

**“No Need for Native Speakers”: A new Insight on Foreign Language Education
(Keynote Speech at International Seminar on Foreign Language Teaching,
Linguistics, and Literature - Universitas Negeri Medan)**

Mathias Jochmann
Universitas Negeri Medan
Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The 4th industrial revolution brought up technologies and phenomena that make native speakers less important for language education if the usage of new technologies and their implementation are re-thought. We do not need native speakers on site. Shipping native speakers around the world negates the progresses that were made in the past two decades. Yet there still is a lot to learn and even more to teach, how these technologies can be used, how cultural, technological and economical changes are interdependent and how we can take advantage of these interdependencies. Hence language education cannot be discussed without all the tools, humans need to survive in the 21st century. And it can't be discussed without experts of other fields than education, like me, who isn't actually a teacher. Shipping native speakers like me around the world is a luxurious act, which can be replaced by new technologies. All we need to do is to acknowledge the reality we live in, approach language students in a multi-dimensional approach, and break the bubbles and foster interdisciplinary collaborations.

Keywords: industrial revolution, native speaker, technology

I am pleased to talk to you today, being a teacher but not being a teacher. The lectureship program by the German Robert Bosch Foundation sent me to Medan in order to teach German as a foreign language- because I am a native speaker - but also to implement cultural projects. Working in the cultural fields in Europe and Asia for a couple of years now, I do consider myself a project manager, but not a teacher.

Actually, I do not mention this to excuse myself, but for pointing out a crucial characteristic of the fourth industrial revolution. It is not only about new technologies but also and very essentially about the growing interdependencies. Differences and borders become more and more blurry and interdependencies between industries, organisations, societies, cultures and various disciplines of education grow. Hence, discussing language education is no longer possible without discussing demographic changes, economic redistributions and technological progress for instance. In no other region than in Asia these growing interdependencies can be observed that well.

I have been working on cultural issues and since language is an essential characteristic of culture I didn't hesitate to accept the invitation for today's lecture. I hope you don't mind.

So, at this point I would like to bring up my core assumption: "We do not need native speakers on site." We do not need native speakers to travel around the world just to teach their native language. If you now wonder if I am negating the reason why I am actually in Indonesia, you are right. I am arguing here against a program like the one that sent me here.

Of course I assume we all agree on the advantages of learning a foreign language from a native speaker. And I clearly remember myself being a high school student and

*“Emerging foreign language towards Industrial Revolution
4.0”*

complaining about my English teacher being a German and speaking English with German accent. I perhaps would still complain today and recently I feel very glad I can study Bahasa Indonesia learning from and with native speakers. But, while more and more people seek for middle-class- and above life-standards and broader education, however, we must admit that shipping native speakers around the world is a) expensive, b) extremely eco-unfriendly and c) it is and will be a matter for the privileged ones. The privileged ones are shipped and some privileged ones can appreciate learning from native speakers.

So, even though we could argue with a kind of snowball effect, which would mean that even a few privileged ones could affect many more students. But I am very certain about the idea, we should free ourselves from this kind of analogue thinking and find powerful methods that replace native speakers on site. And these methods should be spread and to be accessed very easily. So, the question is: How can we can we replace native speakers on site without giving up on the big impact they may have on language students? How can we take advantage of the new environments, that we are living in? It's quite easy, I think.

So, **first** of all, we need to become aware of the potentials we already have. Maybe you know this game: One of us mentions a characteristic and everyone who feels addressed by this, has to stand up. And there is one characteristic that would make everyone of us stand up. So, please, everybody stand up, who has a smart phone.

We all carry a smart phone in our pocket. We all carry tools with us that we should understand as a gate to the rest of the world. We are constantly online hence connected to the rest of the world. We are connected to the *World Wide Web* and worldwide also means there are no borders, no limits. Worldwide also means, every culture, every language is to be reached.

We are all constantly connected to native speakers of any language in the world yet we do not use these possibilities as much as we could. We are online 24/7 but most of us wouldn't dare breaking the cultural bubble of our mother tongue. Who of us reads news in other languages than the native language? Who would dare chatting with people from a culture we are not yet familiar with? The Internet is available in almost every country on this globe. YouTube videos, news and social media contents are uploaded in majority of all the spoken languages. But, which language do we face, when opening our browser now? Exactly, our mother tongue, or, if we are a language geek, in some language that we are good in. And maybe some of us have switched their systems language into the language we currently want to master such as I switched it to Bahasa Indonesia. But hey, we are the nerdy minority here.

So, although it is a *world wide* web, we stay in our bubbles. So, **secondly**, we need to learn and teach how to break those bubbles. By bubble I mean the circles that we usually act in, that we feel comfortable in. The environment that we feel familiar with, the environment, that makes us feel safe. Social media have a big contradiction here: on the one hand they allow us to possibly connect to everyone and everything in the world, but by its algorithms it makes us stay in the circles, that share the same ideas and values, that support ideas that we already have. Social media are nothing else but affirmative.

We need to find ways to break those bubbles in various regards and foster societal mobility. We need to foster openness for the unknown, for the other. And although we are here to discuss language education which already implies a certain curiosity for a

“Emerging foreign language towards Industrial Revolution

4.0”

new language, I want to underline this aspect. I experience many young people that are sort of uncomfortable leaving their comfort zone.

Which brings me to the **third** aspect. As mentioned before I assume we need to find better understandings of social media and how we use them. Facebook and Instagram in particular are tools that make users seek for confirmation. It's all about likes, not about controversial discussions. It is all about saying the right thing, about looking good, healthy and successful. And especially adolescents follow this main stream not to be blamed, not to stand out. But learning a new language also means to make yourself vulnerable. To make mistakes. To fail and try again. Which is why I want to point out again, that we should teach losing the fear of failing. Teach to lose the fear of vulnerability, against the mainstream idea that we all have to look good, happy, healthy and successful.

This is connected to the idea, a **fourth** point here, that the knowledge students already gain about other cultures from the digital spheres is a potential that needs to be used and elaborated. The structural knowledge about online consumption and communication can be applied to any language learning. Additionally, students may know how to sing along lines from Spanish Shakira-song or others from K-Pop. That's knowledge to approve of!

Since many languages are inter-connected it would be fruitful to make students aware of this and sensible them for not only memorising new vocabulary by simple repetition but more importantly about building bridges to memories they already have. Importantly, these memories may also be sensual ones. It's not a new idea that it's way easier to learn vocabulary by linking them to senses. For example, link the new word for fire (or only the sound of the new word) with a sense for heat.

So, if you wonder if I have the final solution here, I have to disappoint you. I do not have it. By pointing out these issues of re-thinking the use and implementation of new technologies I hope for discussions that may result in some new approaches.

Needless to say, I am just scratching many surfaces of how to develop language education under the influence of young technologies. Yet I would like to come back to my core assumption that we do not need native speakers on site. Shipping native speakers around the world negates the progresses that were made in the past two decades. Yet there still is a lot to learn and even more to teach, how these technologies can be used, how cultural, technological and economical changes are interdependent and how we can take advantage of these interdependencies. Hence language education cannot be discussed without all the tools, humans need to survive in the 21st century. And it can't be discussed without experts of other fields than education, like me, who isn't actually a teacher.

Shipping native speakers like me around the world is a luxurious act, which can be replaced by new technologies. All we need to do is to acknowledge the reality we live in, approach language students in a multi-dimensional approach, break the bubbles and foster interdisciplinary collaborations.