

# **EFL and Language Ideology**

## ***The Case of Indonesia***

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**Keywords:** ELT, Language Ideology, EFL, Narrative Inquiry, Language Policies.

**Abstract:** This study was motivated by the understanding that language teaching, learning, and use are implicitly and explicitly ideological endeavours. In the case of ELT in Indonesia, the ideological assumptions often times are not revealed and discussed enough that the stakeholders and societies at large are not aware of the ideological forces at work at multiple levels affecting and shaping their beliefs, decisions, and practices concerning English and what they do with it. Utilizing narrative inquiry, this study looked at how language ideology influenced and shaped two participants' understanding and practices as EFL learners, users, and practitioners. During the depth interviews, the participants shared detailed regarding ELT and its implementations in their local contexts. The findings revealed that language ideology that drive ELT in Indonesia had shaped the participants experiences in profound ways. In addition, there were some generational shifts in how English was perceived and in the values of English in their own families and local communities.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The pervasive presence and influence of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003) and as an International language (McKay 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2012) in periphery countries such as Indonesia has pushed them to rethink about the position of English in their education systems and in their societies in general. Indonesia, as a multilingual society has been considered to be one of the successful models for promoting, managing, and preserving its rich linguistic heritage to enhance its unity and harmony (Goebel, 2015). Nonetheless, as the majority of Indonesians are Muslims and as a nation that perceives itself as espousing the norms and culture of the East, the teaching of English has been viewed as problematic in that English would shake the normative cultural norms (Lauder, 2008). This is due to the fact that many elements in the Indonesian society hold the deep-rooted belief that English as the product of the Western world whose norms and culture are an antithesis to those of the Indonesians.

However, in the globalized world where countries and states are increasingly drawn closer and where geographical boundaries are becoming blurred, the Indonesian government through its Education

Department could not entirely ignore the need and aspiration for its citizen to learn English. In fact, casual observation could prove that the market for learning English is flourishing. Within this contested situation, attempts should be made to investigate how individuals as the member of a particular society and the state see their own aspiration to learn English and what values that might be associated with English learning and mastery.

## **2 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND EFL CONTEXT IN INDONESIA**

Experts have formulated that the concept of language ideology is immensely complex. Language ideology deals with and attributes the value of a language and its relation to political, social and cultural practices (Bianco, 2004; Woolard and Scheffelin, 1994; Woolard, 2010). Therefore, language teaching, learning, and use are implicitly and explicitly ideological endeavours. In this case, from the ideological point of view, at least, Indonesian government has taken a political position that grants English as a foreign language. This bears ample consequences on how English is perceived, taught, and learned in the society.

As Lauder (2008) rather comprehensively reviews, some key factors such as policies, varieties and standards necessary in preparing and developing generations who are proficient in English to tackle the challenges of the 21st century are approached and managed with some level of suspicion that English could pollute Indonesian norms and culture. Further, Lauder explains that there is a love-and-hate view of English where English is desired as a tool for unlocking opportunities in the globalized world but at the same time it is despised for polluting the purity of the norms and values that highly regarded within the culture.

In this regard, Goebel (2010) observes that the language ideology in Indonesia is the preservation of the national language in preserving the national identity and enhancing the nation building. As a country of hundreds of ethnicities and languages, the promotion of Indonesian as the national language and the preservation of the local language should be the nation's top priorities in order to maintain unity and managing diversity (Goebel, 2015). Viewed from this angle, the language ideology of the Indonesian government is noble and principled; it has the right to protect the unity of the archipelago nation that otherwise could potentially pose threats to it.

Goebel (2015) further argues that Indonesian national language is associated with nationalism, inter-ethnic communication, education, and economic enhancement as well as employment opportunities. However, many Indonesians aspire to enrich their linguistic repertoire to include also English as the international language to seize greater opportunities that would not have been offered without English skills and ability. Increasingly these days with the enhancement in international communication and technology, many Indonesians are exposed to and wishing to be part of global citizenship with which the means of communication is English. The tensions present to the extent the government would adapt to this situation and the citizens who aspire to learn and master English remain to this day strong.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed narrative inquiry as a methodology for studying lived experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). It is considered a valid mode of knowing and learning about human experiences (Bruner, 1987) through depth interviews particularly because the study was driven by the detailed stories

of participants' experience that would not have been revealed otherwise. This study is a part a bigger research project and two participants were purposively selected to share their views and experience about English and English learning. The data analysis is bottom-up, emergent and recursive (Glasser and Straus, 1967; Patton, 2002) with thematic analysis, focusing on what is said more than how it is said (Riessman, 1993).

The participants – Rosa and Nani – were graduate students when they participated in the study. Rosa majored in Educational Management and taught English in several institutions. Nani was an English lecturer and majoring in English Education in her graduate program.

### 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The two participants had gone through different paths regarding English formal educational learning. After finishing middle school where they learned English for about four instructional hours per week for six years, each differed in their college and graduate education paths. At college, Rosa chose to study international relation for her undergraduate study and continued to study educational management for her graduate program. Nani, on the other hand, received much more formal education in English as her major was English education and continued to pursue graduate education in the same field.

In general, the study found that the interplays of language ideology between the participants' perceptions, values, and aspiration toward the English language with the larger ideologies at work at the local, national, and international are extremely complex. When both were asked to describe their experiences when learning English at school, their responses are as follow:

Rosa:

*I felt that English was difficult. What I remember the most about it was the English teacher. She liked to wear high heels, just different from other teachers. When she spoke in English, she sounded like a Westerner. I felt like she positioned herself different the other teachers.*

Nani:

*In middle school, for me English is learning grammar, which did not make any sense to me. So it was very hard to memorize all of the grammar rules and vocabularies because they are different (from Indonesian).*

The excerpts above indicate that the participants' experiences about their previous English learning particularly in early years of their middle school education were difficult and not meaningful for them. The teaching and learning process were most likely teacher-centered and focused heavily on the grammatical forms rather than meaning or functions. This situation is indeed common in the majority of Indonesian schools (e.g. Hamied, 2003; Suherdi, 2012; Wirza, 2004). This also indicates that limited exposure toward English as it was only taught a few hours per week as a result of the government policies on ELT in Indonesia did not bring improvement to the students' English ability. The mention of memorization as a dominant technique for learning is one of the typical types of form-focused instruction which is commonly found in EFL contexts (Doro, 2007). In addition, similarly commonly found in EFL classrooms are heavy use of textbooks, limited range of topics, and peer interlanguage.

The teacher factor is another point that emerges from the participants' experiences. Reports (World Bank, 2005) and studies (Pasaribu, 2001) have shown that the majority of English teachers possess lower credentials and competence than the minimum standard. This indeed poses a huge concern since as suggested by Doro (2007) above, often times when the teacher serves the main source and model for the students, having teachers with low credentials and competence is highly concerning. Furthermore, the image of the teacher that was profoundly vivid in Rosa's mind along with her remark about the teacher's attitudes and conduct leaving strong impression of English was a Western construct and that the teacher was portrait as having conformity with that association by sounding and acting "different" from other teachers.

Other pieces of excerpts capture the participants' more recent experiences with English:

Rosa:

*I made more money from teaching (English) compared to working as a civil servant. I have taught at several universities and some in-house training for companies. I looked at my parents and thought: when are they going to get rich and live well? It's funny because I never thought working as a teacher. Never crossed my mind. Now I love teaching very much.*

Nani:

*My father did not approve of my plan to study in the US: "Why would you study in the country of the non-believers?" (Quoting her father) (Laugh).*

*Perhaps because of that, you know, not getting the blessings from my parents, I failed to get the Fulbright scholarship.*

The excerpts above reveal the values of English for the participants. For Rosa, monetary compensation and financial security she gained from her job as an English instructor at some private universities, institutes, and companies have caused her to put higher values for her skills and proficiency in English. Even though her graduate major is not in English education, she could nail various job opportunities with decent compensation because she could provide what the employer was seeking to provide English lessons and trainings for their students and employees. Rosa's perspective on a well-off life was facilitated by English because it enabled her to earn more money. This is what Coupland (2007) asserts as the cash values of English for those who excel it.

For Nani, on the other hand, she was already exposed to some opportunities to study abroad – in this case USA – when she applied for a prestigious scholarship. This indicate that Nani, like many other Indonesians, have aspiration to continue their education in English-speaking countries through scholarships. In other words, Nani and many like her had developed positive association of English and believed that English could open more doors of opportunities for more promising future. There is increasing number of Indonesians to pursue academic, career, social, and cultural enhancement to developed countries like USA. It is not surprising because the border-crossings for educational and other purposes have become more common and English is one of the facilitative factors (Jenkins, 2009).

Both Rosa and Nani's experiences shared similar story in that they reflect generational shifts. As the globalization intensifies, compared to previous generations, the current generation have shown observable changes in the ways they view the world. One such example is choice of profession. As can be inferred from Rosa's story, her parents who belong to the older generations tend to prefer civil servant jobs even though they do not provide much salary but are preferred for job security and stability. Rosa's profession of choice as an English instructor proved to provide her financial security, something that she claimed her parents lacked due to their profession as civil servants.

Nani's parents as the older generation showed different aspects of generational shifts; they concern more with religious values associated with English. It is obviously a false association because English is

freely associated with any religions and faiths. In other words, somebody who speaks English can be of any religion, Islam, Christianity or otherwise. This is one of the major changes in the ideological perspectives concerning English in Indonesian context. It was more common in older generation to perceive English as a Western construct and associated with non-Muslims (non-believer) faiths. They perceived USA as the land of Non-Muslims and would not wish their daughter to study there. The imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) for Nani and her parents about USA were quite dissimilar. This indicates the pervasive ideological beliefs where English are linked with religious beliefs, which is obviously unfounded. Nonetheless, in Lauder's (2008) review, cultural clash is discussed to be one of reasons behind the reluctant of the Indonesian society to embrace English.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Many are not aware of the ideologies working and affecting their lives, as they can be subtle and hidden that we take them for granted. Rosa and Nani are interesting cases the study had investigated in terms of the language ideology they espoused and the people around them. Their stories and experiences have revealed the complexities of English and its position in a periphery country like Indonesia. Indeed, English as a global language has the immense potential nowadays to "presents us with unprecedented ideas for mutual understanding" (Crystal, 1997) for individuals and communities. Moving forward, Indonesia should determine what is in the best interests of its people regarding English. Its legal position as of now has not changed; English still is a foreign language. However, the society has changed and demand for more accessible and open policies toward English.

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