststructuralism – addresses Pennycook’s (2004) concern: “While in poststructuralism discourses position individuals, in Bakhtin’s framework ‘individuals actively use speech genres [i.e., discourse] to orient themselves in their relationships and interactions’” (p. 153, italics original). From my view, then, Bakhtin is optimistic about selfhood or self-agency’s role in shaping discourse, while at the same time also admits the strong influence of discourse on individuality. Different from discourse determinism about which Pennycook is worried, Bakhtin allows us to delve into self-other interface in discourse, especially the self’s role in assuming an authorial role in discourse. Vitanova’s (2005) concern on “authoring the self in a non-native language” in view of Bakhtin (1981) who has paved the theoretical ways to analyze voice through self is likely to be followed up in many Indonesian contexts. Scant attention has been paid to the role of Indonesian EFL teachers and learners in optimistically initiating social transformation through English language teaching, learning and use.
Furthermore, if discourse is understood only from the linguistic perspective as something beyond sentence or clause levels but limited to verbalized texts (written or oral), then I might be pessimistic about overemphasis on such linguistically oriented discourse. On the contrary, problematizing practices in critical applied linguistics have actually opened up a plethora of ways to (1) ask discourse-related questions pertaining to identity, sexuality, power/domination and its impact, access, diversity, and design, among others (p. 803; see also Blommaert, 2005; Janks, 2010), and (2) envision real actions (e.g., to eliminate poverty in a certain rural area) based on reflections on the aforementioned discourse-related questions.

Attention to discourse per se is certainly not enough but removing it altogether and jumping to real actions without discursive talks/mapping is nonsense (cf. Freire, 1970). Uncertainties due to ever-increasing discourse-related questions may be fearsome and overwhelming, and raise pessimism as well as skepticism, but they may also enhance optimism. We never know how to do noble deeds without raising discourse-related questions. I understand that a seemingly noble intention is often masked by a hidden agenda of becoming famous or other motives. Nonetheless, too much worrying or pessimism about people’s insincerity will only discourage us from doing good things. Optimism forces us to think of better questions to solve problems, not only to pose problems.

**Final Remarks**

At the cognitive level, optimism that attempts to save the world through emancipation or empowerment as often perceived through a modern, Western lens has been challenged by postmodern-problematizing pessimism about one-sided modernistic perspective. But postmodernism has its own optimism: that it keeps questioning and problematizing. Likewise, some modernists have their own reservations (pessimism) about problematization. As postmodernists pose more problems, modernists attempt to reduce problems, often under the guise of solving problems, and oversimplifying them. However, absent from modernists’ attention are the struggles encountered by the marginalized groups in order to alleviate hunger and poverty, for instance. The modernists believe that humanitarian aid like exemplified above by the ad on the *Newsweek* magazine will overall suffice to address poverty, whereas the problem of poverty alleviation is not that simple. Through postmodern-problematizing practices, we are driven to think of more problematic issues revolving around poverty, especially through discursive mapping suggested by Pennycook.
(2004), facilitated by Janks’s (2010) domination-design-diversity-design framework, and Freire’s (1970) notion of thematic investigation. In turn, optimistically we hope that posing problems will lead us to address problems in more prudent and comprehensive ways than simply using one perspective (e.g., of feminism and of native-speakerism) to solve problems.

However, emotional and bodily desires are very likely to problematize cognitive optimism. While to some people bodily desires should obey cognitive logic and will, some decide to get carried away with emotions and bodily desires. Extending Pennycook’s (2004) discussion on problematizing practices, I find it worthwhile to ask if we will ever question the taken-for-granted superiority of rational (or even spiritual logic) over emotional and bodily desires, including sexual drives. This question may make some devout Christians or other religious people attempting to embrace postmodern-problematization pessimistic about addressing it, lambasting it “sinful”. In fact, Pennycook (2007) ushers in controversial transgressivity: “without transgression of boundaries there is neither thought nor pleasure” (p. 41). Further he contends that “thought and desire are intertwined in ways that rationalist philosophies of mind cannot account for”. Transgressive philosophies optimistically collapse the dichotomy between rational thought and desire/pleasure or jouissance in French, thus presumably disregarding the religious notion of “sinfulness” activated by “carnality”. Can religious people be transgressive applied linguists, then? To me as a Christian, my transgressivity is my personal, optimistic pleasure in apologetics, i.e., using my Christian logic to problematize Pennycook’s own transgressivity that apparently casts doubt on (or pessimism about) sinfulness due to carnality. At a “more neutral” plane than spirituality are jokes (see again my paragraph on the six Indonesian presidents’ craziness) that merge cognition and pleasure to be pessimistic and/or optimistic.

Recall as well how hidden motives (e.g., for free and yet pretentious publicity) are not in line with the sincere spirit of noble intentions to alleviate poverty and have pushed the limit of problematizing practices from the cognitively rational domain to the bodily realm. And what do people do when rational optimism clashes with bodily desires which in turn degrade optimism to mere pessimism? Perhaps as a starting point we need to inquire into linguistic strategies people use when they shift from rational optimism to pessimism, thanks to their bodily desires. Again, this agenda emphasizes on discourse; and so are analyses on ironies that take on both optimism and pessimism in literary works and non-fictitious narratives I mentioned earlier when discussing Janks’s (2010) ideas.
Central to these discourse-initiated inquiries are problematizing practices: rationalist as well as transgressive philosophies have their own optimism and pessimism. These philosophies may be incompatible in many ways but from the core spirit of problematizing practices, people belonging to any school of thoughts are challenged to identify limits of their own and others’ beliefs or practices. For example, rationalist Christians and non-Christian transgressive philosophers alike can be pessimistic about many Christians’ “fossilized” homophobia, but together they can be optimistic about educating young people regardless of their religions to nurture healthy relationships with people with distinctive sexual orientations. Accordingly, narratives of how heterosexual and homosexual people in Indonesia interact with each other need to be collected. Close discourse scrutiny on their conversations, given that we obtain ethical consents from parties concerned, awaits our attention: how homosexual people conceal or disclose their sexual orientations; how heterosexual people feel awkward or at ease when talking to homosexual people; how heterosexual people take delight in mocking homosexual people; how critical educators address such mockery with homophobic students in classroom discourse. To this extent (of raising these new questions), I feel some sense of optimism, using some sort of “pessimistic, postmodern” transgressivity – notwithstanding (or in essence owing to) some degree of my “optimistic” Christianity, a religion commonly associated with “rationalist modernism” believing in “progressivity” rather than “transgressivity”.

All in all, I do not personally yearn for absolute pessimism – or “radical pessimism” which is prone to “pragmatic paradox: if everything is as hopeless as the radical pessimist thinks, what good can he [sic] hope to achieve by publishing his [sic] views optimistically?” (Mautner, 2000, p. 419, emphases added). To me postmodern pessimism only ignites more insights into addressing a plethora of perspectives not necessarily in agreement with each other in more critical and optimistic ways. As Hargreaves (2006) puts it nicely: “Postmodernism and post-structuralism also lent critical theory greater openness and complexity, acknowledging other significant sources of inequality and injustice as well as social class – especially race, gender, sexual orientation and disability” (p. xvii).

8 Crookes (2009) recently admits that “[d]iscussions of spirituality or religion in TESOL… have been… looked on with extreme skepticism…” (p. 26). My optimism is to challenge such skepticism and I contend that religion is one source of ideas for “a philosophy of teaching” (p. 1). Edited articles compiled in Wong and Canagajah (2009) contain (dis)agreement with whether and how spiritual values transpire in language classrooms.
Finally, I concur with Waite, Waite, and Fillion (2006): “Lest we come off as too nihilistic, too negative, we must acknowledge that, at heart and as [critical] educators, we truly kindle the spark of hope and optimism in our souls” (p. 142).

References


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