

Narrative Study on Student Identity in Acquiring Language

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Abstract.

In general, research on English in Indonesia discusses the challenges and motivations in learning English. Very few researchers have investigated the identity construction process carried out by EFL (English Foreign Language) students in Indonesia through their personal life experiences. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between students' identity and their English mastery. The research questions raised in this study include; How does student identity affect their capacity to acquire language? And also how can learning a language reconstruct one's identity? This study uses data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with students who have different identities. The focus of this research is on the process of learning English as a foreign language; regarding the motivation of participants; and how he was exposed to English. The findings of this study indicate that student identity affects students' language acquisition. Early awareness of diversity results in students' cognitive thinking and behaviour patterns. Thus it can help their mastery of English. In addition, other findings show that learning a language can affect and even reconstruct one's identity.

Keywords: Student identity, language acquisition, student capacity, language mastery.

Introduction

Learning a language is a human lifelong process. The process starts from the early years of life until the day a person dies. This process occurs because the human brain continues to learn new things every day. Language is something that can form a person's identity in society. Language is not only about the diversity of words but is an entity that connects a person with his family, identity, culture, music, and beliefs. Therefore, it can be said that language is a carrier of history, traditions, customs, and folklore from one generation to another. Without language, no culture can maintain its existence. Based on the role of language above, we need to recognize that language is the centre of cognition and the human condition, self-development, and also the construction of identity. When a person recognizes his mother tongue as his first language, the process of identity

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construction has begun. Likewise, when someone learns a second language or a foreign language, certain things can happen in their minds. Therefore, the reconstruction of identity occurs again because basically language itself has an identity.

Literature Review

Concerning this problem, some scholars such as Edwards (2009), Johnson & Johnson (1999), and Norton (1995, 1997, 2009) state that language learning and identity reconstruction are closely related. Larsen-Freeman & Cameron in 2007 stated that identity construction through language is a continuous and dynamic process. Related to that statement, language learners often have fluctuating understanding and awareness of themselves as the first language (L1) and second language (L2) speakers. In the Indonesian context, children are generally exposed to their native dialects such as Javanese, Sundanese, and others which later became their first language. In addition to being exposed to the regional language which is their first language, they are also exposed to the culture of the local language and its social, deep understanding of language and culture, and also exposed to Indonesian which is the connecting language in Indonesia. In some cases, some children learn Indonesian first and then the local language. But generally, this language learning process occurs side by side where they learn Indonesian and their local language almost simultaneously. As children grow up, especially between the ages of 12 and 13, they are now exposed to English. This is because English is one of the subjects in the education curriculum in Indonesia that must be studied in junior high schools. Therefore, they not only hold their ethnic identity and national language, but they also have to be exposed to English and the culture brought by the language itself, so this results in a re-construction of identity which is the main material discussed in this article. this paper In general, research on English in Indonesia discusses a lot about the challenges and motivations of students in learning English, the quality of textbooks, government policies, or about teacher qualifications (Alwasilah, 2001; World Bank, 2010). There is no actual research on student identity construction other than that conducted by Wirza in 2018 which investigated the identity construction process carried out by EFL (English Foreign Language) students in Indonesia through their personal life experiences. Therefore, this study focuses on the process of learning English as a foreign language, on the motivation of participants, and how students are exposed to English. But in essence, the main focus of this paper is more likely to investigate the process of how English reconstructs the identity of learners in the narratives explained by students and also how it can affect students' lives considering that they are part of a society in an area that does not use English in their daily life his daily life.

Method

This research is a type of qualitative research that focuses on the personal experiences and ideas of the participants (Creswell, 2003). The method used in this research is a narrative study. The use of this method is one way that allows researchers to understand the construction of a person's identity because this method can be used to determine a person's life experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kramp, 2004). The participants involved in this study consisted of one student who had a different identity. The instrument of this study was in-depth interviews which were used to collect data related to students' opinions about language acquisition. This study also focuses on the process of students' experiences in learning English as a foreign language, which is related to students' motivation and how they were first exposed to English. The participant in this study was Adam (male, pseudonym). Adam is a mix between Sundanese and Javanese but was later exposed to Sundanese culture as he grew up in a Sundanese environment. He was exposed to English formally in elementary school (SD), and informally in his family.

Findings and Discussion

The results of interviews with participants showed that participants were exposed to English early in their lives, Adam was exposed to English when he was 5 years old. However, even though they were exposed to English since childhood, there was no relevance for them to learn English at that time because English was not spoken in their environment and community at all. English is only one of the subjects that must be learned from the education curriculum in Indonesia. Below is a participant narrative about his identity as an English learner.

Adams:

Adam was exposed to English when he was first able to speak when he was 4 years old. Adam's parents chose to let Adam be exposed to English from a young age so that Adam would get used to it when he had to learn English at school so that Adam would be ready to face his future. From this action, it seems that Adam's parents have a futuristic view where they know that fluent English is one of the skills that must be possessed to survive in the era of globalization. Adam grew up in a family with a multicultural identity where his father was born in Java and is fluent in Javanese, while his mother was born in Sunda and is fluent in Sundanese with its Sundanese culture. Meanwhile, Adam, on the other hand, was born in Majalengka so he has been exposed to Sundanese culture ever since.

“At first I was a bit confused when people asked me what culture and ethnicity I belonged to. As you know, my mother was born in West Java with Sundanese culture, my father was born in Java with Javanese culture, while I grew up here in Sundanese culture because I was born in Majalengka. I often ask my

teachers, family, and friends about my condition being born into this multicultural family, some people say I am Sundanese based on the place where I was born, but some say I am Javanese because of my lineage. . During this confusion, I decided to tell everyone that I am Indonesian and I am not culturally bound to any particular culture because I represent all of them.”

This condition shows that Adam comes from multicultural descent and thus it forms Adam's identity, not as a follower of a particular ethnicity but as a representation of the ethnicity he has in his blood. This condition also shows a situation where Abi is a person with an open mind. He also shared how he was teased by his surroundings (including his friends and the parents he lives with) when he tried to speak English.

“It is very difficult to learn English at school, I find it much easier to study alone at home. That's because at school people used to mock me and tell me to speak Sundanese instead of English, they used to make fun of me by saying that we both eat rice instead of bread, so I don't need to be 'So English'. As a student in junior high school, it interfered with my motivation and mental state, I felt like I would have no friends if I continued to use English, so I decided to only use it in English class. ”

From Adam's narration, he describes his condition when he tried to practice English in a non-English environment. Even though he was just trying to practice, his friends often mocked him by saying "So English". The term is a term used by someone to mock other people who use English in their daily lives. According to Adam's narration, his motivation decreased when his friend mocked him. According to the researcher's analysis, this kind of thing happened because Adam's friends didn't know the importance of English at that time. He stated that he has high motivation and enthusiasm when learning English. However, because the method that Adam's teacher uses during teaching is mostly focused on 'English Grammar', this makes Adam insecure when he meets foreigners, because he is too focused on using his grammar rather than what he wants to convey when communicating. with strangers. Even so, Adam stated that by learning English at least it had influenced his mindset which then influenced the re-construction of identity. As he puts it in his following narration:

“By learning English, I feel more open to the world. Somehow, but I feel that I am more open-minded than people around me who don't speak English. My friends also said the same to me.”

This is another finding from Adam's experience of identity reconstruction. He stated that he has become more aware of his surroundings and also often compares himself to his friends in terms of thinking and dealing with problems. When someone learns a language, he will also learn about the culture that is owned by the users of that language. Indirectly this can affect a person's identity so that the process of identity reconstruction can occur. This process occurs continuously and dynamically. Therefore, it can be said that the reconstruction of identity caused by learning a language is a continuous process (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that in addition to

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identity can affect a person's language learning process, the language learned can also influence and even reconstruct a person's identity by changing his mindset in looking at a problem.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that identity can affect a person in acquiring a language. On the other hand, learning a language, be it a second, third, etc. can influence and even reconstruct a person's identity. This is because when someone learns a language, he will also learn about the culture of the language itself. This process is what causes the process of identity reconstruction where this process will occur continuously until a person's learning process stops.

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