

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Language, identity, and community are interrelated elements. One's identity was developed by his language use within which the community one belongs to. The present study deals with the identities of Indonesian English Department students, nine of whom were purposively selected as the participants. It aims to investigate how they view their identities by analyzing family backgrounds and neighborhoods, and how studying in the English Language Education Department contributes to identity construction as they become members of a new community. The present study applied a narrative inquiry that garnered the data through students' self-reflections and interviews. The findings showed that the students were exposed to local languages and Indonesian when they grew up. They studied English in primary school. Some of them used the local languages to talk to their families. The others only understood them, but they were not able to speak the languages. The influence of environment and neighborhood made them identify themselves as Jakartan even though their parents came from some regions in Java and Sumatera. They, moreover, did not accept all local values of their current environment. Cultural origins of the parents also played a role in students' identity construction. The status of English Department students encourages them to use English with classmates. In addition, they used English to broaden their social relationship such as making friends with foreigners and getting exposed to the international community. The implication of this study was discussed.

Keywords: *Identity, English Learners, Narrative Inquiry*

INTRODUCTION

Being an English language learner is a complex process. Learning English is more than a matter of a process to be a proficient English user. It does not focus only on how to be competent in four

language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learning English means the learner must use English for communication, so it cannot be separated from how the learner becomes a part of a community in which English is used for communication. The whole process makes the learners involve in a new community of English users.

As members of the community, they will find some values or principles that exist in the community. They will act based on values and principles. This community plays a role in developing learner's identity through language and culture (Ha, 2008). The learners do not only learn a new language namely English but also develop a new identity since they are in the new community. Identity shows who one is and what situations that influence it (Rovira, 2008). Identity can be seen through the language that is used. Knowing that identity and language are interrelated, it is necessary to investigate English learner's identity. To do so, an analysis of the social, historical, and cultural factors should be conducted (Norton, 2011).

This study analyzed the identities of English department students in Indonesia. English in Indonesia is a foreign language. In such a setting, English is rarely used in daily communication. Among Indonesians, commonly they used Indonesian or local languages. English is spoken when Indonesian interact with foreigners. In students' academic lives, English is the language used to access information by reading the references and the literature. The students have first languages that are more frequently used compared to English. The languages and communities of people who use the languages shape the identity of the students. Their identities are developed before they become a member of English community. Every community in which the students involve might have different cultures and it gives an impact on the construction of identities.

Based on the discussion above, the present study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What languages do the students use?; 2) How do the students identify themselves in the middle of various communities that exist in their lives?; 3). Does studying in English Department gives contribution to their identity construction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a subject has been learned in several countries as a foreign language. The learners learn English in formal schools and have a little opportunity to use English outside the English class. National or local languages are used there for many purposes in daily life communication. Some studies have been conducted to analyze learners' identities in such a situation. One of them is conducted in Bangladesh. It was found that learners' identities are changing during the English learning process. They face different sociocultural situations and get a new community that makes them construct their identities. For youths, being able to use English give more values compared to their friends that do not have English skill. It makes them become members of high society class (Anwaruddin, 2015). Exploring learners' identities gives more understanding of the characteristics of English language learners. Such things will give some pedagogical implications for designing English course.

The other study was done in China. Constructing identities also includes observing society's attitudes towards English. They will notice differences in their own culture and society and the ones in English. It might influence the learners' point of view and behavior. However, it will not be a problem for their learning. They will accept the differences by reconciliation. This process allows themselves to have some changes in their identities. They have wider identities namely global identities (Gu, 2010)

Norton discussed the process of identity construction in language learners. The learners deal with the wider environment and dimension of time. They do negotiation in such a condition. They accept new values and culture without ignoring their own culture. Furthermore, they do investment in English by practicing English in a community. They recognize their difficulty in learning English and try to find a solution to improve their English. Moreover, they have the concept of an imagined community. They imagined they will be a member of new community in which they can build a new and more prestigious identity in the future. They can be a member of the community if they can use English. English plays a role to achieve a new identity here.

Learning languages includes studying the learners' community. They have their origin community and the imagined community. The origin community can be studied by examining learners' background. The present study explores learners' background and it deals with their family culture and language use.

Based on linguistic demography, people in Indonesia have their local languages besides using Indonesian as the national language. The local languages are more frequently used in particular regions. People in West Java, for instance, use Sundanese. Local languages are spoken by the people of particular ethnicities in particular regions. It is also possible that people use two local languages. They use the local languages based on a social factor. For example, a speaker that can speak Javanese and Sundanese will speak Javanese to establish rapport with the speaker of Javanese.

Certainly, people have the rights to choose the languages they use. They have reasons why they use a particular language. Some local language users shift to Indonesian. They do not talk in their local languages anymore. Indonesian is used as a means of communication in a big city in which people from different ethnicities come. People with different mother tongues use Indonesian to interact and it makes Indonesian spread faster. Furthermore, people might prefer to use a language that is considered more prestigious. Those who come from rural areas speak Indonesian rather than the local language to build a good image of himself.

The young generations who grew up in big cities are usually native speakers of Indonesian. This condition causes the community of monolinguals grow in Indonesia (Cohn, 2014). The spread of Indonesian gets faster because some families make Indonesian as the mother tongue rather than the local languages (Sukamto, 2015)

Language preference has a relation to identity. It can be seen from a study that focuses on English Department students who are conducting teaching practicum. They used several languages namely English, Indonesian, and a local language in the classes. The use of each language has different function and it shows the way the students constructed their identities (Riyanti, 2017).

The previous studies discussed above were conducted in Asia and the participants are college students. Both of them did not describe in detail the changes while the students construct their own

identities. They mostly focus on how the learners constructed their identities. It makes the previous studies did not discuss in depth students' origin, family, and environment. Moreover, they do not focus on exploring learners' identities of the English Language Education Department. Being members of it gives a new community for the learners. It is different if they are English learners who came from non-English Language Education Department students.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study applied a narrative inquiry study. It used a qualitative approach which focuses on elaborating meanings of phenomena. Furthermore, it focuses on the relationship between language, identity, and culture (Phillion & Ming, 2007). The aim is to find one's experience, observe how he interprets and makes meaning of it. The experiences affect his actions and thoughts (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). The benefit of using a narrative inquiry is the real process in English language learning can be investigated.

When analyzing the narrative, people involved in the narrative, time, and place should get more attention. They give specific information that helps the researcher to interpret experience. Other aspects that need special attention is a personal and social condition of the narrative makers and his relationship to the researcher (Clandinin et al., 2007). The researcher should analyze the narrative deeply so he can find the things that the narrative makers do not see (Sinclair, 2010).

The participants of the study are nine students of the English Language Education Department. Eight students are female and the other one is a male. Eight students grew up in Jabodetabek area while the other one was raised in Sumatra. The sources of the data are autobiographies and interviews. The students wrote autobiographies in Indonesian or English. Then, they had semistructured interviews. The interview was conducted in Indonesian to make the students convey the messages easier. From the autobiographies and interviews, students' thoughts, values, and points of view towards their experiences can be seen. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Relevant information was noticed during the interviews.

The students were asked to write about their language use and identities in the autobiographies. When they wrote, they made reflections deeply (Milner, 2007). There are some guidelines for what should be written in the autobiographies. First, they should write about family background. It includes parents’ ethnicities and the languages they use. Second, they should describe the languages they use and how they acquire the languages. Furthermore, they explain the differences use of the languages. Third, they tell their point of view towards their identities. Last, they write whether studying in the English Language Education Department gives any effects to their identities construction.

The data was analyzed qualitatively to answer the research questions. The first step is identifying the language use the students use with their families. Then, students’ language uses were examined. Students’ description of their identities were analyzed based on the result of previous studies and theories of identity proposed by Norton.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The use of languages

The use of languages in the families depends on parents’ ethnicities and places that they had ever lived. The table below shows the parents’ ethnicities of each student.

Table 1

Parents’ Ethnicities

Students	Parents’ Ethnicities	
	Father	Mother
A	Minangkabau	Javanese
B	Javanese	Sundanese
C	Chinese Banten- Bantenese	Batak
D	Sundanese	Betawinese
E	Javanese	Javanese

F	Bangka	Bangka
G	Palembang Malay	Javanese
H	Betawi	Sundanese
I	Javanese	Sundanese

All of the students know that their parents are the users of local languages but only some of them that also use the local language to communicate at home. The students use Indonesian and English to communicate in various settings. The following table reveals the languages the students use.

Table 2

Students' Language Use

Students	Indonesian	Local language	Foreign language
A	√	-	English
B	√	-	English
C	√	-	English
D	√	Sundanese	English
E	√	Javanese	English
F	√	Bangka Malay	English
G	√	Javanese	English
H	√	Betawinese	English
I	√	-	English

Indonesian is used by all students to interact with friends and family. It also plays a role for students whose parents come from different ethnicities. Therefore, Indonesian becomes the mother tongue for the children. For other students whose mother tongues are local languages, they began to use Indonesian in the schools. A foreign language that they use is English. As the students of English Language Education Department, they use it mostly in the class. Outside the class, it has only limited purposes.

Students' identification of themselves

Various parents' ethnicities give a contribution to students' language choice and identity. When the parents have different mother tongues, usually they do not use the local languages at home. This case happens in student A. The parents choose to use Indonesian to

communicate at home. Her father's mother tongue is Minangkabau while her mother's mother tongue is Javanese. The same case happens in student B. The father uses Javanese as a mother tongue and the mother speaks Sundanese as the mother tongue. The family uses Indonesian as a language at home. Student B does not understand Javanese and Sundanese.

When the parents have different mother tongues, it is possible for one of the parents' mother tongue to be used more often than the other. In the case of student D, the father's mother tongue is Betawi and the mother's one is Sundanese. The student uses Sundanese to communicate with her mother and her mother's relatives. It began with her experience staying in her mother's hometown in Ciamis when she was still four years old. It made her able to speak Sundanese fluently at that time. The grandparents told her the formal and informal Sundanese. She wrote as follows: *Pernah suatu kejadian ketika nenek saya bertanya "de mau makan gaa?" Lalu dengan pedenya saya jawab menggunakan bahasa sunda "embung" (yang artinya tidak) kemudian saya ditegur karena menggunakan kata embung tersebut. Kata nenek saya itu bahasa kasar, jika ingin menjawab dengan bahasa sunda sebaiknya menggunakan kata "alim" artinya sama-sama tidak, namun kata alim ini lebih sopan jika digunakan berbicara dengan orang yang lebih tua dari kita.* Once, my grandma asked, "Granddaughter, are you willing to eat, aren't you?". Then, I answered confidently in Sundanese, "*Embung*" which means no. I was warned because of saying *embung*. My grandma said it was impolite. It is better to say "*alim*". Both words mean no but *alim* is more polite to use when talking to older persons.

Based on the description, she preferred to speak Sundanese even though the question was given in Indonesia. She realized that talking in Sundanese as the mother tongue of her grandparents might build rapport. It makes the grandparents feel comfortable in this interaction. Answering in Sundanese, moreover, functions to show politeness. The grandmother realized that she was still a new user of Sundanese and did not know yet the sociocultural aspects of the language. The grandmother knew that the community of Sundanese expects the young generation to speak the formal language to the young generation. Therefore she taught the granddaughter about the use of formal and informal language in Sundanese. She also

introduced a new word that means no. She taught her granddaughter that speaking in one language must consider who the interlocutors are. Even though now she still understands Sundanese, her family considered her Sundanese sometimes is not natural. It can be seen that the student belonged to one community and the community taught her the language rules in that community.

Neighborhood also gives an influence on the use of the local language. Student G speaks Javanese. She acquired Javanese because she lives in an environment in which her mother's relatives who are Javanese live there. Her father's mother tongue is Palembang Malay. However, she, her mother and siblings do not understand it. Another case of the influence of neighborhood can be seen in the case of student A. In her neighborhood environment, people from various ethnicities live there. They use Betawi to communicate with each other. Her parents allow her to speak Betawi as long as she does not use the strong dialect of Betawi or rude words. The parents control her language to make sure the children do not disobey the politeness norms in their own culture. Betawis tend to speak in a loud voice and it might be not relevant to her parents' culture, Minang and Javanese. Parents' effort to control the child's language also can be seen in the case of student H. Her father is a Betawi and her mother is a Sundanese. She speaks Betawi because she lives in a Betawi community but sometimes her mother warned her not to talk in particular Betawi style like her father's relatives or neighbours because it is rude. Her mother still cannot accept the whole aspects of how Betawis speak or behave. Therefore, she selected which one is in line with her own culture. She, then, taught it to her child.

Parents who come from the same ethnicities usually use the local language at home. Student F and her family use Bangka Malay to communicate. She was born and grew up in Belinyu. There, Bangka Malay is commonly used. Student E's parents use Javanese to talk with their children. The other case was found in student E. Student E was born and spent her childhood in Cilacap. Her parents also come from Cilacap. The variation of Javanese there is known as Ngapak Javanese. This variation is not considered as a prestigious language. Her parents would their children to speak the high status Javanese namely Solo Javanese. Her parents use Solo Javanese at home and are

not allowed them to speak Nagapak Java at home. Student E's identity was built to be not fully Cilacap person. Solo is considered to have high status culture because the Keraton is established there. Her parents constructed her identity to be a part of high status society.

Student C's parents have more complex culture than the others. His father's family is Serang Chinese and Serang Sundanese while his mother is a Bataknese. This condition accompanied with the multicultural environment in Jakarta makes the family does not really do cultural traditions. Her mother's family tends to have more family gatherings in which he learned the Batak culture. The family also does not use any local languages at home.

Most of the students were born in Jabodetabek and they grew up there. People from different places come there. Many ethnicities such as Javanese, Betawinese, Sundanese, Minangnese, Bataknese, Manadonese, and Chinese live there. They tend to use Indonesian for daily communication. Local languages such as Betawi, Javanese, Sundanese, and Chinese influence their Indonesian. However, not all parts of Jabodetabek is multicultural. It is possible that one of the ethnicities dominate the whole community as what happened in the case of student H. She lives in Bekasi. Her father was a Betawi while her mother is a Sundanese. Her environment was influenced mostly by Betawi culture and tradition. She is very close to it so she lives based on many Betawi traditions.

For those who were born outside Jabodetabek, the influence of the city of their origins still exists even though the students are in Jakarta. One of the students came from Belinyu. She grew up with the influence of local culture. She has lived in Jakarta for two years. In Jakarta, she lives with her aunt and the environment was still influenced by Bangka Malay culture. She speaks Bangka Malay at home and cooks traditional food. For the other student who was born in Cilacap, she was exposed to the Javanese culture. Her Indonesian is also influenced by Javanese accent. Both of the students have local languages as their mother tongue.

In the case of English language use, the students know English from the schools. Three students started learning English in the kindergartens. Five students began learning English in the primary

schools. The other one knows it in the junior high school. None use English for communication in the family. However, relatives who can speak English can be good partners to practice English. The student wrote as follows: *Walaupun kedua orangtua saya tidak paham bahasa Inggris akan tetapi kakak saya mampu berbahasa Inggris dan pada saat kecil saya berlatih dan belajar bahasa Inggris dengan sepupu ibu saya yang merupakan pengajar bahasa Inggris* (Although my parents do not understand English, my brother can speak English and when I was a child, I practiced and study English with my mother's niece who is an English teacher).

English plays a role more than a subject to be studied. For student C, English has a central role in his process of gaining knowledge. He wrote as follows: *English is not a new language for me, I may say that English becomes a second language in my education process since I was educated in Makarios Christian School, Kembangan Baru, Jakarta, (from 2003 until 2009), where applies English in most of the communication process.* English is a medium of instruction in his education. He learned other subjects through English. English is a language used for gaining knowledge.

Schools' policy towards the use of English gives an influence on students' English development. Student D told that in her primary school English is used in science subject. The book was a bilingual. It makes her using English as a means to learn science. The other policy is an English day. She had to talk in English to the teachers and friends on a particular day. It makes her interest in English becomes greater.

The places where they live and their ethnicity influence the ways the students constructed their identities. Students A and C mentioned themselves as Jakartan because they were born and grew up there. Student A stated: *Saya mengidentifikasikan diri saya sebagai orang Jakarta pada umumnya dikarenakan lingkungan saya yang seperti itu dan karena saya berkembang dan besar di Jakarta sehingga saya melihat diri saya sebagai orang Jakarta.* (I identify myself as a Jakartan because of my surrounding environment and because I grew up in Jakarta). Student C mentioned: *I identify myself as a local people of Jakarta. Most of the activities are done in Jakarta.* For student C, moreover, the fact that he does not speak any local languages makes him feel that he is a Jakartan.

Student's identity can be influenced by what the parents told. This case happens in student C. She identified herself as a Tangerangne because she grew up there and the parents told them so as she wrote as the following. *Jadi saya menempatkan diri saya sebagai orang Tangerang karna pertama saya kecil di Tangerang dan saya lebih suka disebut orang Tangerang karna memang sudah melekat dari kecil saya di bilang orang Tangerang oleh kedua orang tua saya, walaupun begitu saya tetap mengikuti tradisi ayah dan mama saya. (So, I put myself as a Tangerangnese because first I grew up in Tangerang and I prefer to be called Tangerangnese because it is attached to my self since I was a kid. I was called as a Tangerangnese by my parents even though I do my father's and mother's tradition).* Even though she is a 'Tangerangnese, the traditions of her parents' ethnicities (Javanese and Sundanese) are still parts of herself. She does not leave the traditions. It is also found in the student G. She called herself as a 'Tangerangnese because she lives there however her concept of politeness is still based on Javanese culture especially her speech. *Jadi saya mengidentitaskan diri saya sebagai orang Tangerang yang menggunakan bahasa indonesia tetapi masih menggunakan budaya Jawa. (So, I identify myself as a Tangerangnese that use Indonesian. However, I still Javanese culture).*

The place where the student lives does not always determine the way she constructed identity. Student D was born and lives in Depok. Betawinese is the native of Depok. Her father is also a Betawinese. Instead of identifying herself as a Betawinese, she identified herself as a Sundanese because she lived in Ciamis for four months. She was treated very well there and impressed with the kindness of Sundanese. She mentioned it in the interview as follows.

Interviewer : *Apa yang berkesan dari tinggal di Ciamis itu?*

Interviewee : *Apa ya? Pertama sih orang-orangnya ya, Miss.*

Interviewer : *Orang-orangnya gimana?*

Interviewee : *Orang-orangnya tuh bener-bener ramah banget sama kaya...kan saya kan itungannya datang dari Jakarta terus ke sana terus abis itu kaya welcome banget sama saya.*

Interviewer : *What impresses you in Ciamis?*

Interviewer : *Well, first, the people, Miss.*

Interviewer : *What kind of people are they?*

Interviewee : *The people are really friendly. You know, I was still new there coming from Jakarta. Then, I was welcome.*

The sense of belonging to one community makes the students identify themselves as Sundanese. Moreover, she does not identify herself as Betawi because she does not have an attachment to Depok. She explained it as follows:

Interviewer : *Kamu lebih cenderung menyebut diri orang Ciamis yang walaupun kamu tinggal di sana cuma 4 bulan.*

Interviewee : *Iya, heeh.*

Interviewer : *Oke.*

Interviewee : *Soalnya kaya feel-nya lebih dapet sebagai orang Ciamis aja sih, Miss. Kaya di Depok tuh yaudah sebagai tempat tinggal aja gitu.*

Interviewer : You tend to identify yourself as a Ciamis even though you lived there only for 4 months.

Interviewee : Yes, heeh.

Interviewer : Okay

Interviewee : Because I feel I am a Ciamis then, Miss. It seems that Depok is only the place where I live now.

She, moreover, can speak Sundanese even though it is not fluent. Using a local language is one of the features to be called part of that community.

The place where the student was born and spent her childhood became the factor that makes the student E identify herself as a Javanese. She has been in Jakarta for nine years. When she visited her home town, her relatives call her a Jakartan. It can be seen as follows: *Kendati ketika pulang ke kampung halaman semua keluarga dan tetangga saya menyatakan bahwa saya adalah orang Jakarta. Tidak dapat dipungkiri keseharian saya di Jakarta yang memiliki budaya sedikit berbeda dengan di daerah rumah tinggal saya membuat saya sedikit terlibat berbeda ketika bergabung dalam komunitas saya di kampung halaman.* (When I visited my hometown, all relatives and neighbors state that I am a Jakartan. Undeniably, my daily life in Jakarta which culture is slightly different from my hometown makes me look a bit different when I join my community in my hometown.)

Student F has lived in Jakarta for almost two years. She lives in Jakarta because there are several facilities that she never found in Bangka such as trains and recreational parks. In Jakarta, she also knows various ethnicities. She still recognizes herself as Bangkanese

because she still uses Bangka Malay at home to talk to her aunt and uncle and Bangka traditions are still applied at home. She uses Indonesian only outside the home.

Father's origin also influences the way the student constructed her identity. Student I was born and grew up in Jakarta. Her family routinely visits her father's hometown, Cirebon and her mother's hometown, Rangkasbitung. She views herself as a Javanese because her father is a Javanese and grew up there.

Studying in English Language Education Department

As students of the English Language Education Department, they use English for several functions. Some students use English for communication in the campus whether oral communication or written one such as texting. This is the students' investment in English. They practice English in such ways. Student F wrote that she is now able to communicate with foreign tourists. She has an opportunity to learn a foreign culture. She becomes a member of a wider community in which people from different nationalities communicate. One of them mentioned that she tends to have a code switching of Indonesian and English. Such a way of using language makes her as *anak Jaksel* (a youth of South Jakarta). *Anak Jaksel* was considered as a cool youth in Jakarta. The youth is also considered as a member of high social class. Therefore, English is a language to establish a new status. The student claimed herself to be a member of the cool youth community.

Interviewer : *Nah ketika kamu masuk kuliah di jurusan bahasa Inggris ada perubahan identitas ngga yang kamu libat?*

Interviewee : *Hmm...ada sih. Kaya..kaya anak Jaksel gitu.*

Interviewer : *Kaya anak Jaksel? Maksudnya gimana tuh?*

Interviewee : *Maksudnya ngomongnya kaya di mix gitu kadang pake bahasa Indonesia terus ada English Englishnya ujungnya gitu.*

Interviewer : *When you study in English Department, did you find a change on your identity?*

Interviewee : *Hmm, yeah. It seems like a youth of South Jakarta.*

Interviewer : *Seems a youth of South Jakarta? What do you mean?*

Interviewee : *I mean my speech is mixed. Sometimes I use Indonesian then I continue with English.*

This is in line with what is discussed by Anwaruddin (2015) that English helps the learner obtain higher social status. This is the imagined community that the learner has. Speaking English in the way the youth of South Jakarta does makes her have a new social status.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The students use Indonesian and English. Some of them speak in local languages. The main purpose of English is used only for interaction in the college setting. They construct their identities based on the places they live or stay and parents' origin. Studying in English language education department contributes to their identity construction. It enlarges their identities into a member of the international community. How the students see themselves is important to be considered in the process of learning English. Learning activities, syllabus, and materials should accommodate it. The students will feel comfortable to study when they are appreciated as who they are.

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