

Indonesian English Accent: Pride, Prejudice, and Intelligibility

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Abstract

This narrative examines the Indonesian English (IE) accent as a complex site of sociopolitical and linguistic negotiation within the broader context of the global expansion of English and the increasing diversification of its users, where the status of localized English varieties has become a central concern in contemporary sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Framed by the grand theories of World Englishes and decolonial thought, this study explores Indonesian English beyond mere linguistic features. It examines the intersection of IE with identity, power, and historical legacies as well as responds to ongoing debates concerning linguistic legitimacy, ownership of English, and the persistence of colonial language ideologies in modern communication practices. Employing a narrative review methodology, this research synthesizes and analyzes scholarly literature published between 1990 and 2024, integrating foundational theoretical contributions with recent empirical developments to ensure both historical depth and contemporary relevance. The analysis is applied through the lenses of decolonial and World Englishes frameworks to examine the linguistic, sociolinguistic, educational, and technological aspects of Indonesian English. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how IE is constructed, evaluated, and contested across institutional and social domains. The study identifies distinctive IE phonological traits as legitimate linguistic innovations, not errors, and notes their emergence as a marker of cultural identity that reflects processes of nativization and creative adaptation rather than linguistic deficiency. Findings reveal systemic prejudice against Indonesian English in various domains, with a persistent preference for Inner Circle norms. This prejudice operates through educational policies, professional practices, and digital communication technologies that continue to privilege particular accents in global communication. Evidence challenges traditional concepts of intelligibility and supports shared responsibility in communication. It emphasizes the collaborative nature of meaning-making between speakers and listeners in international contexts, rather than placing the burden of understanding solely on Indonesian English speakers. Accent discrimination against IE is linked to colonial legacies and the neoliberal commodification of English, where particular accents function as symbolic capital within global markets and reinforce unequal power relations and linguistic insecurity among non-Inner Circle speakers. This review advocates for Indonesia-led educational reforms, inclusive technologies, and pluricentric standards. It positions Indonesian English as both a linguistic system and an act of postcolonial resistance. This perspective challenges global English pedagogical norms and contributes to broader efforts to democratize global communication and reimagine English as a shared, diverse, and ethically grounded resource.

Keywords: accent; Indonesian English; intelligibility; prejudice; pride; world Englishes.

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of English is often celebrated as a sign of linguistic openness and interconnectedness. However, this optimistic view conceals enduring hierarchies that gives privilege certain native accents while marginalizing others (Kachru, 1992). Within this global ecology, although not officially codified like Singaporean or Indian English, Indonesian English (IE), has become a focal point of scholarly debate. Dewi *et al.* (2018) demonstrate that “Indolish” functions informally in public communication and exhibits local intelligibility despite its lack of institutional recognition. Complementing this, Endarto’s (2020) corpus-based analysis identifies systematic lexical and collocational patterns that mark IE as an emerging localized variety shaped by Indonesian sociocultural contexts.

Aligned with these latter perspectives, the present paper views Indonesian English as a developing variety whose distinctive linguistic features reflect Indonesia’s active participation in the pluricentric landscape of World Englishes. Shaped by Indonesia’s complex postcolonial history and its rich linguistic diversity with more than 700 local languages (Hamied, 2012), IE continues to function primarily as a foreign language rather than a second language. Nevertheless, recent scholarship increasingly recognizes the legitimacy of diverse English varieties beyond traditional centers (Jenkins, 2009), which has prompted renewed interest in how Indonesian English should be positioned within this global framework.

Despite such recognition, attitudes toward IE remain conflicted. Some scholars and educators continue to regard IE as a deviation from standard English, reflecting anxieties over linguistic correctness and international intelligibility (Zacharias, 2005). From this perspective, localized features are viewed as potential threats to English proficiency and global competitiveness. Conversely, other scholars advocate for a more inclusive understanding of English variation, arguing that IE represents a legitimate outcome of indigenization processes (Dewi *et al.* 2018; Endarto, 2020). Their research highlights that localized lexical, phonological, and pragmatic features not only index Indonesian cultural identity but also reflect users’ agency within the *World Englishes* paradigm. The conflict, therefore, centers on the tension between the desire to conform to native norms and the recognition of English as a pluralized, context-sensitive resource. While institutional discourse may outwardly support linguistic diversity, everyday interactions often expose deep-seated biases against Indonesian-accented English, commonly justified by appeals to intelligibility. This paper argues that debates over Indonesian English pronunciation extend beyond phonetic concerns. These debates reveal the enduring influence of colonial language ideologies and Indonesia’s continuing struggle to assert cultural and intellectual autonomy within global knowledge systems.

Indonesia’s strategic use of English as a means of global integration is widely recognized (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Nevertheless, language policies and educational practices continue to reflect native-speakerism, an ideology deeply embedded in colonial linguistic hierarchies (Phillipson, 1992). Although Phillipson’s (1992) concept of *linguistic imperialism* was developed in a broader postcolonial context, it remains useful for interpreting how such hierarchies persist within Indonesian classrooms and policy discourses, where the authority of native-speaker norms continues to shape curricular goals and assessment standards (Lauder, 2008; Hamied, 2012). Such practices contribute to linguistic insecurity among Indonesians, creating a detrimental cycle that undermines the nation’s cultural independence. Despite its lack of formal recognition and codification, IE undeniably exists and warrants scholarly attention, not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a reflection of broader socio-cultural dynamics.

Despite extensive research on Indonesian English (IE) and its linguistic features, empirical studies that specifically examine *Indonesian English (IE)* as an emerging variety have begun to appear in recent years. For example, Endarto (2020) identified localized lexical and collocational patterns in Indonesian English, while Adnyani *et al.* (2023) documented twelve distinctive grammatical features marking IE as a developing linguistic system. Similarly, Dewi *et al.* (2018) have examined IE from phonological and attitudinal perspectives, revealing its complex status within Indonesia’s multilingual context. Yet, these studies have seldom addressed the moral and ideological dimensions of accent discrimination, which this paper argues are deeply rooted in colonial hierarchies rather than purely linguistic debates. Lowenberg’s (1991) identification of IE’s phonological traits, such as shortened vowels or dropped final consonants, reveals systematic patterns shaped by Indonesia’s multilingual landscape. Unlike codified varieties of English, Indonesian English does not have official

institutional recognition. As a result, its linguistic features are often treated as “errors” rather than as legitimate characteristics of a developing variety. Crucially, even codified Englishes face stigmatization (e.g., Indian English accents mocked in Western media), proving that codification alone cannot dismantle native-speakerism. The humiliation of an IE-speaking academic at an international conference or the Jakarta professional barred from global opportunities exemplifies how critiques of IE are rarely about intelligibility. Instead, they reflect a colonial logic that equates proximity to Anglo norms with competence and morality. While Kachru’s World Englishes framework (1992) legitimized institutionalized varieties, its silence on uncodified Englishes like IE perpetuates the myth that legitimacy requires Western-sanctioned codification. Therefore, the devaluation of Indonesian English reveals a broader reality: linguistic imperialism continues not only through strict standards of codification but also through the systematic exclusion of English varieties that exist outside those standards.

The colonial logic underpinning accent discrimination has tangible consequences. Studies have shown that Indonesian English speakers face discrimination in academic and professional settings, often being perceived as less competent due to their accents rather than their actual linguistic ability (Irham et al., 2022; Sultana et al., 2023). In global academia, Indonesian lecturers with noticeable accents are often overlooked for leadership roles and international collaborations (Irham et al., 2022). Similarly, research on professional settings reveals that accent bias limits career progression, with non-native English speakers receiving fewer promotions and lower salaries despite their qualifications (Sultana et al., 2023). When institutions label accents like IE as unintelligible, they reinforce hierarchies that privilege certain voices over others. Thus, linguistic justice involves more than documenting phonetic differences. It requires dismantling the harmful assumption that empathy and respect must be earned through conformity to dominant phonological norms.

Despite the expanding literature on Indonesian English, most existing studies emphasize linguistic features or pedagogical concerns, with limited attention to the ideological, moral, and political dimensions of accent discrimination in global communication. Few studies explicitly integrate World Englishes and postcolonial perspectives to examine how accent, intelligibility, and power intersect in shaping the position of Indonesian English. Addressing this gap, this study asks: (1) how is Indonesian English conceptualized in relation to identity and postcolonial history, (2) how does existing scholarship reveal systemic prejudice and ideological bias against Indonesian English across social and institutional domains, and (3) how can intelligibility be re-theorized as a shared communicative responsibility? By synthesizing literature from 1990 to 2024, this study contributes to debates on linguistic justice and global English pedagogy while reframing Indonesian English as a legitimate variety and a form of postcolonial resistance. A limitation of this study lies in its reliance on existing literature and its narrative review design, which does not incorporate new empirical data, indicating the need for future empirical research.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach to synthesize existing literature on the Indonesian English accent, focusing on the themes of pride, prejudice, and intelligibility. Unlike systematic reviews, which rely on predefined protocols and exhaustive inclusion criteria, this study employs a flexible, interpretive method to explore the topic holistically. The review is grounded in a critical-interpretivist epistemology informed by Fairclough’s (2010) view that language and knowledge are socially constructed and shaped by power relations. From this standpoint, research on the Indonesian English accent is treated as a socially situated discourse that reflects ideological assumptions about identity, hierarchy, and legitimacy in postcolonial contexts. Rather than seeking objective generalizations, this study aims to interpret meanings and ideologies embedded in previous research and to construct a coherent narrative that reflects both the cultural significance and linguistic dimensions of Indonesian English accents.

To identify relevant sources, a targeted search was conducted across academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts (LLBA). The search utilized key terms such as *Indonesian English accent*, *English as a second language in Indonesia*, *accent intelligibility*, *language attitudes*, and *sociolinguistics of English in Southeast Asia*.

The inclusion of the broader regional term *Southeast Asia* was intended to capture comparative and contextual studies. Additional combinations with modifiers such as *pride*, *prejudice*, *perception*, *identity*, *phonological features*, and *communicative competence* were also used. Although the search was not restricted by publication date, priority was given to studies from the last two decades (2004–2024), and reference lists of key articles were examined using a snowballing technique.

Sources were selected based on their relevance to the three focal themes: pride, which concerns accent as identity and linguistic self-determination; prejudice, which addresses biases and discrimination toward Indonesian English; and intelligibility, which includes linguistic analyses of accent features and comprehension studies. The primary materials consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings, supplemented by doctoral dissertations, policy documents, and educational reports where appropriate. Materials were collected in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to capture international and local perspectives. Studies lacking a clear focus on English accents, unrelated to Indonesian contexts, or purely pedagogical without addressing accent issues were excluded.

The synthesis process involved a thematic analysis of the collected literature. After initial reading, key findings were extracted and organized into the three thematic categories, followed by an iterative process of identifying patterns, contradictions, and gaps. A coding framework was developed to categorize content related to phonological features, historical and sociolinguistic influences, attitudinal studies, communicative contexts, and theoretical frameworks on accent, identity, and intelligibility. Consistent with the narrative review approach, no formal statistical methods were employed; instead, the analysis prioritized interpretive depth to illuminate the relationship between linguistic features and sociocultural perceptions of the Indonesian English accent.

ANALYSIS

World Englishes and the Pluricentricity of English

The World Englishes framework, introduced by Kachru (1992), provides a foundational lens for understanding IE as part of the Expanding Circle of English. Kachru's Three Circles Model challenges the hegemony of Inner Circle Englishes (e.g., American, British) by emphasizing the legitimacy of Outer and Expanding Circle varieties. Jenkins (2009) further critiques the dominance of native-speaker norms, proposing the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) as a model for global communication that prioritizes mutual intelligibility over adherence to native accents. Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes adds another layer, highlighting how postcolonial varieties evolve through phases of identity construction and linguistic nativization.

In the Indonesian context, Lauder (2008) examines the role of English as a postcolonial language, noting its dual function as a tool for global engagement and a source of cultural ambivalence. Recent studies, by Zahro (2019), argue for the recognition of IE as a legitimate variety, emphasizing its functional intelligibility in global settings. However, Southeast Asian Englishes, including IE, remain underrepresented in World English research compared to South Asian and African varieties.

The conceptualization of English as pluricentric has gained further momentum through Pennycook's (2006) notion of Global Englishes, which emphasizes how English is constantly being remade through local appropriations and adaptations. In Indonesia, this process is evident in the way English has been indigenized with distinctive phonological features, such as the tendency toward syllable-timing rather than stress-timing, and the substitution of certain consonant sounds (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). These linguistic adaptations reflect not merely "errors" or "deviations" from standard norms, but rather creative processes of language localization that serve communicative functions specific to the Indonesian context. Blommaert (2010) reinforces this perspective by arguing that languages are mobile resources that are constantly being reshaped by their users across different scales and contexts, challenging traditional notions of linguistic purity and correctness.

The legitimacy of Indonesian English must also be considered within broader geopolitical shifts in the ownership of English. Canagarajah (2012) proposes that in today's globalized world, multilingual speakers routinely engage in translanguaging practices that blur the boundaries between discrete languages. For Indonesian speakers, this manifests in the strategic deployment of

English resources alongside Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages, creating hybrid linguistic repertoires that reflect complex multilingual identities. Kirkpatrick's (2012) work on ASEAN Englishes further validates this perspective, suggesting that within Southeast Asia, regional varieties of English serve as effective lingua francas that prioritize pragmatic communication over adherence to exnormative standards. This challenges the assumption that Inner Circle varieties should serve as the sole reference points for language learning and assessment in Indonesian educational contexts.

Furthermore, the development of Indonesian English intersects with questions of language ideology and linguistic security. Tupas and Rubdy's (2015) research on language ideologies in Southeast Asia reveals how the privileging of Inner Circle varieties often leads to linguistic insecurity among speakers of local Englishes. In Indonesia, this insecurity is compounded by educational policies that have historically emphasized American or British standards (Lauder, 2008). However, emerging research by Dewi et al. (2018) indicates a gradual shift toward greater acceptance of IE features among younger generations, particularly in urban areas where English is increasingly integrated into popular culture and digital communication. This evolution reflects broader patterns identified by Bolton (2018), who suggests that attitudes toward local Englishes typically progress from rejection to accommodation and eventually to ownership, a trajectory that may predict increasing linguistic confidence among Indonesian English speakers in the coming decades.

Linguistic Imperialism and Native-Speakerism

Phillipson's (1992) concept of linguistic imperialism provides a critical framework for understanding the marginalization of non-native Englishes, including IE. He argues that global English education policies perpetuate the dominance of Inner Circle norms, often at the expense of local varieties. Holliday (2006) expands on this with his critique of native-speakerism, an ideology that privileges native speakers as the ideal models of English proficiency. Pennycook (2006) further deconstructs the notion of English as a "neutral" global language, revealing the power dynamics embedded in its spread.

In Indonesia, native-speakerism manifests in educational policies and practices that favor native English professionals over local practitioners, despite the latter's deep understanding of the local context. Yawan and Marhamah (2024) challenge this bias, advocating for a shift toward valuing pedagogical expertise over native status. The contestation of native-speakerism in Indonesia is further complicated by what Kubota (2016) terms the "multi/plural turn" in applied linguistics, which ostensibly celebrates linguistic diversity while often reinforcing existing hierarchies. Despite the growing recognition of World Englishes, English practices in Indonesian institutions continue to privilege Inner Circle pronunciation norms. This disconnect between theory and practice creates what Kumaravadivelu (2016) describes as "epistemic injustice," where Indonesian English professional knowledge is systematically devalued in favor of imported methodologies and materials. Munandar and Newton (2021) document how this phenomenon manifests in Indonesian universities, where hiring committees frequently prioritize foreign credentials over local expertise, reinforcing what Hino (2018) calls the "native speaker fallacy", the unsubstantiated belief that native speakers inherently make better language teachers.

The economic dimensions of linguistic imperialism in Indonesia warrant particular attention, as they intersect with broader neoliberal forces. According to Setiawan (2023), the commodification of English in Indonesia has created a two-tier market where native-speaker English is positioned as a premium product, commanding higher fees and greater prestige than locally-produced alternatives. Some private language institutions prominently feature white native speakers in their marketing materials, perpetuating what Ruecker and Ives (2015) term "racial commodification". This commercialization extends beyond language education to professional domains, where job advertisements in multinational corporations operating in Indonesia often specify "native-like English" as a requirement, effectively discriminating against qualified local professionals whose English reflects Indonesian phonological patterns. These practices contribute to what Mahboob in Howard (2020) describes as the "linguistic caste system" that systematically disadvantages speakers of non-prestigious varieties.

Resistance to linguistic imperialism is, however, emerging across various domains in Indonesia. Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment theory helps explain how some Indonesian English users are reclaiming ownership of English by strategically deploying their multilingual resources as forms of linguistic capital. Social media platforms have become significant sites of this resistance, with Indonesian content creators deliberately incorporating features of IE into their English-language content as expressions of cultural authenticity. In higher education context, several Indonesian universities have begun to recognize the distinctive features of Indonesian English while maintaining standards of international intelligibility (Suwandi & Tan, 2023). These initiatives align with what Canagarajah (2012) terms "translingual practice," wherein language users negotiate communication across differences rather than striving for native-like performance. Such grassroots movements suggest the potential for what Honna (2005) calls "de-Anglo-Americanization" of English education in Southeast Asia, a process that could ultimately lead to greater recognition of IE's legitimacy in both local and global contexts.

Accent Bias and Intelligibility

Accent bias is a significant barrier to the acceptance of IE in global contexts. Lippi-Green's (2012) work on language subordination highlights how accent stigma perpetuates social hierarchies, often leading to discrimination against non-native speakers. Derwing and Munro (2009) challenge the assumption that intelligibility requires native-like pronunciation, emphasizing the role of listener adaptation in successful communication. Jenkins (2000) builds on this with her Lingua Franca Core, which identifies key pronunciation features necessary for mutual intelligibility while allowing for regional variation.

In the case of IE, Zahro (2019) found that both native and non-native listeners rate IE accents as intelligible when pronunciation is clear. However, much of the existing research focuses on L1 listeners, neglecting the importance of mutual adaptation in global communication. Research on accent bias has been further enriched by Lindemann's (2002) concept of attitudinal gatekeeping, wherein listeners' negative attitudes toward certain accents can lead to comprehension breakdowns even when the speech is objectively intelligible. In the Indonesian context, Mustajib and Wijaya (2022) documented how foreign interlocutors sometimes claim incomprehension of IE despite demonstrable linguistic clarity, suggesting that psychological rather than linguistic factors may be at play. This aligns with Kang and Rubin's (2009) work on "reverse linguistic stereotyping," which demonstrates how visual cues about a speaker's ethnicity can negatively impact listeners' perception of accent, regardless of actual pronunciation. For Indonesian professionals in international settings, these phenomena can create what Moyer (2013) terms an "accent ceiling," limiting career advancement despite linguistic competence.

The relationship between accent and intelligibility must also be considered within the framework of listener responsibility. Baese-Berk et al. (2013) challenge the traditional speaker-centered approach to intelligibility, arguing instead for a dynamic model wherein communication is co-constructed by both speakers and listeners. Their research suggests that exposure to diverse accents increases listeners' perceptual flexibility, potentially reducing bias against IE and other non-native varieties. Such evidence contradicts the assumption that speakers of IE must bear the sole burden of accommodation in international communication, pointing instead toward what Matsuda (2018) calls "mutual intelligibility responsibility."

The technological dimension of accent bias presents both challenges and opportunities for IE users. Automated speech recognition (ASR) systems, increasingly prevalent in global communication technologies, often perform poorly with non-Inner Circle accents. Analysis of popular voice assistants revealed significantly higher error rates for Indonesian-accented English compared to American or British accents, potentially reinforcing existing linguistic hierarchies. Conversely, argue that the growing economic importance of Southeast Asian markets is incentivizing technology companies to develop more inclusive ASR systems that recognize diverse English varieties. This shift reflects what Park and Wee (2013) describe as the "neoliberal commodification" of linguistic diversity, wherein market forces may ultimately counteract accent bias by recognizing the communicative value of varieties like IE.

Indonesian English: Features and Identity

IE is characterized by unique phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features that reflect its local linguistic influences. Kirkpatrick (2012) situates IE within the ASEAN context, highlighting its role in fostering regional identity and communication. Zein et al. (2020) critiques the marginalization of IE in Indonesian education, advocating for its inclusion in curricula as a marker of national identity.

Endarto's (2020) corpus-based analysis identifies distinctive lexical and grammatical features of IE, such as the use of loanwords and collocations from Bahasa Indonesia. However, qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of IE speakers, particularly in contexts such as the workplace or education, remain scarce. The authors' study addresses this gap by centering personal narratives, reframing IE not as a deficient variety but as a legitimate and dignified expression of Indonesian identity.

The phonological characteristics of Indonesian English represent more than mere "transfer errors"; they constitute a systematic nativization process that reflects Indonesia's multilingual ecology. Several studies identify suprasegmental features, such as syllable-timing and reduced vowel contrasts, as consistent markers of Indonesian English. These features persist even among advanced speakers, suggesting their role as identity markers rather than proficiency limitations. Similarly, acoustic analysis demonstrates that IE speakers maintain distinctive intonation patterns that align with Bahasa Indonesia's prosodic system while still achieving communicative efficiency. These findings challenge what Marlina (2014) calls the "deficit perspective" of accent variation and support Canagarajah's (2012) assertion that linguistic features serve identity functions beyond mere communication. The persistence of these features among educated Indonesian speakers of English, including those with extensive exposure to Inner Circle varieties, suggests a form of what Widdowson (2003) terms "performance resistance"; the strategic maintenance of accent features as expressions of linguistic identity.

The lexicogrammatical dimensions of Indonesian English reveal complex processes of linguistic creativity and cultural negotiation. Such features exemplify what Schneider (2020) calls "contact-induced innovation" rather than simplification or reduction. At the discourse level, Budiwiyanto and Suhardijanto (2020) document how IE incorporates Indonesian cultural concepts through semantic loans and calques, creating what Friedrich and Matsuda (2010) term "linguacultural hybridity." These practices allow Indonesian speakers to index their cultural identities while participating in global discourse communities, challenging Phillipson's (2010) concern that English use necessarily entails cultural assimilation. As Zacharias (2021) argues, these lexicogrammatical adaptations represent not deviation but creative extension of the language's communicative potential.

The relationship between Indonesian English and identity construction operates at multiple levels, from individual to national. At the micro level, ethnographic research reveals how young urban professionals in Jakarta strategically code-switch between different English varieties, including IE, to navigate complex social hierarchies and construct cosmopolitan yet locally-grounded identities. This phenomenon aligns with what Norton and De Costa (2018) describe as "identity investment"; the strategic deployment of linguistic resources to access desired communities while maintaining core identities. At the macro level, Sulistiyo et al. (2020) observe a gradual shift in governmental discourse toward acknowledging IE as a potential "soft power" resource in international relations, particularly within ASEAN. This perspective connects with what Pennycook and Makoni (2020) call "disinventing and reconstituting languages"; the process of reimagining English not as a foreign imposition but as a tool for expressing Indonesian perspectives in global forums. Such recognition could potentially lead to what Park (2021) terms "linguistic sovereignty," wherein Indonesians claim legitimate ownership over their variety of English while participating in global communicative networks on their own terms.

Postcolonial Linguistics and Cultural Sovereignty

Postcolonial linguistics offers a powerful lens for understanding IE as a site of cultural resistance and sovereignty. Canagarajah (2012) advocates for translingual practices that resist linguistic hierarchies and embrace hybridity, while Mufwene (2001) explores the evolution of

postcolonial Englishes as a reflection of local identity and history. Bhola and Thiong'o (1987) emphasizes the role of language in cultural decolonization, arguing for the reclaiming of local languages and varieties as acts of resistance.

In Indonesia, Errington (2007) and Zentz (2017) examine the complex interplay between language planning and cultural identity, noting the dual role of English as both a global tool and a potential threat to local languages. Few studies, however, frame IE as a sociopolitical act of resistance against linguistic homogenization. The tension between linguistic globalization and cultural sovereignty in Indonesia has deep historical roots that continue to shape attitudes toward IE. Zentz's (2020) longitudinal research reveals how Indonesia's language policies have oscillated between nationalist protectionism and pragmatic internationalism, reflecting what Blommaert (2010) terms "the sociolinguistics of globalization"; the complex interplay between local and global forces in language development. This dynamic is particularly evident in educational contexts, where Lamb and Coleman (2008) document how English is simultaneously framed as essential for national development and potentially threatening to cultural authenticity. This hybridity, as Pennycook (2017) argues, represents not a dilution of cultural sovereignty but rather its reconfiguration in response to global forces.

The exercise of cultural sovereignty through language is further complicated by digital technologies that facilitate new forms of linguistic agency. Harrington's (2022) analysis of Indonesian social media discourse identifies the strategic use of IE features in online communication as a form of "linguistic citizenship"; the assertion of identity through creative language practices outside formal institutional contexts. These practices align with what Sultana et al. (2023) describes as "linguistic disobedience," wherein speakers deliberately violate prescriptivist norms to assert their linguistic autonomy. For example, how Indonesian YouTubers and TikTok creators deliberately incorporate IE pronunciation features even when they command more standard varieties, signaling what Dovchin (2017) terms "linguistic pride" in local English forms. Such practices challenge what Kusters et al. (2017) call the "monolingual bias" in language evaluation and demonstrate how digital spaces can function as sites of linguistic emancipation where IE gains legitimacy through vernacular usage rather than top-down recognition.

The geopolitical dimensions of IE's development reflect broader shifts in the global linguistic landscape. Indonesia's positioning within ASEAN and its growing economic influence in Southeast Asia have created what Bolton et al. (2023) term a "reconfiguration of linguistic markets," wherein regional varieties of English gain value relative to Inner Circle norms. This aligns with what Makoni and Pennycook (2006) describe as the "post-linguistic turn"; a move away from conceptualizing languages as bounded entities toward understanding them as fluid resources deployed across diverse contexts. This perspective connects with what Tupas and Rubdy (2015) call "unequal Englishes"; the recognition that different varieties of English carry different types of capital in different contexts. Embracing IE represents not linguistic compromise but strategic adaptation to a multipolar world where English's future will be increasingly determined by its non-native users, challenging traditional notions of linguistic ownership and legitimacy.

Pedagogical Implications and Alternatives

The recognition of IE as a legitimate variety has significant implications for English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia. Kumaravadivelu's (2003) postmethod pedagogy advocates for context-sensitive approaches that prioritize local needs over rigid adherence to native norms. Smith (1992) emphasizes the importance of mutual intelligibility as a collaborative process, while McKay (2002) calls for ELT practices that reflect the local relevance of English.

In Indonesia, Lubis (2018) explores the integration of technology into ELT, and Fransisca and Subekti (2022) examine student perceptions of World Englishes, highlighting the need for curricula that reflect the diversity of global English. However, policy proposals for incorporating IE into national curricula remain scarce. The authors' study addresses this gap by advocating for pedagogical reforms that recognize IE as a legitimate variety, promoting both cultural autonomy and global communication.

The integration of IE into Indonesian language education necessitates a fundamental reconceptualization of assessment practices. Traditional evaluation models based on native-speaker

norms often penalize features of IE that do not impede communication, creating what Lowenberg (2002) describes as "construct-irrelevant variance" in language testing. This contradicts McNamara and Roever's (2006) argument for "assessment justice," which emphasizes the need for evaluation criteria that reflect the actual contexts in which language will be used. Recognizing this disconnect, Fang et al. (2022) propose assessment frameworks that distinguish between features that impact global intelligibility and those that merely signal regional identity, aligning with what Taylor (2006) terms "use-oriented assessment." Such approaches could potentially validate IE while still preparing students for international communication.

Teacher education represents another critical domain for reimagining English pedagogy in Indonesia. Zacharias's (2021) research reveals persistent "native-speakerist" attitudes among Indonesian English teachers, many of whom devalue their own linguistic varieties despite their pedagogical expertise. This internalized linguistic hierarchy reflects what Rudolph (2013) terms "professional self-marginalization," wherein non-native teachers reproduce ideologies that undermine their professional legitimacy. To counter this pattern, Floris (2020) advocate for teacher education programs that explicitly validate IE and develop what Sifakis (2019) calls "ELF awareness" – recognition of English as a fluid communicative resource rather than a fixed set of native-speaker norms. Practical implementations of this approach include "localized microteaching," wherein pre-service teachers develop and critique lessons tailored to Indonesian sociocultural contexts rather than imported from Inner Circle countries. Such initiatives align with what Kumaravadivelu (2016) terms "decolonial options" in teacher education.

The broader policy landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for legitimizing IE in educational contexts. Indonesia's national English curriculum continues to emphasize what Kirkpatrick (2012) calls "exonormative standards," positioning Inner Circle varieties as aspirational targets. Such approaches move beyond what Holliday (2015) criticizes as the "native-speakerist" binary toward what Canagarajah (2012) calls "translingual practice", the fluid deployment of linguistic resources across traditional language boundaries. As Shin (2006) describes as the "neocolonial linguistics" that continues to influence language education worldwide.

This study reveals that the Indonesian English (IE) accent occupies a complex and contested position within the global landscape of World Englishes, simultaneously embodying pride, confronting prejudice, and challenging narrow definitions of intelligibility. The findings, distilled from a synthesis of sociolinguistic scholarship, attitudinal studies, and phonological analyses, underscore three interrelated dimensions: (1) IE as a marker of postcolonial identity and linguistic pride, (2) systemic prejudice rooted in native-speakerism and accent bias, and (3) the contested terrain of intelligibility as a collaborative rather than unilateral process. These insights not only affirm the legitimacy of IE but also expose the moral and sociopolitical stakes of its marginalization, calling for a reframing of global attitudes and pedagogical practices.

Pride in Indonesian English: A Postcolonial Assertion

A recurring theme across the literature is the emergence of IE as a source of linguistic pride, reflecting Indonesia's postcolonial aspirations and multilingual heritage. Scholars like Lauder (2008) and Zahro (2019) highlight how IE's distinctive features, such as syllable-timed rhythm, vowel reduction, and Bahasa Indonesia-influenced stress patterns, represent a creative nativization process rather than deviations from a presumed norm. This aligns with Schneider (2007) Dynamic Model, which positions postcolonial Englishes as evolving expressions of identity, and Canagarajah's (2012) translingual framework, which celebrates hybridity as resistance to linguistic homogenization. Far from being a problematic accent, IE emerges as a living dialect that indexes Indonesia's cultural sovereignty, a point reinforced by Karimah's (2021) observation of growing acceptance among younger urban speakers who integrate IE into digital and popular culture contexts.

Lived experiences further illuminate this pride. Narratives of IE speakers, though underexplored in quantitative terms, surface in qualitative accounts where individuals strategically deploy IE to assert cosmopolitan yet locally rooted identities. This echoes Pennycook's (2006) notion of English as a pluricentric resource, remade through local appropriations. For instance, Indonesian content creators on platforms like YouTube and TikTok deliberately foreground IE features,

signaling what Dovchin (2017) terms “linguistic pride” as an act of cultural authenticity. Such practices challenge the neoliberal demand for a homogenized, “accentless” English, positioning IE as a form of soft power (Sulistyo et al., 2020) and a legitimate contributor to ASEAN’s regional lingua franca (Kirkpatrick, 2012). These findings suggest that pride in IE is not merely defensible but a necessary act of postcolonial self-determination, countering the historical shadow of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992).

Prejudice Against Indonesian English: Systemic Bias and Moral Failure

Despite this pride, IE speakers face pervasive prejudice, rooted in native-speakerism and accent bias, which perpetuates a linguistic hierarchy that privileges Inner Circle norms. The literature consistently identifies native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006) as a dominant ideology in Indonesia’s educational and professional spheres, where British or American accents are fetishized as “correct” and IE is dismissed as substandard. Studies like Ali et al. (2025) document tangible consequences: job advertisements demanding native-like English exclude qualified IE speakers, while YouTube comments analyzed in Khazanah (2023) reveals learners’ internalized preference for native accents over their own. This bias aligns with Lippi-Green’s (2012) concept of language subordination, where accent stigma reinforces social inequities, and Kubota (2016) critique of the multi/plural turn, which celebrates diversity in theory but upholds hierarchies in practice.

The moral implications of this prejudice are stark. Beyond mere communication barriers, accent discrimination exacts an emotional toll, mockery in international forums, career ceilings (Moyer, 2013), and linguistic insecurity (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015), that existing scholarship often sanitizes as a technical issue. Kang and Rubin’s (2009) findings on “attitudinal gatekeeping” are particularly damning: foreign listeners’ claims of incomprehension often stem from psychological bias rather than linguistic reality, a phenomenon they term “reverse linguistic stereotyping.” This suggests that prejudice against IE is less about intelligibility and more about a failure of empathy, exposing a colonial residue that demands native conformity over mutual adaptation. The economic dimension, where native-speaker English is commodified as a premium product (Ruecker & Ives, 2015), further entrenches this inequity, creating a “linguistic caste system” (Mahboob, 2020, as cited in Howard, 2020) that undermines Indonesia’s cultural agency.

Intelligibility: Beyond Native Norms to Mutual Responsibility

The question of IE’s intelligibility emerges as a pivotal battleground, where colonial ideologies of purity clash with the realities of global English. Traditional assumptions, challenged by Derwing and Munro (2009), assert that intelligibility which hinges on native-like pronunciation are upended by evidence that IE is functionally comprehensible when pronunciation is clear (Zahro, 2019). Jenkin’s (2000) Lingua Franca Core reinforces this, identifying key features for mutual intelligibility, many of which IE retains, while allowing regional variation. Yet, the literature reveals a persistent double standard: while IE speakers are expected to adapt to Inner Circle listeners, the reverse is rarely demanded, contradicting Smith (1992) and Baese-Berk et al. (2013) emphasis on listener responsibility.

This imbalance is compounded by technological biases, such as Tadimeti et al.’s (2022) finding that automated speech recognition systems struggle with IE, reflecting a digital reinforcement of Inner Circle hegemony. However, emerging trends offer hope: Khazanah’s (2023) study of international students adapting to IE over time suggests that exposure fosters perceptual flexibility, while Speechmatics (2021) notes market-driven improvements in automatic speech recognition (ASR) inclusivity. These developments support Matsuda’s (2018) call for mutual intelligibility responsibility, where communication is co-constructed rather than imposed. The findings thus reject the false binary between intelligibility and authenticity, positing that IE’s legitimacy does not require native approximation but rather a global willingness to engage with its distinctiveness, a shift that aligns with Indonesia’s broader push for postcolonial agency.

The interplay of pride, prejudice, and intelligibility reveals IE not as a problem to be fixed but as a sociopolitical phenomenon demanding recognition. The pride articulated by IE speakers, rooted in nativization and identity, directly confronts the prejudice perpetuated by native-speakerism, exposing the latter as a vestige of linguistic imperialism that global institutions must dismantle.

Intelligibility, meanwhile, emerges as a collaborative process, not a unilateral burden, challenging both pedagogical norms and listener attitudes. This synthesis advances Kachru's (1992) World Englishes framework by grounding it in lived realities and moral urgency, while echoing Canagarajah's (2012) translingual vision of English as a negotiated resource.

This recognition of IE as a legitimate variety necessitates a fundamental shift in how linguistic competence is assessed in international contexts. The findings suggest that current evaluation frameworks, which often privilege native-speaker norms, systematically disadvantage IE speakers not because of communicative deficiencies but due to entrenched biases. As Mahboob in Howard (2020) and Lippi-Green (2012) argue, such assessment practices constitute a form of structural discrimination that extends beyond language to affect socioeconomic mobility and cultural dignity. The devaluation of IE in professional settings, despite evidence of its functional adequacy, reveals that intelligibility concerns often mask deeper anxieties about linguistic authority and cultural hierarchy. This calls for assessment reforms that evaluate communication effectiveness rather than native approximation, aligning with Bachman and Palmer's (2010) concept of interactional authenticity, where language is judged by its success in real-world contexts rather than adherence to abstract standards.

The digital dimension of IE's legitimacy struggle warrants particular attention, as technology increasingly mediates global communication. The documented bias in speech recognition systems (Tadimeti et al., 2022) represents not merely a technical challenge but a digital manifestation of linguistic imperialism that reinforces the marginalization of non-Inner Circle varieties. However, the emergence of more inclusive technologies, responsive to market demands for global accessibility, offers promising avenues for intervention. This technological evolution parallels what Pennycook (2017) terms the translingual turn in digital spaces, where hybrid practices normalize linguistic diversity and challenge monolingual ideologies. As IE speakers increasingly assert their presence in digital domains, from social media to professional platforms, they not only claim space for their variety but also contribute to reshaping global norms of digital communication, potentially accelerating acceptance of World Englishes beyond academic discourse into everyday technological infrastructure.

The psychological impact of accent prejudice on IE speakers constitutes another critical dimension requiring scholarly attention. While quantitative studies document external manifestations of bias, the internal experience of linguistic insecurity represents an underexplored aspect of IE's socio-political landscape. Drawing on Norton's (2013) concept of investment and Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of identity in language learning, this study suggests that IE speakers navigate complex emotional terrain, balancing pride in linguistic sovereignty against pragmatic awareness of discriminatory realities. The "double consciousness" described by Tupas and Rubdy (2015), simultaneously valuing one's variety while recognizing its devaluation by others, creates cognitive dissonance that may impede learning and professional performance.

The implications are profound. Pedagogically, Indonesia must move beyond exnormative standards (Kirkpatrick, 2012) toward curricula that validate IE as a legitimate variety, as proposed by Zein et al. (2020) and Fang et al. (2022). This requires not only reforms in teaching materials and assessment practices but also in teacher education programs that often perpetuate native-speaker idealization. Globally, the onus lies on listeners; human and technological, to adapt to English's pluricentricity, a shift that could democratize communication and affirm Indonesia's linguistic sovereignty (Sung-Yul Park & Wee, 2013). International institutions, from multinational corporations to academic conferences, must reexamine policies that implicitly privilege certain accents and develop more inclusive communicative practices that distribute responsibility for understanding across all participants. Ultimately, IE's struggle is a microcosm of postcolonial identity: a refusal to conform to foreign expectations, and a demand for the world to reckon with the vitality of its voice. The legitimization of IE thus represents not merely a linguistic adjustment but a moral imperative, a recognition that language diversity constitutes cultural wealth rather than communicative impediment, and that true global communication requires mutual respect rather than unilateral conformity.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the multifaceted position of the Indonesian English (IE) accent within the paradigm of World Englishes, revealing it as a site of pride, a target of prejudice, and a contested terrain of intelligibility. The findings affirm IE as a legitimate postcolonial variety, its distinctive phonological and sociolinguistic features embodying Indonesia's cultural sovereignty and multilingual heritage. Far from a deviation to be corrected, IE represents a vibrant assertion of identity, increasingly embraced by speakers who wield it as both a local and global resource. Yet, this pride is shadowed by systemic prejudice, perpetuated through native-speakerism and accent bias, which marginalizes IE speakers in educational, professional, and digital spheres. Such discrimination, often cloaked as concerns over intelligibility, exposes a lingering colonial hierarchy that privileges Inner Circle norms and exacts a profound psychological and socioeconomic toll. Intelligibility itself, reframed here as a collaborative process rather than a unilateral expectation, challenges these entrenched biases, urging a redistribution of communicative responsibility that honors linguistic diversity over conformity.

Ultimately, the legitimization of IE transcends linguistic debate; it is a moral and sociopolitical imperative. To affirm IE is to reject the homogenizing legacy of linguistic imperialism and to embrace language diversity as a cornerstone of cultural wealth. This study calls for a paradigm shift, one where IE's vitality is not merely tolerated but celebrated, and where the world is invited to listen, adapt, and engage with Indonesia's voice on its own terms. As English continues to globalize, the journey of IE offers a compelling case for reimagining competence, challenging prejudice, and redefining intelligibility as acts of mutual respect. Future research might explore the lived experiences of IE speakers in greater depth, amplifying their narratives to further dismantle the structures that devalue their linguistic agency.

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