

TRANSLINGUAL IDENTITIES OF NES AND NNES ENGLISH TEACHERS: A NARRATIVE STUDY

Yohanes Nugroho Widiyanto¹³ (nugroho@ukwms.ac.id)

Abstract

This article reports the study of narratives of research participants, both native and non-native English speaker (NNES) teachers, explore their experiences of learning and teaching English which they reflected during their encounter in Gorontalo. Using Narrative Inquiry as a methodological device, this research facilitates the participants to write their ethnobiographies which were analyzed in order to depict the landscape of their language identities. The analysis shows participants' diverse language identities paradigms ranging from monolingual, multilingual to translingual tendency. Their perspective can be placed into a continuum where Mary (pseudonym), an American veteran English teacher, was on the tendency of monolingual identities and Julie (pseudonym), an English teacher from Indonesia, was on the other end of holding translingual identities.

Introduction

I also believe that I can learn English through games. I prefer using traditional games from Gorontalo to make students not to forget their root culture. For example, when I teach children colors, I use Tenge-tenge (ladder games). I provide carpet colors or paper color that I put on the floor. I then ask children to jump on the space according to the colors that I mention. (Julie, p. 8)

Julie (a pseudonym) was one of the participants of my research in eliciting the communicative strategies deployed by both native and non-native English speakers (NNES) during their interaction (Widiyanto,

¹³ Author is a fulltime lecturer of Widya Mandala Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia. His research interests are in the area of teacher identities, educational policy, Teaching English literature and skills, and Narrative Studies

2016). Julie told story about her professional life as an English teacher in Gorontalo, a young province in Indonesia. The above vignette is an example of the way English teachers in peripheral countries try to challenge ‘monolingual approach’ (Ellis, 2006, 2008) that gives privilege to native speakers and ignore non-native speakers’ resources. Canagarajah (2013a, 2013b) proposes Translingual Practice (TP) as a means of a paradigm shift. In order to understand his concept of Translingual Practice, Canagarajah (2013a, 2013b) simply asks his readers to focus first on the prefix ‘trans’ of translingual which implies that communication happens “between and across languages” so that both native and non-native speakers are both translingual users.

This paradigm shift is influenced by the construct of language identity. The study of identities in language teaching challenges the scholarly tradition of structuralism which focuses on individual traits (motivated/unmotivated, inhibited/uninhibited, field-dependent /field-independent) rather than sociocultural factors in explaining the success or failure of language teaching (Pierce, 1995; Norton & Toomey, 2011). I use the framework of translingual identities (Zeng, 2013) or in Jain’s term (2014) translanguistic identities which combines identity studies (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toomey, 2011) with translanguism (Canagarajah, 2013, 2013b; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Jain, 2013; Motha, Jain, & Tecele, 2011; Pennycook, 2008). Since identity studies investigate “how language learning experiences and outcomes are framed by the interaction of a multiplicity of social factors that situate learners into different positions” (Velez-Rendon, 201, p. 637), translingual identity study grapple with how those language learning and outcomes are framed under the construct of translanguism which must be different from those using the frames of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), World Englishes or English as an International Language (EIL). In explicating the main concept of translanguism, Horner et al (2011) argues for several key positions in second/foreign language teaching and learning that teachers

and learners. Firstly, the translanguaging approach believes in differences within and across all languages as the prefix ‘trans’ implies. The differences should not be condemned as deficiencies but as resources that people need to preserve, circulate, and utilize. Secondly, the translanguaging approach believes that language norms are fluid and dynamic so that consequently they don’t believe in any standardized forms. Language varies from one region to another, from time to time and genre to genre. Thirdly, translanguaging is aware of the political implications of language practices.

The intensive English course in Gorontalo in which both native English speaker (NES) teachers and non-native English speakers (NNES) teachers interacted was a potential language contact zone (Pratt, 1991; Thomason, 2001). This study invited some selected participants to reflect their practice of learning and teaching English. This process was aimed at critically analyzing their trajectories in their personal history in order to reveal their language identities as translanguaging speakers.

Research Methods

I employed Narrative Inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin 2000) in exploring the issues of participants’ language identities. Interrogating teachers’ professional lives is a way of showing the landscapes of teacher’s professional knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) that contains sacred, secret and cover stories. Sacred stories refer to stories in public area where policy makers and researchers have constructed that the teachers have to believe while secret stories are those in the classrooms that teachers are free from scrutiny and tell them only to other teachers in secret places. Cover stories are “stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school” (p. 25). In this type of landscape of cover story do I analyze the participants’ auto ethnography (Hoppe, 2014) about their practice of teaching.

There were two categories of participants: Native English speakers (NES) teacher and Non-native English speakers (NNES). The participants met in an intensive English course during Summer 2013. Since the other American teacher declined from the study, there was only one NES teacher, Mary, a 74 year veteran teacher. The second group of my participants consisted of the students of the intensive English course. I invited those who were English teachers and lecturers to involve in the follow-up data collection activity in which they reflect their professional calling as English teachers through writing autoethnography. There were five NNES teachers who were willing to participate. I provided three examples of autoethnographies as reference to the type of writing that I would like them to do. One was written by Canagarajah (2011) who promoted this term and the other two are my own autoethnographies as English learners (Widiyanto, 2005) and as English teacher (Widiyanto, 2013). After my participants submitted their drafts of autoethnography, I invited my participants to have a focus group discussion. Prior to the focus discussion, I sent the members' autoethnographies, asked them to read them prior to the discussion. During the discussion, I asked my participants to share interesting aspects of your peer's autoethnography in a group. I led the discussion. The discussion did not only focus on the content of the autoethnographies, but also the way the autoethnographies were constructed. After the focus discussion, I asked my participants to review their autoethnographies so that they could reshape them before they sent their final works.

Through the analysis data from the interview, autoethnography writing and focus group discussion, I explored their changing attitude, values, and perception as translingual (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Varghese et al, 2005). I wonder whether the participants, especially the NNES teachers from Indonesian, affirm diverse local communities and still construct translocal cosmopolitan identities through suitable uses of their language resources.

Discussion

The NNES teachers' reflection on the diverse languages that they are grown up shows how rich the linguistic environment that the participants are engaged with. While they have live relatively in the same area in Gorontalo, it does not automatically prove the basic principle of monolingualism that believes in the Herderian trilogy that language is fixed with society and territory (Canagarajah, 2013). Living in Gorontalo does not make all multilingual English teachers are raised in Gorontalo language only. While four of them show this path of having Gorontalo as their mother tongue, two others have Bahasa, the national language, as their mother tongue and even one person is raised with Javanese as her mother tongue, a heritage language from the root culture of her grandparents.

The concept of mother tongue should be seen critically. The multilingual English teachers acknowledge that they have a certain language as the most dominant language they use for communication at home in their early stage of their life. However, they also acknowledge that they also understand other languages used by the surrounding people. In such a communal society, in which relationship among people are really close, they do understand the diverse languages around them ranging from their national language to other local languages such as *Makasar* and *Manado* and are able to use them in its basic functional use. They find that language is not a pure entity which is restricted from any influence from other languages but they are mixed and fluid. It is only the old generation who really used 'pure' Gorontalo language while the younger generation see the language as a 'mobile resources' (Bloommaert, 2008) so that the Gorontalo language that is used by their surrounding people is mixed with the language they are in contact with, a phenomenon known as contact zone language (Thomason, 2001; Pratt, 1991). The linguistic experience of the multilingual English teachers in their early stage of life also makes them acknowledge the stratification of people based on the language they use in which Bloommaert (2010) uses the metaphor of scales, 'a metaphor that

suggests that we have to imagine things that are of a different order, that are hierarchically ranked and stratified” (p. 33). Language is not a neutral entity but it is related to power. It has a political dimension that gives power to those who master the language of the establishment (Canagarajah, 2002). The establishment can refer to those who have bigger economical capacity as in the case of Suzan with her Javanese mother tongue. Even though her family is immigrants from other island in Indonesia, the fact that they outnumber the local people makes their language become more powerful than local languages. It is the local people who have to adapt themselves to master Javanese in order to gain economic benefits of trading with the transmigrants. The reason that makes Julie’s and Jolanda’s parents raise them in Bahasa is related to their consideration of giving better aspect of education. The earlier the parents give them access to Bahasa, the readier they are to embrace the opportunity of maintaining their social status through education. This comes to the stratification where the national language, Bahasa, has higher level compared to local languages. Among local languages, the higher of level depends on the political or economical capacity of its users which usually refers to whether the local language is spoken by the majority of the residents, not necessarily the origin language of the territory.

The last point is that language has relation with religious and cultural identity of the speakers as in the case of TESOL and Christianity (Varghese & Bill, 2007). All Muslim participants acknowledge their experience of learning Arabic as a part of their Muslim identity since their prayer is in Arabic. On the other hand, Jolanda, the only Christian participant, refers to learning Dutch as a part of her identity. As the Dutch preaches Christianity to her ancestors through the social institutions of school and church, she assumes that ‘Bongo’ languages, the “white” languages from Europe, are connected to Christianity as Arabic to Muslims. In conclusion, the participants are grown up in “plurilingual” language environment (Taylor & Snoddon, 2013) despite the use of one

language as the most dominant one. This rich linguistic environment makes the participants as “translinguals” (Canagarajah, 2013) from the early stage of their life. The semantic resources of those languages are mixed so that they them in their repertoire when they speak one language. This situation has already shaped them to deploy translingual negotiation strategies in their communication. For example, it is obvious that the participants deploy envoicing strategy in their autoethnographies. This can be seen from only inserting occasional Arabic words such as *Alhamdulillah* (praise the Lord) in their story to inserting their life philosophy in Gorontalo language to begin their autoethnography.

Since most of the participants admit that their first encounter with English is in formal education, specifically in their first year of junior high school, political factor plays important in this process. The practice of English teaching and learning that they experience is greatly influenced by the Indonesian government policy. The Indonesian government is very firm that *Bahasa Indonesia* is the national language so that it should be used in formal situation, including as the language of instruction at schools (Lowenberg, 2000). The teaching of English should apply this policy. However, Lie (2007) noted that the government has already updated teaching methodology so that it is expected that teachers can also implement them in their classes. However, in practice, both Jolanda who started to study English in the 70s and the other four participants who started in the 90s, shows that there have not been substantial changes in the practice. The classroom interaction that the participants describe is congruent with the grammar translation method that theoretically should have been left behind many years before. It is in line with Marcellino’s (2006) argument that many teachers slip back and use the more traditional approach in which the English classes only contain instruction on grammatical items, or the teachers use the audio lingual method in which students practice certain forms by repeating the teacher’s model. However, Julie’s experience of being humiliated by her teacher after being unable to

pronounce the words correctly can be the consequences of this audio-lingual method.

Among the five participants, Julie and Kadija are relatively successful in their early learning in English. Their success is related to the way their instructors (in Julie's case, it is her aunty, and in Kadija's case, it is her teacher from private course), connects their learning English with their practice of life. This is the basic idea of socio-cultural approach that pays attention to the context of learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2008). In the case of Kadija, the teacher asks her and her friends act as if they were left at home. In the case of Julie, it is much more practical because she has to immerse in her aunty's house to encounter English words and expressions in the things that she does and find in daily life.

In order to be a professional English teacher, the NNES teachers from Indonesia argue that English teacher should be equipped with at least two aspects of competence, namely the language competence and pedagogical competence. The language competence refers to the teacher's knowledge and skills in the subject that can be translated into their proficiency in English. Madya (2008) insists that one of the biggest challenges in Indonesia is the fact that English teachers have a low level of English proficiency. This phenomenon is rooted from the failure of teaching English in K-12 in which very few high school graduates are able to communicate intelligibly in English (Lie, 2007). Some of the participants of the study also agree with this view. Jolanda argues that her incompetence in English when she starts her college training is due to the curriculum of vocational high school she attends that does not provide any English classes. Suzan also admits her weaknesses in English. In high school, she takes A1 strand which focuses on mathematic and natural science. Her initial motivation is only to go to a state university that demands a very low tuition fees. Whatever major that accepts her will do as long as it is in a state university.

Most participants appreciate local teachers who use English most of the time in teaching. They believe that these teachers can be a role model for them and boost their confidence that non-native speakers can also communicate in English in the class as a native teacher does. This is in line with research in non-native English teachers that the competence of non native teachers to deliver their materials in English is the most important quality (Braine, 1999, 2005; Moussu & Llorca, 2008). Julie, furthermore, adds that she takes her lecturer who can invite students for discussion as her role model of teaching. She argues that a teacher is not the sole resource of knowledge and students do not come to class empty handed. Teachers who can appreciate the knowledge that students bring to the class is the best teacher.

By using the image of a facilitator, Suzan narrates her role in the classes that she teaches. As a facilitator, she gives chances for every student to have a sense of achievement through completing a project. She documents the project by video typing it so that students can refer to the token as a sign of the students' participation. In addition, during the classroom interaction, she scaffolds the discussion by using her 'speaking stick' so that even shy students have the opportunity to participate.

Jolanda perceives herself as a long life learner who is thirst of knowledge. Despite her seniority in the department, she believes that she still wants to learn. Teaching for her is also an act of learning. When she teaches reading, she has the responsibility to understand the text prior teaching to the class. Engaging in this preparation is a way for her to enrich her vocabulary and widen her perspective of life through the reading content. She believes that any text contains values of life that she wants to share with her students.

Fariad wants to be a man of integrity who is consistent between his principles in the class and in the office. In his autoethnography, he writes his philosophy as "*Bo to laku-lakulo odutuwa lo tanggulo, Bo to hale-halelo Odotuwa lo tinelo*" (A saying in Gorontalo language that

means “Men must show good attitudes and behavior that in return will give them fame and appreciation”). Believing that speaking in English is a good quality of being professional English teacher, he wants to apply his belief in any situations he encounters. He gets his confidence after finding the fact that even a native speaker does not always know everything about the language.

Kadija believes in creativity. A teacher should find a lot of ways to make her teaching successful. Using the image of a mouse in “Tom and Jerry” cartoon series, she wants to be open to any means as far as it meets the goal. She believes that there are many roads leading to Rome, but the roads are not always straight and smooth. The roads sometimes bend and are even circling. Only creative people can see all alternatives.

Julie is a proud member of locality. She acknowledges that globalization makes her connect with people of diverse language and cultural backgrounds. However, she believes that her local background has abundance of resources that she can share. The resources range from local games to local values. She dares to show her locality and even contests with others who come to her with their own values.

While their identities as professional English teachers are really complex and cannot be represented by one image, these images can show one mosaic of the professional knowledge of the participants. Their images are shaped by their experiences from learning their mother tongue, other languages surrounding them and eventually English that becomes the integral part of their identity.

Different from the multilingual English teachers from the previous part, Mary’s story represents the monolingual orientation that follows the Herderian triad of language, society and region. From early phase of her life, Mary had seen English as a part that cannot be separated from American society and American land. Those who live in America learn English naturally from their encounter with their closest environment, in this case their families and local school they go to. Living in rural areas

also made Mary had a limited experience of meeting people of different cultural and language backgrounds.

It was in the college that she started to realize the multifaceted of English, especially after she dated with a young man from Oklahoma, a region in the US with its strong accent which can be regarded as less educated. In this particular moment she learned about the multiple codes of what is regarded as one language. Even though, she did not come to a strong statement about the existence of Englishes, she realized that American English has also diverse dialects. However, she believes in the primacy of standard English. People who speak non-standard English has to improve their language in order to be successful in finding better life, just like her husband's success in life. Realizing this particular aspect, her mission of teaching English is assisting her students to reach the standards.

Her encounter with international students has made her realize more about the multifaceted aspects of English. Both teaching in the U.S. and outside the U.S. increases her awareness that international students speak different language codes compared to standard English. Her monolingual orientation guides her in her practice as an English teacher. She believes that English-only should be implemented in class so that students have great opportunity to use the language. The better students follow the standard norms the better opportunity they will get for a better life.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that both multilingual English teachers and native English teacher acknowledge that they are shaped by their plurilingual environment. However, they are in the continuum of monolingualism and translanguaging. By analyzing the participants' autoethnographies of learning and teaching English, I find that the multilingual English teachers are aware of their rich experience of learning many languages, from local, national to international languages

that are connected with their personal, social and religious affiliations. Their experiences of learning English have become their resources for their professional identities as English teachers in Gorontalo-Indonesia context. The native English speaker teacher also experienced diverse linguistic world both prior and during her professional life as an English teacher. The fact that English is more powerful than other languages so that her students tend to ignore the linguistic colonization (Phillipson, 1992), the NES teacher fails to gain the access of communicative ability in a second language.

However, among the participants, Julie is the only participant who dares this monolingual approach even during her formation as a pre-service English teacher. Her determination to challenge the norms has truly connected with the negotiation strategies that she employs during the intensive English course. In her case, the interconnectedness of translingual negotiation strategies and translingual identities have found its realization.

Translingual practice is still a new paradigm so that it still lacks of research under this paradigm. This research is a way of showing these potentials together with other researches (Jain, 2014; Lamsal, 2014; Rudolf, 2012 and Zeng, 2013).

References

- Block, D. (2007). *Second language identities*. London: Continuum.
- Braine, G. (2010). *Nonnative speaker English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis
- Canagarajah, S. (2012). Teacher Development in a Global Profession: An Autoethnography. *Tesol Quarterly: a Journal for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and of Standard English As a Second Dialect*, 46, 2, 258-279.
- Canagarajah, S. (Ed) (2013). *Literacy as translingual practice: Between communities and classrooms* London: Routledge.

- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Ellis, E. (2006). Monolingualism: The unmarked case. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 7, 2, 311-9.
- Ellis, E. M. (2008). Defining and investigating monolingualism. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 2, 3, 311-330.
- Hoppes, S. (2014) Autoethnography: Inquiry into identity. *New Direction for Higher Education*, 2014 (166), 63-71
- Horner, B., Lu, M.-Z., Royster, J. J., & Trimbur, J. (2011). Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach. *College English*, 73, 3, 303-321
- Horner, B., NeCamp, S., & Donahue, C. (2011). Toward a multilingual composition scholarship: from English only to a translingual norm. *College Composition & Communication*, 63(2), 269-300.
- Jain, R. (2014). Global Englishes, Translinguistic Identities, and Translingual Practices in a Community College ESL Classroom: A Practitioner Researcher Reports. *Tesol Journal*, 5, 3, 490-522.
- Lamb, M. (2007). The Impact of school on EFL learning motivation: An Indonesian case study. *Tesol Quarterly: a Journal for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and of Standard English As a Second Dialect*, 41, 4, 757-780.
- Lamsal, T. R. (2014). *Globalizing literacies and identities: Translingual and transcultural literacy practices of Bhutanese refugees in the U.S.* University of Louisville. Unpublished dissertation
- Lantolf, J. & Thorne, S. L. (2007). Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning. In B. van Patten & J. Williams (eds.),

- Theories in Second Language Acquisition (pp. 201-224). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lie, A. (2007) Education policy and EFL curriculum in Indonesia: Between the commitment of competence and the quest for highest scores. *TEFLIN Journal*. 18.2 (n.p)
- Madya, S. (2007) Searching for an appropriate EFL curriculum design for the Indonesian pluralistic society. *TEFLIN Journal*. 18.2 (n.p)
- Marcellino, M. (2006) English language teaching in Indonesia: A continuous challenge in education and cultural diversity. *TEFLIN Journal*. 17.1 (n.p)
- Motha, S., Jain, R., & Tecle, T. (2011). Translinguistic identity-as-pedagogy: Implications for language teacher education. *International Journal of Innovation in English Language Teaching*, 1 (1), 13-28
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity, and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31: 409–429. doi: 10.2307/3587831
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412-446. doi:10.1017/S0261444811000309
- Pennycook, A. (2008). Translingual English. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31(3), 301-309. doi:10.2104/ara10830
- Pennycook, A. (2012). What might, translingual education look like? *Babel (00053503)*, 47(1), 4-13.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Pratt, M. L. (1991). Arts of the Contact Zone. *Profession*, 33–40. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/stable/25595469>
- Taylor, S. K., & Snoddon, K. (September 01, 2013). Plurilingualism in TESOL: Promising controversies. *Tesol Quarterly*, 47, 3, 439-445.
- Thomason, (2001). *Language Contact*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing Language Teacher Identity: Three Perspectives and Beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4, 1, 21-44.
- Velez-Rendon, G. (2011). From social identity to professional identity: Issues of language and gender. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 4, 635-649.
- Widiyanto, Y. (2005). The making of a multicultural English teacher. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 4(1).
- Widiyanto, Y. (2013) Creating Englishes alliance between Non-Native English Speaker (NNES) teacher and students in inner circle territory. In Zacharias, N. T. and Manara, C. (Eds.). *Contextualizing the Pedagogy of English as an International Language: Issues and Tensions*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Widiyanto, Y. (2016) *The Interconnectedness between Translingual Negotiation Strategies and Translingual Identities: A Qualitative Study of an Intensive English Program in Gorontalo-Indonesia* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).
- Zheng, X. (2013). Translingual identity-as-pedagogy: The identity construction and practices of international teaching assistants

(ITAs) of English in the college composition classroom (Doctoral dissertation). University of Washington, Seattle, WA. Retrieved from <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/>