

THE EFFECTS OF AN EFL TEXTBOOK ON LEARNERS' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

It has been generally accepted that language learning, to some extent, affects identity construction and such a complex relationship has generated a considerable amount of research papers and literature. Few studies, however, have looked into and discussed how teaching media (e.g., language textbooks) contributes to learners' identity construction particularly in the context of Indonesia. This study attempts to address this gap by analyzing an EFL textbook and then, grafting on several theoretical frameworks, discussing its contribution to the formation of learners' identity. Its pedagogical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: Language learning, EFL textbook, identity construction, intercultural approach

Introduction

Learning is important to one's identity (Wenger, 1998). It shapes a person to be whom and what they like and dislike to be. Such process of wanting to become and despising to become entails a process of identity negotiation from the old self to the new self, or the current self to the future possible self. All of which are, partly, enabled by learning. In other words, learners' involvement and engagement in the process of acquiring and learning new knowledge, performing academic and non-academic tasks as well as performing social roles and function within the educational contexts subsequently change perspectives and as a result bring about new understandings. New understandings will some way alter learners' perception about themselves and the social world around them. Learning, therefore, cannot be narrowly defined as an institution where students accumulate knowledge and skills for the sole purpose of enriching their cognitive repertoire but it, as Norton (2000) argues, a site of struggle between learners and their social world.

The relationship between learning, particularly that of English language learning, and identity has been of researchers' interests with major studies focusing its studies on the formation and construction of identities in the inner and outer circle countries. Few studies have explored the intertwined relationship between identity and language learning in expanding countries where English is considered as a foreign language (hereinafter EFL). Some of the studies are such as Gao, Jia, & Zhou (2015) in China who investigate EFL learning and its effects to learners' development of self-identity, MostafaeiAlaei & Ghamari (2014) in Iran who examine the correlation between formation of Iranian students' national identity to that of EFL learning situation, Lobaton (2012) in Colombia who studies the effect of EFL students' identity construction to that of students' language learning process, and Wirza (2018) who descriptively examined identity constructions of two Indonesian learners of English studying in US.

Despite the amount of literature and research studies that revolve around ESL dan EFL learners' identity, little has looked into the effect of teaching media in the formation and construction of learners' identity. This particular study intends, though not extensively, to analyze an English textbook used in major Indonesian high schools and drawing from several theoretical foundations (Anderson's concept of imagined communities (1983), Ochs and Schieffelin's theory of language socialization (2011), and Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of identity formation and participation) to discuss its possible contribution to EFL learners' identity construction.

Research Method

This study aims to analyze an EFL textbook and discuss its possible contribution to language learners' identity construction. To this end, the paper employs a content analysis as it is a research technique that can provide summary and report of the written data and their messages within its context of use (Cohen, 2007). It mainly seeks to categorize culture-related contents because such contents are deemed suitable for the formation of learners' identity construction. To make it more specific, it will seek to investigate major cultural and social values and norms presented in the textbook. The textbook in question is titled "New Snapshot", published by Pearson Longman in 2003 and written by Fran Linley, Brian Abbs, Ingrid Freebarn, and Chris Barkers. It is chosen for the practical reason, that is, it is one of the textbooks widely used by

public schools in Jakarta, Indonesia.

FINDINGS

Celebrity and aspirational content

The textbook states that its objective is to capture “students’ interest and imagination through real characters and language, up-to-the-minute teenage topics and pop songs” (Linley, Abbs, Freebarn, & Barkers, 2003; inside cover). To achieve its learning goal, the textbook provides a considerable great amount of celebrity-related learning materials which are seemingly assumed by the authors of the textbook to be of teenagers’ interests. A-list Hollywood figures such as Hugh Jackman and Halle Berry (p. 57), Catherine Zeta-Jones (p. 56), the Beckhams family (p.100), Elijah Wood (p.54) and many other celebrities are found throughout the textbook. These actresses and actors featured are typically “the achieved kind(s)” (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012). Those who do not fall under this category of ‘the achieved kinds’ are rarely presented.

The portrayed actresses and actors throughout the textbook are seemingly opted and thus presented due to their working ethos and other desirable traits. Elijah Wood, for instance, is presented as a “determined, ambitious and inspiring” new actor (unit 9, p 54). The portrayal of Elijah Wood as passionate, hardworking, and committed to advancing his career in the entertainment industry has enabled him his global fame. Peters (2008 cited in Gray 2010, p. 718) argues that such portrayals of successful figures with their distinguished traits are Western characteristics of “distinction, commitment, and passion”, signifying the idealized neoliberal working ethos. Other than the achievement of the celebrities, their financial accomplishment is described at length. David Beckham, for instance, is depicted as one of the most financially prosperous football player whose has gained several properties around the globe [a few houses in Britain and Madrid, a villa in France] and a collection of luxurious cars such as Ferrari, Porsche, and Jaguar. Such depictions of high-class lifestyles are also found in non-celebrities reading materials and language functions presented to readers such as travelling overseas, to Spain “...I’ve decided to spend the summer holidays in Spain” (p. 13), to New York (p.16), to Paris (p.22), Japan, London, and Brazil. Language functions related to reserving in famous and high-end hotels are also presented

(p. 17). other mode of communication such as images and pictures are also used to depict the aspirational content and the high-class lifestyles. Take, for example, some pictures of two figures in front of a beautiful castle in Europe enjoying their holiday (p. 8), a picture of a man who won a lottery and bought a limousine (p.20), a picture of a man enjoying his life by travelling in a yacht (p.24) and other pictures depicting middle to high-class professionals with their business attires. These kinds of images are accounted for more than 85% of the images displayed in the textbook.

Feminism and Gender roles

My brother Steve, and his wife Fran are married/have been married for two years and have/are having an eight months old baby. At present Fran is working/has worked for an advertising company but Steve doesn't have/isn't having a job. For the last six months he has stayed/stays at home to look after the baby. At the moment, he has done/is doing evening classes on cookery and Fran just enrolls/has just enrolled on an information technology course. Their problems is that they don't go out/haven't been out to have fun for ages! (Linley, Abbs, Freebarn, & Barker, 2003, p. 19)

The extract from the reading passage above ostensibly describes the modern construction of men and women's gender roles and in its core seems to challenge the current traditional gender roles. Within such modern construction of gender roles, women are liberated from the traditional gender roles and encouraged and expected to take up more modern roles and traits such as being independent and doing what they want to do despite the traditional views that used to expect women to stay at home and be a housewife. Such roles, which under the traditional view are commonly done by women, are taken up by men. These swap-gender- roles are portrayed to be neutral and natural. Other materials also depict more or less the same values towards gender roles. Some of these examples are a man doing grocery shopping (p. 26), a female researcher conducting research in Gunung Leuseur National Park Indonesia (p. 93), and a female solo traveler in Australia (p. 14, p. 98). Such portrayal of modernized gender roles invites readers to think of their own gender roles with some probing questions such as "do you think that boys/men are better at something and girls/women are better at others? If so, what? And why?"

Race, nationality and English varieties.

The representation of culture, race and nationalities are unequal. Of the 20 units, the reading passages, texts, images, nationalities and cultural artifacts are majorly from the inner-circle English speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and so forth. The nationalities mentioned in the textbook in question, for example, display mostly nationalities from the so-called inner circle countries such as the UK, the USA, Ireland, and Australia, with greater emphasis is given to the UK and the USA. Outer circle and expanding circle countries are minimally represented. Countries like Brazil, Japan, the Philippines, or Indonesia are mentioned in passing. Cultural references or artifacts are also specific to that of the Western countries, European and American. Some of these examples are such as a reality show in a British TV (p. 10), an American TV series titled *Fugitive* (p. 32), an American film titled *the Talented Mr. Ripley* (p. 60) and many other examples. Other than those cultural references, English varieties and dialects from outer circle countries and expanding countries are also not represented. The representation of Caucasian or white racial group is accounted for almost 90% of the people shown throughout the textbook. Other racial groups such as Black racial groups are shown with traits similar to that of the white groups. Other racial groups such as Asians are represented as immigrants and shown only in passing (p. 86). This rather imbalance proportion of coverage has also been found in many other research studies, one of which is Song's (2013), which argues that these inner-circle countries are "positioned as most dominant in terms of content coverage" (p. 385).

DISCUSSION

From the textbook to the creation of 'imagined community' and to learners' identity construction.

The term "imagined communities" developed by Anderson (1983) was initially used to analyze nationalism. Even though it was developed a few decades ago, its theoretical framework has still been considered relevant and hence widely used. In fact, its use has been expanded and applied to broader social contexts including those of learning situations. Anderson argues that nation-states are imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.6). In his analysis, he

critically discusses the role of printing technology and capitalism to the creation of “new imagined community”, and historically explores the intertwined relationship between capitalism, power relations, and the creation of “new imagined community”. He further argues that these types of “new imagined communities” are made possible through power relations, meaning that those in power (particularly those having resources to and access to the printing technology) do the process of imagining for the rest of the community members, generating and offering certain identity options for the rest of the community members. Implicit in his argument is that the creation and dissemination of nations' or /and communities' identities is therefore biased, not neutral. In other words, these identity options are not an objective product of agreement between all communities' members; they are often times the product of imagination done by a certain social group. These new imagined identities are represented and shared to wider social contexts through the advancement of technology, be it printing or digital technology.

Under this theory, the textbook especially a language textbook with its convoluted relationship with culture, can therefore be a site for the creation of “imagined communities” of the society where the language is spoken. The EFL textbook analyzed for this study, for instance, represents the English speaking community under two big themes – celebrity and aspirational contents, and feminism and individualism. The textbook portrays neoliberal working ethos as the key to financial and professional success of the celebrities depicted throughout the textbook. It also represents feminism and individualism as liberating and modern. Other socio-cultural values, artifacts or products are rarely mentioned, or borrowing Pavlenko and Norton's (2007) word, are ‘unimaginable’. To put it another way, sub-cultural values such as those of minorities and of outer circle and expanding circles are not equally represented. Previous studies have indicated similar results (Garcia, 2005; Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011; Rashidi, Meihami, & Gritter, 2016). Such lack of diversity can potentially narrow the English speaking nations, at least to those expanding circle countries like Indonesia whose exposure to English speaking nations and digital technology (at least in some parts of Indonesia) are limited, if not almost non-existent, to certain biased identities of the English speaking nations. This lack of diversity also contradicts the status and function of English as an international

language which should embrace social and cultural diversities.

To understand how biased identities of 'imagined communities' of the English speaking nation contributes to the construction of language learners' identities, it is important to firstly explore and examine how identity researchers and scholars argue around the term "identity". Norton (2000) defines identity as a way "a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Wu (2011) provides another useful insight to that of Norton's by emphasizing the role of social context in the construction of one's social identity. As opposed to Hall & Gay (1996) who views identity as a stable core of oneself, Pavlenko (2002) views it as a fluid and dynamic, indicating that identity formation and construction is a lifelong process and continuously constructed and re-constructed through social interaction and engagement in social, cultural or professional institutions.

School is one of the many institutions that plays a fundamental role in students' identity formation. Students are shaped and re-shaped through different stages of schooling, starting from early childhood education to higher education. All of which are partly shaping students' life and hence their identities. The process of identity's shaping and re-shaping continually occurs through interactions with newly gained knowledge and skills, which change perspectives and understandings. This is in line with Wenger's argument that views learning as an experience of identity. In other words, learning offers learners with necessary academic, social, and cultural experiences that enrich learners and give them diverse identity options for them to opt for themselves. The process of opting for a certain or multiple identity commonly goes through a process of identity reflection and evaluation, and in the context of collectivist culture like Indonesia, a collective evaluation. In other words, learning enables learners by providing them with socio-cultural values and tools to see their future possible self. For example, students studying in English in their university will generally, although not always, at least in the context of Indonesia end up being an English teacher or an English-Indonesian translator. This illustrates the function of a school or learning to situate learners to become a particular person in a certain context.

If learning contributes to learners' identity formation, a foreign

language learning, like EFL in the periphery countries like Indonesia, the process of identity formation and construction can be more complicated due to the blurred line between language and culture and the fact that English and Indonesian cultures are quite the opposite of each other. As widely known and agreed, language is not a set of universal concept that can be easily replaced in another language. It has its own concept that is culturally laden and socially tied to a particular speech community. Thus, in order to learn a new language, one inevitably needs to learn the culture embedded in the language. To illustrate, Indonesian has many equivalents for the pronoun "you" such as "kamu", 'kau', 'engkau', 'anda', 'mba', 'ibu', 'bapa', and so forth. To use these Indonesian pronouns, one needs to understand the degree of politeness each word may culturally carry. Not only that, one also needs to understand the power distance, social distance, and age difference between the speaker and the interlocutors, and the degree of formality. Therefore, when one addresses an older woman, say, with "kamu", it would be considered impolite and rude. One would therefore opt to address with some pronouns like, "mba" (sister) or "kak" (sister; used to address a woman around the same age or less than five years older than the speaker but socially not close), or "bu" (mum; used to address an older woman, socially close or not close). While these unwritten social and cultural rules are automatically understood and agreed by an Indonesian speaker and an Indonesian interlocutor leading to a smooth process of identity negotiation, it may not automatically result in the same identity negotiation when a non-Indonesian learning Indonesian without learning those unwritten social rules. This example indicates a close-knit yet complex relationship between language and culture, necessitating a multifaceted interaction between language and its culture in language learning.

With regards to identity formation and (language) learning, Wenger (1998) argues that in the process of learning, learners often time desire to become a member of a community of practice. He provides three modes of belonging to a particular community of practice; engagement, alignment and imagination. Engagement is a mode of belonging entailing a direct and mutual engagement of negotiation of meaning. Alignment is where learners align their sources as a means to be accepted in broader structures. Imagination is where learners use their imagination to construct new images of themselves and the social world around them. Relating it to the context of this

study, other modes of belonging; engagement and alignment (Wenger, 1998) with the English communities are limited, if not almost existent for Indonesian EFL learners, leaving a mode of belonging, "imagination" to be opted. "Imagination", as Wenger argues, is "a distinct form of belonging to a particular community of practice and a way in which we can locate ourselves in the world and history and include our identities other meanings, other possibilities and other perspectives" (p. 178). In other words, imagination enables learners to imagine themselves through time and space and re-construct themselves and their social world. Implicit in his argument is that identity formation and construction can occur through not only direct participation or engagement in real communities of practice, but also through participation in the "imagined communities" or through imagination.

Given the fluidity of identity (Pavlenko, 2003; Yoshizawa, 2012) and flexibility of it to be continuously constructed and reconstructed and the effect of the globalized world, interactions with a foreign language with its culture that is quite the opposite of Indonesian culture might therefore contribute to the construction of EFL learners' identity. In the context of this study, the cultural and social values embedded in the textbook and presented to the learners may, to a certain degree, affect the way learners perceive their own cultural values in relation to the projection of the discursively presented values. This is supported by theory of language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011) which posits that "... [as] novices become fluent communicators, they also become increasingly adept members of the communities. Their communicative efficacy in particular situations depends upon their grasp of shifting and enduring perspectives that give meaning and order to an array of relationship, institutions, moral words, and knowledge domains (p. 7). In other words, when EFL learners become fluent communicators of English or when they perceive themselves as a fluent English speaker, they might associate themselves through imagination as a member of the English speaking community, and go through process of negotiation from their current "Indonesian" self to their "English speaking self". This process of negotiation occurs as they switch from one code to another, from Indonesian to English or the vice versa.

Theory of language socialization also highlights the tenet that "becoming a recognized member [of a certain community] entails an accommodation to members' ideologies about communicative

resources, including how they can be used to acquire and display knowledge, express emotions, perform actions, constitute persons and establish and maintain relationship" (p. 7). This might be true because when learners of English are exposed to language with its different functions and roles, learners might re-negotiate their ways of acquiring or displaying knowledge in relation to the projection of the language. For example, an EFL learner writing in English will be exposed to the "straight" discursal system, which is quite the opposite of the Indonesian "circular" discursal system. Such exposure and the requirement of him/her to write in English will subsequently situate learners to re-negotiate her/his Indonesian discursal system and choose to use the English discursal system in order to be considered as a fluent speaker, or in the context of schooling, to pass the course, say, for instance, English writing class. The example above indicates that language learning shape learners' way of displaying knowledge and organizing ideas. That is why the more Indonesian students are exposed to writing in English, the more they acquire the English way of organizing ideas, thus opting for English discursal system.

While the example above is an evitable effect of learning English, the socialization of other socio-cultural values may not always result in the same way. The textbook represents feminism ideology which encourages women to exercise their individual choice as a right and liberty bearer. With regards to this, Pavlenko and Piller (2007 as cited in Zhiao, 2011, p. 1) assert that 'successful L2 learning may entail a modification of one's gender performance in order to ensure validation and legitimacy in the target language and culture". This can be best illustrated in an example taken from the textbook. A listening activity which provides learners with a radio report on men and women drivers in Britain is inviting learners to think of their own gender roles with questions, "Do you think that boys/men are better at something and girls/women are better at others? If so, what? And why?" (p. 45).

Such philosophically rooted questions probe learners to think of their own gender roles against the non-traditional gender roles projected through the reading texts. In order to minimize their own imagination as a fluent EFL and their current self, they might adjust their gender roles through their language performance in order to meet the expectation. This, however, does not necessarily translate to the adoption of such gender roles as to say so imply undermining learners'

agency and neglecting the complexity and multifaceted process of identity construction. Identity construction is a complex process and influenced by multilayered factors such as race, geographic locations, social interaction, relationships, educational and professional institutions and established customs and so forth. In other words, EFL learners are not passive recipients of cultural values transmission or internationalizations. This premise however indicates that the projection of certain socio-cultural values that are quite different from EFL learners' values enables learners to form rich conception of themselves through the process of language learning and language performance.

It further implies that identity is multiple, indicating that learners can, through their language performance, go from one cultural identity to another depending on the social and cultural context they are in, or one learning context to another. This is a common practice in Indonesia as Indonesians are bilingual, if not trilingual. The general population of Indonesia can speak at least two languages; one local language and one national language. Therefore, when an Indonesian speaks Indonesian and then shifts to their local language, which generally is culturally laden, she/he might adjust accordingly to the social and cultural convention of their local language. Another example, an English student in Indonesia when addressing his or her Indonesian English teacher will have to use the pronoun "you" when they converse in English but then switch to "bu" or "pak" when the conversation is in Indonesian. The automaticity of code switching to the linguistic convention of the target language involves a process of (re) negotiation from one identity to another, suggesting the existence of multiple identities within individuals. This means when someone speaks a second or a foreign language, he or she does not abandon his/her own cultural identity and adopt the new one, he/she instead tries to accommodate his/her own cultural identity and the new culture.

Learning and mastery of English also enables Indonesian learners to get to know themselves better, to understand their own cultures and other cultures better. For example, Indonesian EFL learners may not directly adopt the projection of some cultural values such as those of neoliberal working ethos, feminism and individualism, as those are quite the opposite of their cultural values. But this projection might expose them to different conceptions and through the process of evaluation,

they can learn to opt what is best and socially acceptable in their social context and grow to be a better version of themselves. After all, learners are agents in their own right.

Other than enriching students' self-concept and their social world around them, the projection of English as a language of success, a language of development, a language of modern world, and a language of "super power countries" through the portrayals of celebrity and aspirational contents found throughout the textbook can possibly influence learners' motivation. With regards to this issue, Dornyei (2005) argues that pupils who foresee themselves as L2 users are typically highly driven to learn and reach a high level of fluency in the target language as a means to minimize the discrepancy between their imagination and their current self. Other L2 learners, as he further argues, also have the same aim, that is, to be proficient but are generally led by extrinsic motivations such as societal pressure or socio-political factors. In Indonesia, English proficiency is perceived as a capital resource (Zacharias, 2003). It is equal to economic and professional assets as it defines the likelihood of a person being hired in multinational companies that commonly offer high take-home pay. It has also been commonly perceived as an academic investment, which is evident through the rapidly growing number of English language institutions, bilingual schools and immersion programs across Indonesia. It is aligned with Bourdieu's (1991) theory of cultural capital in which he argues that when a language yields benefits to the speakers using the language, then that language is thus considered as a linguistic capital.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Considering the multifaceted relationship between language, learning and identity, language teachers need to instill a more inclusive, critical and intercultural approach in their teaching practice. This can be done in several ways. First, language teachers need to opt for a textbook or any teaching media that offers diversities in terms of cultural coverage. Opting for a textbook that circulates around the inner-circle English speaking countries with its coverage of English varieties from such countries enhances the long-existing dichotomy of native and non-native speaker-ism. On the other hand, opting for a textbook that is inclusive and thus offering diversities in terms of varieties of Englishness, be it standard, usage, dialects and cultural references or artifacts will provide learners with authentic materials and

language functions that will be in use in their future academic and professional life. In fact, in reality, EFL learners in Indonesia will have bigger change to meet and communicate in English with English speakers from neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, China and other outer circle and expanding circle countries. Therefore, exposure of varieties of English to Indonesian EFL learners is needed and should be taken into consideration by English teachers in order to develop authentic communicative skills of Indonesian EFL learners.

Moreover, language teachers need to apply intercultural approach in their teaching practice. This way, language teachers acknowledge the fluidity and hybridity of identities especially in the context of foreign language learning. This can be done by encouraging learners during the process of learning English to observe, evaluate and reflect on English and Indonesian and the cultures of both, and as a result gain deeper and better understanding of Indonesian and English cultures. Other than that, language teachers can provide a platform for the exploration of linguistic and cultural differences between English and Indonesian and thus to academically, socially and culturally respond to them. Such exploration raises awareness and respect to diversity leading to a diminishment of a classical concern spreading across Indonesia that teaching and learning English with its Western values will negatively affect personalities and cultural identities of learners. In other words, a new lens in viewing the teaching of English as a foreign language needs to be adopted by language teachers. Teaching English needs to go beyond the traditional aim of teaching English, which is, at least in some parts of Indonesia, aiming at meeting the academic purpose. It needs to provide a space to explore themselves during the process of learning other languages and cultures and to opt for their "identities" which are socially and culturally fit for themselves and their context.

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