PORTRAITS OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS AS IMAGINED BILINGUALS

Amirullah
Victoria University, Australia and Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Martin Andrew
Victoria University, Australia

Bill Eckersley
Victoria University Australia

Abstract

The paper presents “portraits” of learners who desire to be proficient in both Indonesian and English languages and explores these portraits for patterns related to learners’ aspirations and desires. Through this exploration, the study contributes to theory about connections between motivation and identity. This study explores synergies between notions of motivation and “future selves” (Dörnyei, 2009) and interculturality (Kramsch, 2002), and draws on the methodology of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to emphasise and embody our subjects’ contexts and voices. Primary data were gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews from three key participants relating to their contextual backgrounds and efforts to become bilingual. These portraits suggest that learners’ aspirations of future imagined identities and their desires to belong to local and global communities influence their learning of an additional language. Because of the small scale of the study and the specificity of the sample, the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to a broader population. They are, nevertheless, valuable as portraits of learners becoming bilingual in Indonesia and open the doorway for future studies of Indonesian bilingual language learner identity.

Keywords: Indonesia; portraits; motivation; future selves; foreign language learners; bilingualism; identity

Introduction

Research in second language motivation has been influenced by the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) who collaboratively introduced the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation. They described the concepts in relation to learners’ target language from a social psychological approach. Gardner and Lambert defined integrative motivation as the learners’ desire to learn a language in order to integrate into the language community psychologically, while
instrumental motivation refers to learners' desire to learn a language for practical purposes. Following Gardner and Lambert and drawing on psycholinguistic theory, Dönnyei (2009) argued that learning a foreign language can be influenced by learners' aspirations, wishes and hopes to form their future identities, while Norton (2000) stated that motivation to learn a foreign language can be influenced by socio-historical and discursive contexts where critical issues of power come into play. Despite their different epistemic stands, the broadly poststructuralist Norton and the psycholinguistic Dönnyei agreed that foreign language learning can help construct learners' future identities. The commensurability of the outcomes of these disparate but influential approaches (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014) in the field of language is central to my theoretical framework.

In applying theories about the negotiation and construction of learner identities to the Indonesian context, we argue that the mastery of the additional language, namely English, is not only related to its use as a medium of instruction, but it is also crucial to learners' developing conceptions of themselves as users of English. Thus, it is a vital aspect of language learner identity construction. This study presents portraits of Indonesian learners' motivation, drawing epistemologically and systematically on research studies that outline portraits of bilingual teachers (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011) and presents vivid portraits of language activists (Hornberger, 2014). This paper, then, provides a new perspective on external and cultural factors impacting identities and future selves, particularly in Indonesia as an example of a developing country.

To our Indonesian research context, we apply Dönnyei and Ushioda's (2009) suggestion that identity references future selves (Dönnyei, 2009), specifically "the ideal self which refers to the representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess (i.e. a representation of personal hopes, aspirations or wishes)" (pp. 4-5). Therefore, this study applies the concept of future selves to the context of Indonesian bilingual learners through the methodological reconstruction and analysis of portraits of imagined identities. We suggest that understanding their motivation for mastering a second language can draw attention to themes and hence create theories that can assist in attaining the goal of better teaching and learning of English among Indonesians.

At the same time, informed by both poststructuralist and constructivist thought, we need to bear in mind the issues of power inherent in learners' desires to attain fluency in English, join communities where English is the language of communication, and attain the status of bilinguals. In the current study, we propose that narratives of language learning, portraits or "portraits" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), can help envision learners' identities through the expression of future aspirations. In this way, portraiture is a method of both data collection and presentation, creating stories that can lend themselves to thematic analysis, but which can also stand independently as representations of learner identities.

This paper explores the experiences of a range of Indonesian individuals in becoming proficient bilinguals. It heeds calls for empirical research in Indonesian education because this is under-represented in the global knowledge system (Adnan, 2014; Welch, 2012). Hence, this study aims to make a contribution to knowledge through the reporting of new findings relating to aspirational bilingualism among Indonesian learners. At the same time, it makes a specific contribution to ongoing international research into ways of "doing and becoming" in teaching and learning that make real differences to learners' identities as bilingual. The desire to become bilingual is a hook to enhance motivation precisely because it requires the envisaging of ideal but realisable future selves.

The under-representation of studies of Indonesian bilingualism is effectively due to its citizens' reported general lack of mastery of an international "lingua franca" (i.e., English) (Pauuw, 2009). However, we assume that many Indonesian learners are motivated to learn a second (or third, or fourth) language. They are motivated by the desire to develop what May, Hill, and Tiakiwai (2004) called a "degree of proficiency" (p. 12) in another language. Our study portrays three Indonesian learners of English in relation to their motivation to learn, and master this powerful additional language beyond a mere degree of proficiency into the building of confident bilingual selves.

**Motivation and future selves**

This study draws on an epistemology of motivation and the "theory of selves" (Dönnyei, 2003). Derived from integrative motivational concepts developed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Dönnyei introduced the concept of 1.2 selves as it relates to English as a foreign language. Dönnyei (1994) argued that Gardner and Lambert's motivational approach is "grounded in the social milieu rather than in the foreign language classroom" (p. 273) and does not do justice to the psychological realities of learners' contexts. The context of language learning in Indonesia, it is that English (or other languages) are considered foreign languages (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional [Education System Act] No. 20, 2003). For this reason, Dönnyei's concept of motivation suits the Indonesian contexts in that it allows for language learner identity negotiation both socio-linguistically and psycho-linguistically. We acknowledge that Dönnyei's concept evolves over time, particularly in the context of his bilingual collaborators, most notably Emu Ushioda. Further, we need clearly to account for the problem of power inherent in the notion of desire to be bilingual, itself encapsulating a desire to be international. For this reason we refine our lens in the light of Claire Kramsch's work on intercultural and Bonnie Norton's studies of learner investment and identity, all of which are discussed shortly. First, however, we discuss the usefulness of the work of Zoltan Dönnyei and his collaborators to our study of Indonesian learner identities.
Dörnyei's (1994) notion of future selves includes the detailed wishes and identities of learners in relation to the target language. Developing the theory further, Dörnyei (2009) described future selves by referring to the future attributes that are embedded in individual lives as a result of personal wishes. One of the individual attributes or aspirations is to be a proficient target language speaker (May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2004). Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009) claimed that "proficiency in the target language is part and parcel of one's ideal or ought-to self, [and] this will serve as a powerful motivator to learn the language because of our psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between our current and possible future selves" (p. 4). The theory of future selves foregrounds individuals' desires to learn and to use a second/foreign language as a key component of both present motivation and aspirational identity. This imagined identity is most manifest in learners' desire to align themselves with powerful communities of English speakers. Ideal future selves can be realised through the creation of systemic future visions, and in a practical application of theory, Dörnyei and Hadfield (2014) provided a range of activities that activate such visions and impact motivation positively.

From her poststructuralist, Bourdieusian, socially and historically constructed view, Norton (2000) argued that "identity" relates to "how 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" (Norton, 2000, p. 5). These can be imagined communities that include included imagined future relationships, which for current language learners "might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment" (Norton, 2013, p. 8). The possibility of future selves, a psycholinguistic concept, resonates with Norton's envisioning of language learner identities as being negotiated with a view to participation in future imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013). In a very recent study, Darwin and Norton (2015) described how "imagination allows learners to re-envision how things are as how they want them to be" (p. 46). This notion of identity can be used for the context of Indonesian bilingual learners because they imagine their identities are constructed through negotiation between internal desire and the external worlds. These external worlds involve participation in the international world and involve the need for interculturality.

To account for the powerful desire to be international embodied in learner motivation to aspire to future selves, we recognise that another component of the construction of bilingual identities in Indonesia is that of intercultural or transcultural literacy or competence. Among many scholars, Kramsch (2002) argued that learning a foreign language involves learning other cultures. Specifically, Kramsch stated: "It enables [learners] to encounter people from other cultures with empathy and to shape interpersonal relations along the principles of respect and tolerance, justice and solidarity" (2002, p. 8). In addition, to learn other cultures can be done via "co-operative learning, generative topics and critical thinking" (Saez, 2002, p. 103). The increase of knowledge of other cultures can lead to the acquisition of intercultural competence (Sereu, 2004). Within this research focusing on aspirational Indonesian bilinguals, it is assumed that learning English as a foreign language can stimulate learners to understand more about English-speaking countries and their ways of being. Thus an express desire for biculturality or multiculturalism additionally enables Indonesian learners to develop relationships and engage with those from English-speaking countries, possibly because they desire to participate in or even integrate into what Wenger (1998) described as communities of practice, where participation in cultural ways of doing and being using the desired additional language is possible though at first peripherally.

As we have emphasised, too few specific studies have been conducted in relation to the fuller participation of Indonesian learners into wider communities. Lamb (2004, 2009) and Lamb and Coleman (2008) used Dörnyei's (2009) "future selves" notion to investigate the influence of self-motivation in learning English as a second language (L2) as a subject at secondary education. Lamb (2009) maintained that Indonesian learners who have invested much in learning English appear to be able to move forwards with "full participation in the wider English speaking community, and towards actualising Ideal L2 self as cosmopolitan Indonesian members of community" (p. 244). This emphasis on the mastery of English for Indonesian learners can impact on their future lives and their participation in communities of practice, characterised here by the use of English as lingua franca.

Our study applies these concepts to suggest that there is link between the efforts of Indonesian individuals to become bilingual and contemporary theories of identity construction. Because there is an evident dearth of studies on learning English in Indonesia in relation to the construction of identities, we propose the current study, alongside those of Lamb, as a conversation opener.

**Methodology**

This qualitative study investigates "a set of interpretive and descriptive patterns of practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, and documents" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 4-5). In particular, it employs qualitative portraiture analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which has been used in educational (Eckersley, 1997) and language learning identity research (Keeney & Andrew, 2013). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) argued that portraiture seeks *goodness*, uncovering only positive rather negative attributes. Importantly, the portraits presented in this study depict only the positive attributes of learners' motivation and their future identities in relation to language learning, but they also consider their desire for interculturality. The choice of portraits was made in the hope it would help highlight how individual identity or self-concept is linked intrinsically to motivation, so portraits are sites where we observe learners' self-
portrayals of their identities as imagined bilinguals, complicated by the need to become interculturally competent and to aspire to the identifier ‘bilingual’.

This study is a small segment of a larger work. In its wider form, this research involved 33 participants: 15 lecturers and 18 students in three bilingual programmes across three Indonesian universities. For the purpose of this article, we will present three learner participants (pseudonyms: Azizah, Kadir, Gary), all students between the ages of 18 and 30. The reason for choosing Azizah, Kadir and Gary as representatives of the wider sample is that they most evidently portray the different future hopes and aspirations that characterise the wider group of participants. The participants came from three different Indonesian universities and did not know each other. All three participants had experienced international exchange programmes overseas.

The first author, himself a language educator from Indonesia, spent one month at each university site in order to interact with participants. He interviewed the participants about topics relevant to language learning motivation, identity, and interculturality in a process lasting on average 50 minutes, and then the researchers transcribed the interviews. All transcriptions were sent back to the participants for verification and they did not make any changes to the transcriptions. In regard to the three participants’ choice of language for the interviews, Azizah preferred to use more Indonesian, while Kadir and Gary preferred to employ English. During interviews, Kadir, Gary, and Azizah often code-switched between Indonesian and English.

The first author also visited and observed participants in their language learning classrooms at each Indonesian university. During several observations, the interaction between the researcher and participants helped shape the way the researcher observed and presented findings as portraits. The direct observations of their learning process related how participants used Indonesian and English in classroom contexts. The observations assisted the researchers to access information about the frequency and degree of usage of both languages as media of instruction. After the classroom observations, the participants interacted with the researcher, discussing issues relating to the use of English and Indonesian modes of instruction. The observation notes were sent back to each participant to seek their comments. None of the participants made amendments to the observation notes.

All data were thematically coded in relation to learners’ voices in social and cultural contexts, as part their dialogue with the first researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The interaction between the first researcher and Indonesian bilingual learners helped to enable what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described as listening for a story rather than listening to a story. Story-telling becomes a negotiated co-construction rather than being an imaginative but impositional retelling on the part of the researcher. We have chosen three Indonesian bilingual learners, and the themes of exposure to English, motivation, and future ambitions, as a heuristic or grounded theory-informed way of portraying learners’ motivation to learn English and illustrate how English can influence their future identities.

The portraits

Kadir and his wish to contribute to national communities of English

Kadir was a third-year student in a Mathematics bilingual programme. He graduated from an Islamic high school where he experienced immersion not only in English but also in Arabic language. In his Islamic school, he had two years in English, two days in Arabic and two days in Indonesian. Because of his exposure to English, he registered in bilingual programmes for his bachelor studies. He was proud that he achieved a TOEFL score of 520.

Kadir preferred native English-speaking lecturers to teach him so he could have a chance to directly communicate in English. Despite the fact that there were two native speakers of English who were guest lecturers in the bilingual programmes, this was not enough for Kadir to have maximum contact with them. He realised that the challenge for bilingual students was to invite and recruit competent native speakers of English to the university who can teach certain subjects in the bilingual programmes.

After two years in a bilingual programme, Kadir indicated that “one thing for sure is that the intensive use of English expands my vocabulary not only generic words but also specific words and terminologies relating to science education and mathematics”. He felt more confident than before in using English words in his written assignments and conversational activities. He reflected that the bilingual programme had triggered his intention to write in his diary using more English than Indonesian words on a daily basis.

For Kadir, learning English had impacted positively on his academic work. For example, he had become more aware of plagiarism via the Turnitin software. Kadir commented: “We are told to be academically honest, recognise other people’s research, and perform academic work ethically.” He noticed that “lecturers often remind us in terms of plagiarism. If we want to continue our studies in English speaking countries, we have to avoid committing plagiarism by citing sources”. This plagiarism issue has become an important topic for Kadir to learn since he aspires to pursue further studies in English-speaking countries.

The immersion programme contributed to Kadir’s positive attitudes to diversity. Kadir stated: “I learn how lecturers treat students equally and how they respond to students’ questions.” He further added that “lecturers are very appreciative of the
diversity of ideas among students." Kadir’s role in this bilingual programme is that of a language ambassador. He commented:

I have learnt a lot from the language ambassador activities. It improved my language ability particularly the foreign languages. There were a lot of activities that you would not expect to support your language ability such as games, storytelling and many biliteracy activities.

Contributing to the national development was part of Kadir’s ambition. Empowered by mandated competence in English, he aimed to teach maths using English as a medium of instruction. This is important for the next generation since English is becoming much more important in Indonesian educational contexts. Kadir stated: “If we introduce English and teach another subject with English earlier, many people will have no problems with English." Therefore, he imagined English as being embedded and becoming a second language in Indonesia, which could then lead to changing people’s opinions that English is difficult to learn.

Gary and his ambition to contribute to ASEAN communities

Gary was a third-year student in a bilingual Economics programme. Gary completed his secondary education at a vocational high school where he learned practical and employability skills including English. He said: “My major was accounting, but everyone should be able to communicate in English at least for general conversation.” During this period, he did not have any spare time, with a major focus on reading and studying. He regularly had to go directly to evening English classes before going home.

As an Indonesian Chinese background student, he was aware that he had to work hard to win any competitive process including those involved in getting a job. He wanted to speak like a native speaker even though he had a strong Chinese accent. He was proud that he achieved an IELTS score of 6.0, overall. He planned to continue his learning until he reached the “perfect” score.

Learning an additional language influenced his other skills, such as the skill of communication via a presentation in English. Gary had recently returned from an international programme, and he commented:

The use of English in our classroom presentation here [Indonesian university] has helped me a lot when I presented my papers in English-speaking universities overseas. I see there are no differences in terms of organizing points and the way to present papers here and there. I think it is good preparation before enrolling in short courses or going on summer visits overseas.

Gary was also an off-campus activist. He felt that the off-campus community programmes expanded his skills and knowledge in different areas. Gary argued: “I try to contribute back to the community, not only taking but learning with them.” Gary indicated he was more appreciative of literature-based knowledge than before, as a result of learning to write short stories and poems and to participate in art performances. Gary also practiced English tests through free websites. He referred to the following website as an influential and helpful source when he studied English and familiarised himself with English tests: ‘www.examenglish.com’. It was a free website which was full of English exercises. Gary claimed: “It is full of examples and detailed explanations of different kinds of English tests. It is undoubtedly beneficial for me to have practice tests prior to real English tests through the Internet.”

Gary planned to seek employment opportunities not only at the national level but also in the neighbouring ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] contexts. He stated that “using full English can be beneficial for preparing for our final big tasks”. Gary felt “there is a positive connection with me, so I have no doubt that English will enable me to get jobs in Indonesia. That is why I choose to study here rather than continuing overseas”. At the same time, he wished to be part of ASEAN communities when the opportunities open, commenting: “A key requirement to gain access to a teaching position in the ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, and even Timor-Leste is no doubt English.” It was important to have at least a bachelor degree with excellent English. He argued firmly that “this opens up employment opportunities not only for us but also for people from the other ASEAN countries seeking work here. There will be tough competition amongst us.” With English, the opportunities for teaching positions in neighbouring countries were becoming more visible for him. This portrayed his future aspiration either to be part of communities within Indonesian contexts or to represent Indonesia in the ASEAN contexts.

Gary’s imagined future of being able to work or teach in one of the ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Cambodia) is reasonably possible. This is due to ASEAN having formalised English as the official language of communication among these nations. Therefore, it is important for member of ASEAN communities to master English in order to contribute in the region. In addition, Gary’s imagining can be realised since the ASEAN Free Trade Council has been established, hence increasing employment mobility among these countries.

Azizah and her aspiration to be part of an international agency

Azizah was a third year political science student who came from a Javanese background. She went to an international school for her junior and senior secondary education in Singapore. Azizah used English as a medium of instruction
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Azizah aspiration to work in a United Nations agency: “I can work for the United Nations that represents Indonesia in the world community.” This represented her future self. By mastering English as one of the official languages of the United Nations, could potentially become a member of an international agency community.

Discussion

As we said earlier, these narrative portraits are findings in themselves as well as being a repository for potential thematic analysis. To bring a researcher’s eye to the findings, we witnessed the portraits suggesting that Kadir, Gary and Azizah were highly motivated with clear visions for their future. Their levels of English competency varied, with Gary and Azizah able to use the target language effectively. They both had relatively more exposure to the English language than Kadir, and thus had higher English competence and confidence to engage in global environments.

This study identified that through the learning of English, Kadir, Gary and Azizah had developed a more inclusive attitude and were manifestly aware of both their own culture and those of others. The findings of this study are consistent with earlier studies that determined that learning other languages is also about learning other cultures (Kramsch, 2002). The development of their intercultural understanding can lead to the acquisition of what Sercu (2004) calls ‘intercultural competence’. Azizah, for example, appeared to be focusing on developing an understanding about herself that was leading then to her learning about others. This cross-cultural knowledge, coupled with new understandings of cultural values will more enable the participants to recognise, accept, behave, and survive in a multifaceted global environment.

In addition, Kadir, Gary and Azizah imagined that they will contribute to different sectors of communities. While Kadir wished to be part of the national community, Gary imagined being part of the ASEAN communities, and Azizah hoped to represent Indonesia on the world stage. Azizah’s studies had enabled her to become more involved in international and global activities while Gary occupied himself with activities related to ASEAN contexts. Kadir seemed more motivated by local and national activities.

Learners’ ambitions about their future reflect what Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) described as their ideal and possible future selves. As Lamb (2011) discovered in his study of aspirant Indonesian English learners, their imagined identities lead to greater opportunities for future studies and employment. In our study, the learners’ imagined future selves, engaged nationally, regionally and globally, reflected Wenger’s (1998) belief that “a very peripheral form of participation may turn out to be central to one’s identity because it leads to something significant” (p. 155).
Whether these learners’ motivations to integrate occurred at a local or international level, it was clear that a sense of desire to belong to a group characterised by English-speaking was fundamental to their motivation and hence their evolving senses of identity. To the psycholinguistic lens of Dörnyei and his co-researchers, we need to bring the theoretical concepts of interculturality and participation and move into a critical constructivist space. It is there we have unpacked the freight of the findings, aware, too, that the Nortonian space of investment awaits for further, more nuanced analysis.

Conclusion

Since this research was small-scale study, the findings cannot be generalised to a broader or internationalised population. However, our in-depth exploration of aspirational bilinguals’ imagined future selves contributes to insightful theoretical and practical knowledge of the Indonesian tertiary education community. This is particularly so for the use of English and Indonesian as media of instruction, an area much under-represented in academic writing. Future research needs to explore other factors that also impact on the acquisition of an additional language, and also needs to be conducted with larger samples and in multiple sites. Multiple settings would, of course, contribute to broader population samples and extend our findings by providing more comprehensive evidence to complement the findings in this paper. Despite these limitations, this research presents and theorises portraits of bilingual Indonesian learners with the potential for making a contribution to the literature.

This paper offers an insight into the use of portraiture as a methodology to contribute to knowledge about emergent bilingual identities among Indonesian scholars. This methodology provides authentic voices of Indonesian bilingual learners who wish to achieve high levels of proficiency in English as a foreign language. These are valuable because they allow the exploration of learners’ motivations and identities through the portraits. We see these Indonesian learners’ motivations to master an additional language are shaped by their future imagined identities (Dörnyei, 2009) and desires to belong to defined global and local communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The level of their involvement is related to their investments in English learning in community contexts during their student years. We also see that their need for English is related to access to the language of the desirable and powerful as an entrance to such communities (Norton, 2000) and enables learners to navigate and to potentially transform themselves (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This research was carried out with successful learners of a foreign language in an Indonesian university context and provides a new perspective on external and cultural factors impacting identities and future selves, particularly in Indonesia as an example of a developing country. Azizah may envisage herself as potentially working for the United Nations to represent Indonesia in the world community, but all aspirant bilinguals in Indonesia, as embodied by Kadir and

Gary, are compelled by the desire to be or become part of a wider community characterised by communication in English.

References


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REVIEWS