

EFL Students' Understanding of Their Multilingual English Identities

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Abstract

Little is known about how multilingual English users (MEUs) in EFL contexts such as Indonesia understand and construct their MEU identities. The purpose of the study is to explore how 30 students in a pre-service teacher education frame their multilingual English identities as written in response journals, part of a course requirement in a Cross-cultural Understanding (CCU) course. The findings illustrate that many of the participants negotiated their identities based on a core identity derived from their assumed first language (L1) culture. With regard to the English use, encounters with native speakers appeared to magnify their linguistic insecurity, viewing their nonnative status as a drawback. All of the participants appeared to be fully aware that the use of English in public spaces would project negative identities as Indonesian nationals. Implications for pre-service teacher education programs are made at the end of the paper.

1 Introduction

With the globalization of English and the pervasiveness of schools with English as medium of instruction in the nation, many Indonesians have expressed concerns over the extent to which enthusiasm to learn and speak English might contribute negatively to national identities. Pramono (2009), for example, strongly argues that speaking *Bahasa Indonesia* with an English accent or code-mixing *Bahasa Indonesia* and English, or “Indoglish” (*Bahasa Indonesia-English*) is symptomatic of the deterioration of nationalism. Good Indonesians, he believed, are those who speak *Bahasa Indonesia* in a correct and right manner (*Berbahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*), which implies it is free from an English accent and mixed English-Indonesian words. Pramono's concerns are also shared by Onishi (2010). Onishi observes that some upper-middle class parents take pride if their children can speak English fluently, even though their competence in *Bahasa Indonesia* is questionable.

The concerns about national identities might be justified. In a country with hundreds of local languages, a strong lingua franca, *Bahasa Indonesia*, is crucial to unify the hundreds of ethnic groups and local languages. The socio-cultural settings of English language classrooms in Indonesia are bi-/multilingual and bi-/multicultural, as both learners and teachers bring their multiple identities into the classroom. In classrooms where teachers have realized and accepted this fact and legitimized the use of the first language (L1), these identities and practices are empowered and explored as ‘resources.’ In classroom where this is not the case, they are positioned as ‘problems.’ Unfortunately, in Indonesia classrooms, the latter is the most common (Zacharias, 2003, 2006).

Another necessary point in Pramono's and Onishi's views concerns the concept of national identities as static and unified. Their views might be justified in contexts where English is not a

global language. However, in this modern world, identities, including national identities, are continuously constructed, reconstructed, negotiated and transformed on on-going basis through and by languages (Hall, 1996; Norton, 1997). English, as the world language, certainly is a major force in the construction of multilingual Indonesian identities. Also, the view that good Indonesian nationals need to speak only 'Bahasa Indonesia in a correct way and manner' does not accommodate the very nature of Indonesians who are multilingual and multicultural.

As a teacher educator who has been teaching English for years, I take the negative Indonesian societal perception towards English seriously, although my personal experience as a postgraduate student in the US has taught me otherwise. It was during my time in the US, surrounded predominantly by monolingual English speakers and the English culture, that I felt truly most Indonesian (Zacharias, 2010). It was in the US that I cherished all the languages that I speak and the multiple cultural selves that I have. My heightened awareness of being an Indonesian has sparked a fear of losing my Indonesian and Javanese, the two languages I grew up with. My experience in the US of using English in a natural setting and learning English in an institutional setting have led to what Kramsch (2009) labels as "reconsideration of the familiar" (p. 5). I began to be aware of the multiple selves I have and how these 'selves' seems to intersect, contradict and even question one another. Nunan and Choi (2010) were right when they say that "most people are unaware of their culture or identity until they are confronted with other cultures and identities" (p. 5).

The growing concern of many Indonesians over the fascination of English and my personal experience of living in an English-speaking community led me to wonder what it means by a multilingual English user (MEU). My curiosity is even deeper because of the lack of studies focusing on MEUs in contexts where English is a foreign language (except for Block, 2007) such as in Indonesia. Some studies conducted in the foreign language settings focus on foreign languages other than English, such as German (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001) and Mandarin (Lantolf & Genung, 2003). As language is an act of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985), the studies involving German and Mandarin as foreign languages surely result in different identity issues and options, although I would not deny there might be some similarities with English as a foreign language (EFL).

Studies focusing on MEUs in EFL contexts are even rarer. Knowing that EFL contexts are extremely varied with regard to the intensity of the English learning (i.e. hours per week), the availability of teaching materials, the relative importance of English in the society and, most of all, the purpose for learning English (Block, 2007), there needs to be a study focusing on MEUs in EFL contexts where English is acquired in institutional settings and is not the language of the community (Block, 2007). Such studies are needed to avoid "harmful generalization" (Kumaravadivelu, 2005, p. 710); viewing the identities of MEUs in Indonesia as similar to those in other EFL contexts.

Thus, the present paper aims to explore how students frame and see their Indonesian multilingual English identities as constructed through their journal responses to multilingual narratives in a Cross-cultural Understanding (CCU) course. It aims to address the following research question:

- What are the participants' perceptions of their identities as multilingual English users as reflected in the response journals?

I will refer to the participants in the present study with the term 'MEUs.' In line with the traditions of the field of bi-/multilingualism, the word 'multilingual' is used to refer to someone who functions in more than one language for purposes of communication and not necessarily as someone with high levels of proficiency in those languages (Kramsch, 2009; Pavlenko, 2006). I use the word 'users' rather than 'learners' because in the department they are not only learning English but also use English "to engage in frequent, regular oral or written interaction" (Maley, 2009, p. 190) with other students as well as the teachers.

2 The identities of multilingual English users

The paper is situated within the current shift in the field of SLA from the notion of language learning as the mere acquisition of the linguistic system of the target language to the view that it

involves the sociological, psychological and anthropological dimensions of language learning and the language learners (Block, 2007; Norton, 2010; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Here, Norton (2010) points out that language is understood not just as a “linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities are negotiated” (pp. 351). Within this view, in addition to acquiring the linguistic system of the target language, learning a language includes being exposed to and educated in engaging with social practices associated with the target language.

In this section, I will focus specifically on language learning and language learners in EFL contexts because of the relative exposure and status of English. Additionally, the language learners' association with English in EFL contexts are different from ESL settings. Although teachers often provide EFL students with activities that raises pragmatics and cultural awareness, Block (2007) maintains such an activity “does not constitute a period ... of time during which prolonged contact with a TL and a new and different cultural setting causes irreversible destabilization of the individual's sense of self” (Block, 2002, p. 4).

An important concept in this sociocultural view of learning is that language learning is not a neutral process but is “conflictual and transformative” (Norton, 2010, p. 357). In fact, studies on foreign language learning in EFL contexts illustrate that as learners gain more competence in the target language, their identities are contested and become an issue (Block, 2007). One such study was conducted by Liddicoat and Crozet (2001) with Australian students of French in Australia. Their study investigated the extent to which a group of Australian students of French would benefit from cultural-awareness-raising activities about French and Australian small-talk at weekend activities. Their study highlighted that learners appear to develop an “understanding that learning to speak a FL is not a matter of simply adopting foreign norms of behavior, but about finding an acceptable accommodation between one's first culture and the target culture” (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001, pp. 137–138).

Examining research conducted by Liddicoat and Crozet (2001), Belz (2002), Lantolf and Genung (2003), as well as his own study (Block, 2000), Block (2007) concludes:

... in FL [foreign language] setting, there is usually far too much first language-mediated baggage and interference for profound changes to occur in the individual's conceptual system and his/her sense of self in the TL [target language] (p. 144).

His study of Sylvia, an English learner in Brazil, and her identity development through writing linked this development to her direct contact with her teacher and classmates rather than the target language users. Block (2000) explains that identity play is often mediated by participation in communities of practice (CoP) and in the foreign language contexts, learners' engagement in these CoPs is effected through their local languages and not the target language, English. Block further argues that EFL contexts provide a “relatively unfertile ground for TL-mediated identity work” compared to ESL contexts where there is the “potential for partial or full immersion” in the target language's CoPs (p. 144).

Mathews (2000) notes that identity is not an entity into which one is raised but that one assumes an identity and then works around it. In the case of MEUs, one has to wonder to what extent MEUs are free to assume an identity for themselves and, even if they do, what identity options are available to them. One highly cited study illustrating the detrimental effect of limited identity options to MEUs' sense of identity is Pavlenko (2003). Her study focuses on the identity options available to pre-service and in-service international students enrolled in a TESOL program. Participants who viewed themselves as nonnative speakers, admitted feeling passive, incompetent, unimportant and invisible.

Several studies have shown that EFL contexts provide fewer identity options for MEUs (Block, 2007; Kramsch, 2009; Zacharias, 2011). Among those few options, even fewer or no empowering identity options are available for MEUs. The only working identity options for MEUs is that of nonnative speakers (NNS), an identity option that has been problematized heavily in the academia (Block, 2007; Braine, 2004; Kramsch, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2005; Moussu & Lurda, 2008), but

is still pervasively used in educational settings. To complicate the matter, in EFL contexts, as pointed out by Kramersch (2009), MEUs are not trained and challenged to “construct new identities for themselves” (p. 4). As a result, MEUs have no other options but to submit passively rather than to problematise the disempowering identity option. Fortunately, some studies are slowly starting to emerge, pointing to the encouraging effect of critical pedagogies focusing on issues related to language, culture and identity in MEUs’ sense of self (Block, 2007; Pavlenko, 2003; Zacharias, 2010).

3 The design of the Cross-cultural Understanding course

To contextualize the results of the study, I start out by outlining the structure of the CCU course in question, in which the study took place. The CCU course ran for 14 weeks. In the first four weeks, the class began by discussing three articles on issues related to English as an International language, identity and multilingualism: “English as an International Language” (McKay, 2010), “Language and Identity” (Norton, 2010), and “Being trilingual or multilingual: Is there a price to pay?” (Olshtain & Nissim-Amitai, 2004).

In the remaining weeks, students read multilingual narratives or what Kramersch (2009) terms “published testimonies and language memoirs” (p. 3) of former language learners and immigrants. The ‘multilingual narratives’ here refer to written testimonies of English speaking multilinguals narrating in English their experiences of learning and living with several languages, one of which is English. They address issues related to language, culture and identities. Since all the multilingual narrators in these narratives are immigrants, one may argue that such texts might not be suitable for EFL students who might have different needs for learning English. Although this might be true, I see these differences more as a resource that the participants could draw on during classroom discussion or for their response journals, a part of the course requirements.

4 Method

4.1 Participants

All 30 students whose response journals form the data for this study were in the third or fourth year in the English Language Teaching (ELT) department. At the beginning of the course, the participants were requested to fill in a “Participant biographical information” form, which captures information such as gender, age, year level, and linguistic repertoire. The participants consisted of 22 females and eight males in their early to mid 20s. They are all trilingual in English, Bahasa Indonesia and local languages. Eight students claimed they were quadrilingual. These students were those who completed their high school in other language communities before moving to Java, where the present university is located, and acquired Javanese for survival needs. The biographical information also required them to indicate the number of years they had learned English and whether they had lived or studied outside Indonesia. As expected, all of the participants did not live or study outside Indonesia. Many of them acquired English as a school subject. Ten students stated that in addition to learning English at school, they also learned English in external language courses.

They registered for the CCU course in 2010. It was a three-hour credit course and ran for fourteen weeks. They were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis by filling in a consent form at the beginning of the course. The participants were either in the third year or fourth year of a four-year degree in a pre-service teacher education program. They are of various cultural backgrounds with the majority being Javanese and Chinese. All the names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

4.2 Data collection

To gain insights into the ways the participants frame their multilingual English identities, I made use of a response journal, a data collection method to understand students’ development in

their sense of self in the target language (Kramsch, 1993, 2009). The response journal addressed personal experiences related to language, culture and identity dealt with in the multilingual narratives. 'A letter to the author' format was chosen as the genre of the journal to give the students a sense of audience so that they could be more personal and focus on content rather than worrying about grammatical errors. The assignment was worded in the task sheet in the following way:

Write a letter to the author (1-2 pages long) sharing your understandings, feelings and even questions you had after reading his/her narrative piece on issues related to language, culture and identity. In the letter, you can write the following, for example:

- Overall feelings or impression of the story;
- Opinions after reading the story
- A particular "critical incident" (Nunan & Choi, 2010) that you can identify with;
- Questions that you might ask the author; and
- Other relevant things advancing your understanding of issues of language, identity, and culture.

At no point in time were the students explicitly told to write about their L1 cultural identities and/or English identities. Pavlenko (2003) points out that, though data collected in this way may lack the richness of data collected through ethnographic methods, they will allow the researcher to explore issues of language, identity and culture.

4.3 Data analysis

The narrative data in the study were analyzed using content analysis (McKay, 2006). The first stage of the data analysis procedure involved reading and rereading the participants' journals. When reading the participants' journals, I analyzed the narratives using a categorical-content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) to identify emerging themes. For each theme, I assigned a different color, and each time I identified narrative utterances referring to the themes, I highlighted them accordingly. Examples from the subjects' narratives were placed into these identified themes for further analysis. It has to be noted that only the qualitative results of the analysis are presented here, as quantitative information about the number of references to particular issues would be meaningless in this type of narrative analysis.

Due to the small-scale nature of the study reported here, the data presented are not intended to represent the perspective of all pre-service teachers and the findings are not to be generalized to contexts beyond these cases. Nevertheless, the data provide valuable insights into the nature of multilingual English identities in EFL contexts such as Indonesia.

5 Findings

5.1 Legitimizing English self through acceptance from NS

Many participants saw their English selves as related to the linguistic aspects of the English language. Park (2007) notes that NNS identities are co-constructed through interaction. In the journal entries below, Ari and Muhamad appeared to foreground NNS identities during their encounters with native speakers (NSs):

Narrative 1

This happened when I was having a basketball match with students from an international school in Salatiga. When we were inside the school, we were so nervous. "What are we going to say to them?" I said to my friend ... Fortunately, they were so kind, greeted us. I tried to talk to them about Basket. They way they speak were so fluent (Yes because they are native). At that time, I was saying to myself, "Be careful when talking to them." I was afraid of making grammatical mistakes and mispronounce words. It will embarrass me. (Ari, Journal 3)

Narrative 2

The experience happened 4 years ago when I was just a freshman in the department. My teacher (native speaker) speaks in English. I was not confident because I was afraid of making errors during lesson. When the lecture started the class, I felt so nervous. When he spoke, I was confused because of his unique accent. It was not really clear. I swear I felt so stupid at that time because I could not understand what he said. (Muhamad, Journal 3)

Kramsch (2009) points out that in language learning a learner's conceptual self stems from "stories learners have been told about themselves and others, the stories they have heard told or written to others" (p. 72). Although these stories are not necessarily correct, Kramsch maintains that these stories tend to govern what learners notice and what they find relevant. Both Ari's and Muhamad's narratives might well illustrate Kramsch's idea. They shared the frequent assumption still prevalent in Indonesia that native speakers are those who speak perfect and accurate English (Zacharias, 2003, 2006). Good NNSs are those who speak English like the idealized NSs. Such pressure might lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt as illustrated in Ari's and Muhamad's journals. Similar feelings were experienced by Braine (2004) and Morita (2004).

Kramsch (2009) notes that for language learners in EFL contexts, "passing for a native" can be coupled with ... pride and pleasure" (p. 92). The pride and pleasure of many participants resulted from praise from NSs. In the narrative that follows, Ronny narrated his encounter with Australian international students during a basketball match. The encounter made him realize the quality of his English:

Narrative 3

When I was resting, suddenly, an Australian student approached me and we talked. I tried to pick a topic that make him interested, about World Cup 2006. ... At first, I felt nervous. I was afraid he could not understand my English because of my pronunciation and grammar. Then, other Australian students praised my English, saying it was good. I did not realize my English was good. The native speaker praised my English even though I felt my English is not perfect at all because I am still a learner of English. Other international students seemed surprised because my English was better than their expectation. When I communicate with them, I thought they would not understand my English. The most unforgettable thing is that they show appreciation to me when I spoke English with them (Ronny, Journal 3).

The psychological impact of NS praise was also found in Margi's journal entry. Here, she shared a meeting her uncle's NS boss, an encounter she had yearned for:

Narrative 4

Two months ago, my uncle in law from Bali visited me with two of his foreign friends. His boss was from America and his friend from the Philippines but has spent some years in the US. I was very excited because I thought that it was my chance to practice my speaking skill with native speakers. I have waited for the opportunity to speak with native speakers out of my study's setting. That is why I decided to come even though I was not formally invited. My uncle introduced me to his boss and his friend. They asked me about my study and what I want to do after graduating (Margi, Journal 5).

Margi was excited when the American boss praised her grammar and accent, giving her the psychological fulfillment of being considered a legitimate English user:

Narrative 5

In the middle of the conversation, my uncle's boss praised my English. He said my English is good especially the grammar. He said that English grammar is not easy especially because of the tenses. And he said that my grammar is good. His praise made me felt proud. He also said that my accent is good. At first, I thought he just wanted to make me happy but then, I sensed he was genuine because our conversation went well. He can understand all of what I said. While we were talking, I noticed that the rest of my family looked at me with pride. My aunt, especially, said my English is good. (Margi, Journal 3)

Norton (1997, 2010) states that at times NNSs are most uncomfortable when speaking to people they see as gatekeepers to the imagined communities they attempt to enter. Ronny and Margi might perceive NSs as the gatekeepers to the English-speaking imagined community. Thus, whenever their English was not comprehensible to NSs, they developed negative opinions of themselves. By contrast, legitimacy and acceptance by NSs of their English provided them to some extent with the 'cure' to the fear of being identified as incompetent NNSs. This therefore relieved them from the linguistic insecurity blanketing them even before the communication with NSs began.

What these narratives illustrate is that speaking English is more than using the language in communicative events as pointed out by Kramersch (2009). It points to a struggle and desire for linguistic acceptance and legitimacy from the NSs. Margi (see Narrative 4), for example, yearned for an opportunity to use English with NSs and thus sought to fulfill his wish by coming uninvited to meet his uncle's international friends. The praise from her uncle's American boss (see Narrative 5) enhanced (Kramersch, 2009) her NNS self. In a similar vein, Ronny (see Narrative 3) was aware of how good his English was only after a group of Australian students praised it. What is more significant, the positive feedback Ronny and Margi received specifically from the NSs, and not other English users, appeared to have enhanced their status as English users.

Norton (1997) states that natural language learning context is sometimes "marked by inequitable relations of power in which language learners struggle ... [for] opportunities to practice their English in a safe and supportive environment" (p. 113). The narratives of Ronny (see Narrative 3) and Margi (see Narratives 4 and 5) show that the NSs were frequently very supportive of the NNSs' status. NSs in Indonesia were depicted as tolerant towards and appreciative of NNSs' English and their attempts to communicate. The acceptance by people the participants see as the "gatekeepers of the language" (Norton, 1997, p. 415) seems to significantly change the way the participants viewed themselves as well as their sense of English competence.

Together these narratives concur with Park's (2007) and Faez's (2007) perspectives. In his study, Park explored how NNS identities are co-constructed through interaction. Faez (2007) confirmed that linguistic identities are relational and highly context-dependent. From the narratives in this section, the participants showed that encounters with NSs in varying degrees and relationships might significantly lessen the linguistic insecurity experienced by many participants.

5.2 *Backgrounding English use to project desirable Indonesian identities*

In considering the participants' identities as MEUs, we should, however, be cautious not to fall into the trap of making the EFL status of the participants the only focal point in defining the identity construction of MEUs. Learning English makes participants aware of how their English use might project unfavorable Indonesian identities:

Narrative 6

Talked to her [an American teacher] made my friend and I felt proud and prestigious. People stared at us. Maybe they thought that we mastered English well. Maybe some of them were jealous at us. (Astri, Journal 3).

Narrative 7

Now ... I am a student of English Department in SW, I am still a Javanese. It means that, I just learn to study about English ... not apply the English culture in my daily life ... I think English is just the bridge to a better education and knowing its culture can enrich my knowledge. I myself try not to use many English outside campus ... because some people in here think that I am too arrogant, and show off in my capability of speaking English. It is enough for me to use my English in the right place and situation (Resti, Journal 2)

The narratives of Astri (see Narrative 6) and Resti (see Narrative 7) illustrate the conflicting identity functions of English. As pointed out by Kramersch (2009), people who study foreign languages might be considered part of the elite; a point that was felt by Astri and Resti. Astri felt 'prestigious' when speaking English with an American. By contrast, in Indonesia, the use of Eng-

lish in public places may be indexed as lacking nationalism and arrogant, a point made by Onishi (2010) and Pramono (2009). From the narratives above, both Astri and Resti seemed to be aware of the conflicting identity functions of English. They were aware of the social scrutiny that awaits Indonesians who use English in the public eye.

Resti's narrative (see Narrative 7), in particular, illustrate the case made by Doran (2004). He notes that individuals may seek to challenge or resist the identity options to allow for greater identity options. Resti's conscious decisions not to "apply the English culture," consider English as 'just' an object of study, and locate English use within the "right place and situation," illustrate her attempts to obtain more viable identity options to be accepted in Indonesian communities.

For one participant, Bowo, multilingual English identities were not only associated with language usage but also bodily movement:

Narrative 8

I got an experience ... in Speaking 4 course. She [the teacher] always told me to keep my eye contact to the audience in my presentation but I couldn't. I felt so afraid if I do that. Maybe it is caused by my Javanese norm which is inside me. Javanese children ... never keep their eye contact to the older person ... Javanese people believe this is ... to show respect to the older person. In Javanese culture, look straight on to the older person ... [is] impolite ... and means "you challenge them." [However] ... In English, ... you should keep eye contact to your partner to show the respectfulness. It is very impolite if you look down ... it means you are not interested with the topic of conversation (Bowo, Journal 2).

Kramsch (2009) explains that learning a foreign language makes students more aware of "their bodies and of the language's body" (p. 67). In the case of Bowo, his narrative reveals tension between his Javanese self and his English self when his Speaking 4 teacher asked him to keep an eye contact when making a speech in English. Through his writing, he appeared to be troubled because he could not easily keep eye contact with the audience, a body movement he associated with the 'English culture.'

Overall, the narratives in this section show the participants' awareness of the conflicting symbolic value (Bourdieu, 1991) of English. In Indonesia, English continues to have a high symbolic value. Thus, being an English pre-service teacher brings a relative amount of prestige to an individual (Widiyanto, 2005). However, code-switching between Indonesian-English and the use of English in public settings can be viewed negatively as lack of respect to the national language, Indonesian (Onishi, 2010; Pramono, 2009). I believe the status of English in Indonesia and the societal views of Indonesian English speakers have a significant impact on the way participants view themselves and their English selves.

5.3 Cultural identities as true identities

What I found interesting is that in the response journal, many participants expressed strong concerns about losing their cultural identities as a result of acquiring English. In these narratives, many participants construct their multilingual English identities as rooted in their cultural identities. In the following narratives, Mythul and Cimunz, for example, described Javanese identity as "a commitment" and "real":

Narrative 9

[M]y identity as Javanese is commitment that cannot be easily ... deny even ... [by] myself ... Unconsciously whenever or wherever I go far away from our country/culture, I have a kind of special bond to my real identity ... I cannot deny and avoid my blood ... because, if I deny or feel embarrassed of my identity, I feel like I embarrassed myself (Mythul, Journal 7).

Narrative 10

Reading your story [Widiyanto's story] made me think of the concept of teacher identity. When you are learning English ... and living and teaching in Australia, you still keep your identity as an Indone-

sian English teacher with you. You become multicultural but it does not affect your true identity in speaking using *Bahasa Indonesia* or Javanese in your life (Cimunz, Journal 8).

For Mythul and Cimunz, cultural identity seems to be “a sense of self-hood attached to a physical body” (Young, 2008, p. 9). Thus, they both felt the need to acknowledge and maintain the existence and continuity of their cultural identities.

For some multilinguals, identifying one's identity seems to be a struggle, as seen in Celly's narrative below:

Narrative 11

I'm a Javanese because my family is all Javanese ... but since I was born I learn many languages and cultures that influence my languages and my behaviour ... I don't have Javanese accent, I can't speak Javanese fluently ... but I can speak in Betawinese fluently. My friends in Salatiga still don't believe that I'm really a Javanese people. I think I'm in danger because I start to lose my true identity as a Javanese. Even now, I also learn English deeper. It also affects my culture (Celly, Journal 7).

Celly's narrative appears to problematize Le Page's (1995) idea of language as an act of identity. The one-on-one association between language and identity might not be straightforward when dealing with multilinguals. Mathews (2000) claims that identities are not entities into which one is raised. Rather, one assumes an identity option and then works on it. In the case of Celly, he assumed a Javanese identity because of parental association. He appeared to be disturbed because his multilingual repertoire (fluent Betawinese, less fluent Javanese, and the lack of Javanese accented Indonesian) did not project his perceived sense of self as a Javanese. Here, his overall narrative highlighted concerns of losing his true Javanese self at the expense of being a multilingual in Javanese, Betawi, Indonesian and English.

One participant, Nidia, went to a great length to “work around” (Mathews, 2000) a Javanese identity she assumes she has. In one journal entry, Nidia shared a critical incident when her legitimacy as a Javanese woman is questioned by a *lotek* (mixed vegetables with nut sauce) seller, because she did not use the appropriate register when ordering the dish. The way the *lotek* seller questioned her Javanese identity resulted in Nidia learning *Krama*, the register that she should have used with the *lotek* seller:

Narrative 12

I tried to learn 'Krama.' I realized that the lotek seller was right. I need to know my own culture, my own language. I got some lesson from school, and ... also learn '*Krama Inggil*' from older people around me. ... When I felt that I was ready enough, I decided to go to the 'warung' again and proved that I was really Javanese and I know my culture. There although I still felt afraid with the seller, I tried to speak in '*krama*' as fluent as I could. However, she did not give me a good response about my development. I was rather disappointed, but it did not make me give up ...learning 'Krama.' I want to prove to everyone that I am a true Javanese girl (Nidia, Journal 7).

Nidia's narrative above underlined the interconnectedness of identity with what Butler (2004) calls 'norms of recognition,' that is, norms through which people can construct themselves to be 'intelligible' to others and can thus ascribe a particular identity. Her decision to go back to the *lotek* seller to show off her *Krama* might be an attempt to authenticate (Bucholtz, 2003) her Javanese self. Bucholtz (2003) defines authentication as “the assertion of one's own or another's identity as genuine or credible” (p. 408). In Nidia's mind, her mastery of *Krama* would authenticate her as “real” and genuine Javanese. Thus, when the *lotek* seller failed to recognize her *Krama*, Nidia was disappointed. Her effort to learn *Krama* did not lead to the authentication of her Javanese self.

6 Conclusion and pedagogical implications

The purpose of the present study is to explore the participants' understanding of their multilingual English identities as constructed through their response journal. Although the study is carried out on a small scale and does not reflect the identities of all MEUs in Indonesia, the findings can give insights into the identity constructions of MEUs in EFL contexts. Generally, the findings of the study problematized the poststructuralist view of identities. The poststructuralist view of identities challenges the idea of identities as having a stable core (Hall, 1992, 1996; Norton, 2010). While the identities of the participants in the present study were far from stable, the participants appeared to negotiate their multilingual identities on the basis of core identities derived from their L1 culture.

Contrary to Pramono's (2009) and Onishi's (2010) assumptions, although the participants were active users of English, they were fully aware of the effect of English on their identities as Indonesian nationals. For some participants, such as Astri (see Narrative 6) and Resti (see Narrative 7), English use in public spaces created the "feeling of self-enhancement" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 63); repositioning them as educated and "part of the elite" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 4). For many others, however, English, both the language and the cultures, was perceived as an imposition to their core cultural identities. These participants highlighted the need to locate and contain the use of English in certain places so that they could be accepted in Indonesian society.

If the participants seemed to be certain of their cultural identities, most of them perceived their English identities relative to their nonnative status. The narratives of the participants illustrate that the feeling of being NNS is heightened and magnified when meeting, not even directly interacting, with NSs. It seems encounters with NSs triggered a sense of linguistic inferiority. In other words, with regard to NNS identity, the participants' narratives pointed to the centrality of linguistic identity in the construction of MEU identities. Praise from tolerant NSs proved to be significant to their NNS identities.

It is apparent from many participants' narratives that they saw their NNS status as a drawback rather than a resource that they could draw on. Moreover, the participants appeared to be submissive to the NNS identity options that might be enforced upon them by previous education without any attempts to challenge or even resist such negative constructions. Thus, it is important for pre-service teacher education programs to introduce and integrate critical pedagogy, focusing on second language identities, nonnativeness, multicompetence, and multilingualism in their programs and/or existing courses. Studies conducted by Pavlenko (2003) and Zacharias (2010; 2011) indicate that exposing MEUs to such topics appear to be significant in providing empowering identity options.

Finally, the present study points to the importance of multilingual narratives in pre-service teacher education. Multilingual narratives can be a springboard for MEUs to reflect on issues related to language, culture and identities. Wong (2007), one of the multilingual narratives students read for the present study, states that shuttling between communities can be a lonely affair. I would say that shuttling between different languages within oneself is not only lonely, but also troubling and confusing. By reading about somewhat similar experiences, students can relate their struggles and unique experiences to that of other MEUs. Such activities will make students' multilingual journeys less lonely, as the discussions and reflections will allow students to discuss, challenge and share personal joys and triumphs in constructing and reconstructing identities as MEUs.

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