

**Writing for International Publication:
An Interview with
Nugrahenny T. Zacharias, Handoyo P. Widodo
and Willy A. Renandya**

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There is a growing pressure in recent years for people working in institutions of higher learning to get themselves published in peer-reviewed international journals. This is true not only for those working in research-focused universities, but also for those in teaching-intensive universities. For those lacking experience, publishing in international journals can be a daunting task. Some may, in fact, feel that only a select few (e.g., those who hold professorial ranks) can get their work published internationally. Even many believe that writing for an international audience is an impossible task to accomplish. To shed this belief away and to make the idea less daunting, TEFLIN Journal initiates to bring about the experience of Indonesian EFL scholars who are nationally and internationally renowned for their publication and contribution to the field. Starting from this issue an interview will be published every other year with the hope that more and more Indonesian scholars are inspired to publish.

This piece is brought together by Flora Debora Floris, one of TEFLIN Journal Editors and also a faculty member of the English Department, Petra Christian University, Surabaya, Indonesia. Three productive TESOL scholars from Indonesia: Nugrahenny T. Zacharias of Satya Wacana Christian University, Handoyo Puji Widodo of Politeknik Negeri Jember (both are still in their mid-thirties) and Willy A Renandya, who currently works at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, were interviewed to not only showcase their work, but also highlight the joy, the reward, the recognition of having their work accepted and acknowledged by members of the international community, and yes, also the pain of having their work rejected by journal editors. More importantly, the key message being sent through this interview is that there is nothing impossible to achieve. The three scholars be-

ing interviewed are very passionate about their works, teaching, learning, writing, and publication. This is not to say that writing and getting published is a smooth-sailing process. But, with a bit of passion and hard work, the writing and publication journey can become a bit less overwhelming and more enjoyable.

Their writings and publishing experiences are inspiring. Hopefully, the readers of this journal will be inspired to follow their lead. If they can do it, so can many of us who are embarking on this writing and publishing journey.

1. *Bu Henny, Pak Handoyo, Pak Willy, can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?*

Nugrahenny (N): I am a language teacher educator working at the pre-service ELT department, *Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW)* in Salatiga, Central Java. I have been teaching in this university for approximately 10 years. Prior to working at *UKSW*, I taught briefly at a language school in Salatiga. I started writing for publication when I was 14 years old. I remember that even at that age writing had always become part of me. I wrote stories that appeared in *Belli'*, a teen magazine. I guess teaching and writing have always been important for me. I love sharing stories and also learn from the way other people tell a story. I guess that's why I love writing.

Handoyo (H): I am a faculty member at the Department of English, *Politeknik Negeri Jember (POLIJE)*. I have taught academic writing and English for specific purposes (ESP) courses since 2001. Prior to joining *POLIJE*, I was a part-time English tutor at the *Universitas Jember's* Language Centre. At this center, I learned how to teach ESP, write ESP textbooks, and develop self-access learning materials. I was fortunate to have worked for the centre as it gave me a lot of opportunities to develop professionally. Such opportunities inspired me to see teaching as a calling. It is my firm belief that a good teacher must be a good learner.

Willy (W): I teach applied linguistics courses at the *National Institute of Education (NIE)*, *Nanyang Technological University Singapore*. *NIE* is the

only *IKIP* in Singapore, responsible for preparing professional teachers for the Singapore schools. Prior to working at *NIE*, I taught at *SEAMEO RELC* where I got a lot of exposure working with very experienced language teachers and language teacher educators from Southeast Asia. It was also at *RELC* that I got to know, and had the opportunity to work with, some of the best people in the TESOL and applied linguistics.

2. *When did you begin writing for international publication? What is the genre of your first manuscript for international publication? Is it a book review, a research paper, a discussion paper, or a book?*

N: I began writing for international publication when I took an MA course at *Assumption University*, Thailand back in 2002. I published in the university's international journal called *The English Teacher*, now *The New English Teacher*. The title of the paper was *Come on in, mother tongue: Evaluating the role of mother tongue in English language teaching in Indonesia*. As the title suggests, it is an opinion article problematizing the monolingual approach to English language teaching. The paper was developed from a final assignment in a course called *Second Language Acquisition*, so the writing process took approximately a month although the 'thinking' process started much earlier.

H: I embarked on writing for international journal publication in 2006. It took me roughly eight months to prepare a manuscript. I struggled to write this piece, primarily because I had little experience, and also did not have access to relevant resources. I just made use of a few library and online resources, but finally I was fortunate to have met Jack C. Richards who mentored me to prepare this manuscript and supplied me relevant books and articles. In May 2006, my first pedagogical article entitled *Approaches and procedures for teaching grammar* appeared in *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, which is an internationally indexed journal. At the outset, I did not consider whether this journal was indexed, but most importantly, I thought that this journal was an appropriate outlet for publishing my work, and its editorial board standing was solid. I learned a lot from the reviewer and worked closely with her. I reworked the manuscript four times based on the reviewer's expectations. This first publication really gave me a fresh start in my academic life.

W: I started out as editor when I was with *RELC* and had a great time doing this for several years. I edited almost anything that came in my way: *RELC's Anthology Series*, the *RELC Guidelines*, and the *RELC Portfolio Series*. This Series is popular with teachers and has been translated into Portuguese for sales in Brazil and other South American countries. Then, I bumped into Prof. Jack Richards, and we talked about putting together a *Cambridge* book on teaching methodology. The book *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice* was published in 2002, with a chapter that I co-wrote with George Jacobs. It took about two years to get the book completed, after three rounds of reviews by international scholars. The book was a big success with thousands of copies sold worldwide and used in many institutions as a required text in methods courses. I must say I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with one of the most renowned applied linguists in our field. I am awaiting a green light from *Cambridge* to do a second edition of this book, as some of the chapters appear dated now.

3. *What is normally the source of inspiration of your work?*

N: I am not sure if I can pinpoint one incident that inspires me to write. I guess it is more of a combination of things. However, to be perfectly honest, at first, I was not 'inspired' to write, but I was put in a condition where I have to write to get a promotion. In my case, I could not get a full time position if I did not get myself published, so that is pretty much the reason why I started writing and publishing academic articles. Gradually, the sheer joy of seeing my own writing in print has led me to enjoy writing and publishing. I guess luck plays a role too. I feel that I am lucky because I often come into contact with individuals who love writing, and they pretty much contribute to my fascination about writing. My teachers at *Assumption University*, perhaps, are the one big group of people who inspired me to write. They not only promoted the importance of sharing thoughts in their lectures, but also showed how to do it at the weekend writing workshop. Another individual that has inspired me to write is Pak Willy Renandya. To this very day, I still remember how he took the time to email and encourage me to turn the paper I presented in the 2004 *RELC* conference into a

published article. That encouragement gave birth to the paper *Write better with Mak Su* published in *Guidelines*, a RELC periodical for ELT teachers.

H: I have always been inspired to write articles by three main things: (1) my role as a writing teacher; (2) the need for critical reading, observation, and reflection; and (3) the need for my own professional development. Since I taught academic writing, I have been challenged to write better. A good writing teacher, in my opinion, should be a good writer. Writing for international publication gives me the kind of practice and experience to become a good writer. In order to become a good writer, I must be a critical reader. For this reason, I get accustomed to reading published articles critically in order to learn much from successful writers. By reading such articles critically, I am able to identify gaps (e.g., theoretical and practical gaps, contextual and methodological gaps) in the literature. From reading, I learn useful ideas that can be applied to my teaching practices. Critical observation and reflection help me explore my teaching practices and finally allow me to introduce meaningful changes in my own teaching. Finally, writing for international publication is one of the ways I can continue to keep myself up to date with current developments in the field.

W: It is usually a gap that I notice between theory and practice. When the gap becomes unbearably large, I then try to narrow this gap by putting together a paper. An example of this is my recent writing that tries to point out the discrepancy in perception between theoreticians who tend to give too much emphasis on the role of higher level, top-down processing, and practitioners who believe that lower-level, bottom-up processing should be given more attention in language classes.

4. *What was the hardest part of writing and publishing it?*

N: For me, one of the hardest parts of publishing is receiving the editorial/reviewer feedback with an open mind and resilient attitude to keep on going. It is the 'spice' to grow, I guess. Most importantly, it is a humbling experience because it provides a challenge to be better the next time around. Another hardest part of writing and publishing a paper is, of course, to make sure that the paper inspires the readers. In Indonesia, all lecturers are required to write and publish. As a certified lecturer (*dosen*

tersertifikasi), I need to publish and/or conduct research every semester. And that is tough. Although the expectation is ideal, it might give birth to a ‘publishing robot’; simply writing and publishing without really taking the time to dwell and learn on what has been published. That’s why, I try to be very careful and not to be a ‘publishing robot.’

H: To me, the toughest part of writing and publishing a manuscript is finding topics that are current and are likely to appeal to a wider audience. To do this, I have to read extensively, making sure that I have consulted relevant literature related to the topic I am writing on. Writing and publishing scholarly manuscripts involves thinking about: (a) what experience can I draw upon? (b) what do I want to focus on? (c) what theoretical framework should I use to support my stance? and (d) how do my perspective relate to others’?

W: Finding the right angle or perspective for my writing can be really hard. There are literally thousands of articles that have been written about almost anything under the sun. Pick any topic and google it, and you will find that other people have already written about it. So, it can be hard to find just the right angle that gives your paper in a fresh perspective.

5. *How many research papers, discussion papers or books have you written for international publication? Which ones are your favorites?*

N: I am not sure how many because the number does not matter for me. The important thing is to make sure that the next is better than the previous ones. There is no point, I think, to publish many papers if the quality is not there. That’s why, it is hard for me to identify one favorite article because all of my publications are in a way my favorites. Each article shows the way I view and understand a certain topic at a particular place and time.

H: So far, I have published a number of book reviews, journal articles, and book chapters. I have also co-edited five volumes with international scholars. My favorite is *the Lincom Guide to Materials Design in ELT* co-edited by Lilia Savova (Lincom Europa, 2010) because the book has been used as a compulsory textbook in some Australian, British, and American universities. Another favorite publication of mine is an article entitled *Approaches*

and Procedures for Teaching Grammar (*English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2006) because I have seen it cited by other scholars. This article is also listed as a recommended resource for grammar instruction by TIRF (The International Research Foundation for English Language Education), a US-based educational organization.

W: I like my Cambridge book *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. It has done really well. Even after 10 years, the book continues to do quite well in terms of sales. Upon request from the Ministry of Education Mexico, Cambridge University Press published a special edition of this book (2007), and the Ministry purchased 30,000 copies which were distributed to language teachers in Mexico. I am also proud of my ELT Journal article *Teacher, the tape is too fast: Extensive listening in ELT* (Oxford University Press, 2011). The article has been well-cited by people and is listed as one of the most-cited/read articles published in the ELT Journal as of August 2012.

6. *What are your current projects?*

N: Currently, I have been working on an edited volume for *Cambridge Scholar Publishing* together with Christine Manara, a colleague from UKSW, and writing two chapters, one of which happens to be for a book edited by Handoyo Puji Widodo, Jayakaran Mukundan, Le Van Canh, Marianne Perfecto, and Adcharawan Buripakdi. On top of that I am also in the process of revising and working on several manuscripts for international publication, designing and developing a course in *Teaching English to Young Learners* and *Incorporating Voice in Academic Writing*. My biggest project, though, is to be a better mom to my now-three year-old Ben, which is more like a life-long-God-given 'project.'

H: I am currently working on several book proposals for *Multilingual Matters* with Jayakaran Mukundan, Le Van Canh, Marianne Perfecto, and Adcharawan Buripakdi and *Palgrave Macmillan* with Willy Renandya. I am also preparing manuscripts for major journals such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *System*, *ELT Journal*, *Linguistics and Education*, *Language Awareness*, and *Modern Language Journal*. My biggest project is my PhD dissertation because I will need to complete it as soon as possible.

W: I have just completed a large project on English proficiency test development funded by the Ministry of Education Singapore. This project was very interesting and rewarding professionally as I got an excellent opportunity to translate language testing theories into a tangible product. It took up a lot of my time, so I am sort of taking a break at the moment. But, I continue to write for various journals.

7. *How does writing enrich your teacher self?*

N: I personally think that being a teacher and a writer is inseparable. For me, writing provides a platform for teachers where they can reflect on their teaching, their students, and their contexts. Some have said that what separate a good teacher from a bad teacher is experience. But, to me what separates a good teacher from a better teacher is not just experience, but what you do with that experience. Because five years experience can actually be a one year experience repeated 5 times if a teacher does not reflect on it. And one excellent way to reflect on your experience is through writing. Writing provides teachers with space for educating oneself through reading what others have done and adjust them for one's own teaching and learning context. When the piece is published, it gives an outlet to share and communicate with other like-minded people and in itself, it is a learning and enriching experience.

H: To me, writing can enrich my intellectual capability because by writing, I am always challenged to draw on my teaching experience through critical observation and self-reflection. Writing also paves the way for building and maintaining a sustained reading habit. Reading can enrich my writing in that reading is a way to gain more informational input which is the source of inspiration. Of course, I need to selectively read resources to allow me to focus on what I am currently most in need of. Reading also enables me to probe into different authorial voices articulated in the resources I am reading and situate my own voice into a particular scholarly standpoint. In other words, reading and writing can color my intellectual resources. Certainly, reading and writing help me enhance my routine roles as course planner, materials developer, instructor, and evaluator.

W: Some people believe that writing can make you ‘smart.’ If you are a teacher, and you write about what you teach, you can, indeed, become a smart teacher. Writing gives you an opportunity to understand more clearly your beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, misconceptions, and biases towards teaching. This understanding can help you question your existing beliefs and assumptions, revise or completely replace them with a new set of beliefs in light of the changing learning needs of your students and the demands of your teaching context, so that you can continue to effectively carry out your daily routines of developing good lesson plans, choosing appropriate materials, selecting the most suitable methods of teaching, communicating and interacting with your students, and assessing their learning.

8. *Is it important to get our work published internationally? What are the benefits?*

N: For me, publication is a part of sharing and networking with like-minded people interested in the topic that we write. With that in mind, I think it is important to publish internationally because it is a way to reach out to a wider audience and to communicate our ideas to others.

H: Yes, it is. For novice writers, getting their work published internationally means building confidence in realizing their intellectual potential, getting to know who has been engaged in scholarly conversation, and learning from more experienced writers and reviewers. Assuredly, getting our work published internationally is a means of sharing our ideas with wider readership and building an international network. I think writing and publishing in internationally refereed journals is one of the most effective ways to connect with other scholars and to learn from others who may have different perspectives from ours.

W: Yes, I would think so. For novice writers, the benefits are not that obvious. But, once you have written several papers, you become more conscious of your role as a contributing member of the academic community. You begin to realize that knowledge becomes truly meaningful when it is shared with other people who do not share the same theoretical stance as we do, when it is debated from different angles, and when people disagree with our viewpoints. All this helps us see things from new and richer per-

spectives which in turns deepen our understanding of the issue we are interested in. You have published quite a bit yourself in the international forum, *Bu Flora*. So, I'm sure you can appreciate how you have learned and grown professionally as a result of this scholarly experience.

9. *Do you ever suffer from writer's block? If so, what do you do about it?*

N: I experience writer's block almost each time I write. In fact, as far as I remembered, I have never written any piece of writing without experiencing writer's block. The intensity of these writer's blocks varies, of course, ranging from those that are so severe that I cannot complete a paper. What do I do when I experience writer's block? The first thing I do is identify the source of the problem: Is it because I do not have sufficient knowledge on the topic? Is it because of language issues where I find difficulty in expressing certain parts in English? Is it because of style issues? This initial identification is important because each reason leads to different strategies. If I feel that I am not familiar with the topic, then, I try to find journal articles within the topic area I am writing in. Then, I read them as much as I can, so I can get a sense of the current issues surrounding the topic and how that particular topic is dealt with others. If it is because of style issues, then, I try to find a model article that I can scan and learn from.

H: Yes, I often get stuck when I try to use a new theoretical framework that I am not too familiar with. To solve this problem, I normally consult other sources that discuss this framework using more familiar concepts and terminology. Another writer's block is putting different ideas into a new solid theoretical or conceptual framework. Being able to modify or develop the current framework means a lot in providing significant contribution to the current body of literature. To surmount this writer's block, I have to seek some exemplary articles that successfully elaborate on the adaptation or modification of the current theoretical framework. I have been aware that selective and extensive reading assists me in surmounting any writer's block which I may encounter as my writing journey evolves.

W: Yes, very often. Sometimes I sit for hours and nothing seems to come to mind. When this happens, I just stop writing. But, it does not mean that I

stop thinking about what I want to write. In fact, I continue thinking about this, albeit subconsciously, for a few days and when I get back to my computer, ideas seem to flow more readily. Another thing that I do is to re-read some of the key articles or chapters on the topic that I am writing on. I find this extremely helpful as certain ideas, phrases and expressions from these readings often serve as a trigger for me to continue with my writing.

10. Do you have any suggestions to help us become a better writer especially for international publication? If so, what are they?

N: Perhaps, after reading this interview you can understand that writing for international publication is in itself a learning process. I, myself, am a learner in this. So, this is the advice that I said to myself: “Be resilient, never give up, and keep moving on.” And thank you very much, Bu Flora, for giving me the opportunity to communicate with other writers out there and share my experience with them.

H: Yes, I do. I have some suggestions for writing for international publication. Firstly, we need to know what topics have been published, discussed, and debated through regular and extensive reading. Regular and extensive reading helps us familiarize ourselves with key journal article features (e.g., what to include in the introduction section and how to frame theoretical and original research articles). Secondly, we should relish an opportunity to co-write with an experienced scholar or academic because she or he will mentor you how to write better for international publication. My third suggestion is seeking advice from peers who have published in international journals. We can ask our more experienced colleagues to look at our work. Fourthly, we have to see feedback positively if our manuscript is rejected because rejection is not the end of our writing career and serves as a trigger for keeping on learning to write. What we can do with this rejected manuscript is to rework/rewrite it based on the reviewers’ comments and then resubmit it to another journal. Lastly, we have to maintain our motivation high. So, the motto is: never give up!

W: My number one suggestion is to familiarize ourselves with the genre of internationally published articles. The best way to do this would be to read (and re-read) a lot of published articles. The more the merrier!! Gradually

you will begin to notice certain writing conventions that more established scholars employ; how they choose the topic of their writing, how they introduce and develop this topic, what stance they take about the topic, what theoretical perspectives they take, how they present their arguments, what sort of evidence they provide to support their arguments, and what style of writing they adopt to address the needs of the audience. Once we are familiar with the genre of international publication, the next thing to do would be to engage in a lot of writing and working with editors of international journals. There will be a lot of rejections along the way, but this is the part and parcel of writing for publications. We simply have to continue writing and improving on it based on feedback and comments given by reviewers. Practice does make perfect. There is no shortcut.

11. *To end our interview, do you have any tips or advice for our novice writers, Pak Willy? Are there any resources that people could tap on?*

W: My number one tip is this: you need to have a can-do spirit. Writing is hard, but it is learnable. Both Bu Henny and Pak Handoyo are great examples of young scholars with a strong can-do spirit. I am sure it was very hard when they first started, but they didn't give up. They kept at it until they became successful. They have now mastered the art of writing for an international audience.

My number two tip is for people to get connected with the academic community. This is one way of keeping oneself current and up-to-date. Be a member of professional organizations and engage in conversations with like-minded members. Becoming a member of on-line professional discussion groups is perhaps one of the easiest things to do for many who live in the provinces. One such group is a Facebook discussion group called 'Teacher Voices' (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/226750694055637/>). Members discuss and debate theoretical and practical language teaching issues, share writing and publishing experiences, exchange online resources, and other ELT related issues. I have found this forum personally and professionally enriching.

I have put together a paper *Choosing the Right International Journals in Applied Linguistics and TESOL* (which I have uploaded on the Facebook

site referred to above), written specifically for novice writers. In this paper, I give a number of useful tips on how to select international journals with reasonable rejection rates for those who are just starting. Once they have developed confidence, they can work their way up and try the more demanding journals.

Another useful resource is John Flowerdew's (2001) TESOL Quarterly article *Attitudes of journal editors to non-native speaker contribution* in which he discusses some of the problematic aspects of non-native contributions in international journals. Flowerdew also points out the many advantages of being non-native speakers whose ideas can contribute meaningfully to theory development and whose experience and contexts of work can provide a legitimate testing ground for mainstream language teaching theories.

Here is one last piece of advice from me. It is often tempting to take a shortcut by sending our manuscripts to some obscure fly-by-night journals. There is quite a number out there. These are journals that normally charge exorbitant publication fees (some as high as \$500 per published article), but whose quality may be questionable. My advice is for us to stay away from such journals. If you are not too sure about the quality of the journal, seek advice from your more experienced colleagues.

12. *Bu Henny, Pak Han, and Pak Willy, thank you very much for sharing your ideas and experience with me and with TEFLIN readers. Hopefully, many of our younger colleagues will find your experiences inspiring and that they will be inspired to follow your lead.*

N/H/W: Thank you, Bu Flora. As we have received help from a lot of people in various stages in our writing career, we would also like to offer our help to those who are beginning to pursue their career in writing. Our email addresses can be found in the brief biodata below.

Useful Resources

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Biodata of Interviewees:



Dr. Nugrahenny Tourisia Zacharias is a teacher-educator at the pre-service Teacher Education program at the Faculty of Language and Literature, Satya Wacana Christian University in Central Java, Indonesia. She obtained her Ph.D. in Composition and TESOL from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, U.S. in 2010. Her research interest is in the area of identity issues in teacher education, curriculum and materials development, and the implementation of EIL concepts in second language education. She has published in various national as well as international journals such as *RELC Journal* and *Asia TEFL Journal*. Her recent book publication includes *Bringing Linguistics and Literature in EFL Classrooms* (co-edited with Christine Manara, 2011) and *Qualitative Research Methods for Second Language Education: A Coursebook* (2011). Her email address is ntz.iup@gmail.com.



Mr. Handoyo Puji Widodo is an English lecturer at State Polytechnic of Jember in East Java, Indonesia. He has published articles and book reviews in internationally refereed journals (e.g., *Modern English Teacher*, *Asian EFL Journal* and *English Teaching: Practice & Critiques*). He has presented his work at international conferences in the areas of language teaching methodology and language materials development. Also, he has edited several volumes in these areas. He is currently sitting on the editorial board of a number of peer reviewed international journals (e.g., *International Journal of Innovation in ELT & Research*, *Asian ESP Journal*, *English Australia*, *TESL-EJ*). His areas of specialization include language curriculum and materials development as well as language teaching methodology. He can be contacted at handoyopw@yahoo.com.



Dr. Willy A Renandya is a language teacher educator working at the English Language and Literature Department, National Institute of Education, Singapore. He is a frequent speaker at language conferences in the Asian region, has published research articles in various journals, authored an ESL textbook, and edited numerous books and anthologies. His most recent publication is *Teacher, the tape is too fast: Extensive listening in ELT* (*ELT Journal*, 2011), *Keeping it Simple: The Hook Book Look Took Lesson Structure* (*Modern English Teacher*, 2012) and *Teacher Roles in EIL* (*European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*, 2012). His e-mail address is willy.renandya@nie.edu.sg. His website: <http://www.nie.edu.sg/profile/willy-ardian-renandya>.

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