THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN AN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK TO ADDRESS THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF *BAHASA INGGRIS*

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Social Identity *ELT textbook* *Intercultural Competency*	The role of English as an international language has altered how English should be presented in textbooks. English language teaching and learning should not merely reflect Western culture but needs to include and portray the learners' own culture, the international culture, and the native speaker's culture. Textbooks need to ideally reflect all three to promote learners' awareness of intercultural competency – which is the objective of Curriculum 2013, the national curriculum in Indonesia. Given *Bahasa Inggris* as a compulsory English textbook to support the implementation of Curriculum 2013, this study aims to investigate how compatible the content is with the objective of Curriculum 2013. Focusing on social identity as a key element of culture, this study utilizes critical discourse analysis to find out how the language used in Bahasa Inggris represents the learners' own culture, international culture, and the native speakers' culture. The findings show that the representation of these three cultures is not in a balance proportionate with the dominance of the learners' own culture. This suggests that Bahasa Inggris provides the students with a limited sense of how English is used to facilitate communication across boundaries. However, at the same time, the domination of local culture within the text is helpful to its students in creating awareness of the diversity that exist in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Serious questions have been raised regarding the validity of English textbooks that play a crucial role in second language teaching and learning in many language classrooms. Criticism has been levelled at their limitations in guiding students toward self-awareness of the role of English as a global language without losing the learners' own context. Many textbook producers do not take into consideration the practicality of the textbooks for their users who come from different cultural backgrounds. The strong culture of English native speakers embedded in the textbooks is spread out into the market and it can be seen as inappropriate in certain contexts (Canagarajah, 1993; Yuen, 2011). Hence, it may affect students' motivation and willingness to learn. Arguably, since

English is considered an international language, the materials for English language teaching should not be restricted to the native speakers' culture (Alptekin, 2002).

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) has shown that many learners encounter identity issues (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004) because textbooks, as their main learning aids, mostly focus on Western culture. The predominance of Western culture inhibits ESL/EFL learners from being sensitive toward their own culture. Ahmed (2011) sees this issue as "Western cultural colonialism" (p. 120), in which English learners are pushed subtly to emulate everything Western, including identity.

In general, Curriculum 2013 was intended to improve the quality of education in all subjects as well as in students' attitudes. In English itself, the emphasis was on the preparation of the learners' competency to use English to deal with the interconnectedness and interdependency between intercultural communities (Ahmad, 2014). This refers to the ability to establish and maintain communication with the least distortion with people from different linguistic backgrounds. The implementation of Curriculum 2013 is supported by the use of English textbooks which were released under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The government mandated that schools use the textbook entitled "*Bahasa Inggris*" as one of the main resources. The goal was to raise learners' awareness regarding intercultural interactions and to reach competency in using English for communication, which is closely related to how English as an international language is presented in both the local and international context in the textbook. This research aimed at revealing the representations of social identity in *Bahasa Inggris*, balanced proportion of social identity in *Bahasa Inggris* reflect the local culture, native-speaker culture, and the international culture and the representations of social identity in *Bahasa Inggris* compatible with the aims of Curriculum 2013 to gain competencies in the use of English to deal with the interconnectedness and interdependency between intercultural communities?

Although studies of English textbooks and culture have been conducted by many other researchers, no study has been done to investigate the appropriateness of textbooks to address the intercultural competency within Curriculum 2013. Using two English textbooks, *English in Focus* and *English on Sky*, Silvia (2015) investigated the representation of local native speakers within international culture to support the Indonesian students in their acquisition of the intercultural communicative competence. The results concluded that *English in Focus* and *English on Sky* do not facilitate students in the achievement of intercultural communicative competence.

Another analysis of textbooks focusing on cultural identity was conducted by Gailea and Rasyid (2015). They investigated the issue of gender in an English textbook written by Indonesian authors and an English textbook written by an English author. It was found that there were unequal gender representations in the textbook written by

Indonesian authors, where men were portrayed as superior and women inferior as reflected in the patriarchal system in Indonesia. On the other hand, equal gender representation was found in the textbook written by the English author. Similar to the study conducted by Silvia (2015), this study does not investigate the appropriacy of the textbooks within Curriculum 2013.

In investigating how social identity is depicted in *Bahasa Inggris*, this study have used the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis. "Critical discourse analysis explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs. It explores issues such as gender, ethnicity, cultural differences, ideology, and identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in texts" (Paltridge, 2012, p. 186).

The rationale behind the reason for this study is to help teachers using this textbook to promote intercultural competency. First of all, *Bahasa Inggris* is used as the main resource in ELT in high schools across Indonesia. As a compulsory English textbook, it constitutes the basic input for the students in acquiring the target language. It is also the primary resource used to recognize cross-cultural situations and to learn how to interact with communities across linguistic boundaries. Therefore, an analysis of *Bahasa Inggris* in terms of cultural understanding needs to be undertaken to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

METHOD

This study will analyse an English textbook entitled *Bahasa Inggris* (2017 Revised Edition) for Grade X that is being used as a compulsory teaching medium to support the implementation of Curriculum 2013 throughout senior high schools in Indonesia. The textbook was written by Utami Widiati, Zuliati Rohmah, and Furaidah (Indonesian authors) under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It involves short functional texts, essays, and interactional texts. Short functional texts are writings meant to help solve problems in daily life, like how to give announcements and compliments. The essays consist of recount, narrative, and descriptive texts that are followed by comprehension tasks such as fill in the blanks and vocabulary exercises etc. The interactional texts consist of conversation and small talk to engage students in the use of language for social interactions.

Critical discourse analysis has been utilized to analyze the content of the textbook, to link word choice and language use to particular social contexts and to examine how the language used embodies discourse since people have a range of linguistic options (word choice, styles, dialects, etc.) to choose a suitable language to represent themselves in the society. In analyzing the content of *Bahasa Inggris*, the analysis is not based on the textbook as a whole, but rather selected excerpts that represent three different cultures

(source culture, target culture, and international target culture) suggested by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). The analysis of images is also included in this study because images can represent particular cultural values. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) believe that "a text does not uniquely determine a meaning, though there is a limit to what a text can mean" (p. 67). As Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004) explain, a text can be interpreted differently based on the knowledge and social positioning of the interpreters. Accordingly, the interpretation in this study is based on the writer knowledge as an Indonesian who have experience of living in Australia for two years in which the writer have experienced intercultural communication and a Western lifestyle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The representation of social identity in *Bahasa Inggris* can be scrutinized in three different aspects of social identity namely: gender, ethnicity and religion, and cross-cultural encounters. Each of which will be explained in the following subsections.

2.1. Gender

Language is considered a crucial facet in gender construction (Connell, 2008) in which people make sense of their feelings and ideas about the world (Holmes, 2008). In English textbooks, men are often represented as having more powerful positions and a various range of job roles (Gupta & Yin, 1990) while women are seen as inferior (Harashima, 2005).

Indonesia is basically a patriarchal society in which men have the authority while women are expected to play subordinate roles. In that society men are the breadwinners and are depicted as assertive, having power and control. They are also associated with professional jobs as opposed to those of women. In *Bahasa Inggris*, the men are portrayed as superior with higher status at work. As can be seen in excerpts 1, 2 and 3, all the male characters are portrayed as newly promoted or as having important positions such as director of a company (Alif, excerpt 1), a branch manager (Tomi, excerpt 2), and a village head (Mr. Muslih, excerpt 3).

Excerpt 1

1. After a long struggle and hard work, Alif is finally appointed as the director of a national company where he works. Many of his friends who work at the same company congratulate him.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 23)

Excerpt 2

2. Tomi has just been promoted to be the branch manager of Jepara Ukir Company in London.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 30)

Excerpt 3

3. Mr. Muslih is a very _____ village head. He seems to be in control of the village matters.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 162)

On the other hand, none of women characters are illustrated with pivotal jobs at professional levels. In *Bahasa Inggris* women are associated with domestic chores as housewives. As can be seen on the excerpt 4 line 5, the woman is doing household chores such as buying groceries at the market. In the excerpt 5 line 12 and 16, the woman is illustrated cooking while another example is "Your sister has graduated from a culinary arts program in Padang, West Sumatra. She wants to be the best chef and plans to open her own restaurant" (p. 30).

Excerpt 4

4. Anisa: I've never seen you in that hat. Where did you buy it?

5. Rani: My mom bought it for me when she went to the market.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 28)

Excerpt 5

6. Santi: So what about you Bayu? Do you have any plans?

7. Bayu: Definitely. My dad and I are going to go fishing.

8. Santi: Fishing? Are you going to go fishing in the river near your house?

9. Bayu: No. We plan to go fishing in the river near my uncle's house. Would you like to come with us?

10. Santi: Fishing? That sound great. But I would rather stay at home than go fishing.

11. Bayu: What about you Riri? What would you like to do on the long weekend?

12. Riri: I have made a plan with my mother about what to do on this long weekend. We are going to practice baking cookies.

13. Santi: That sounds like a very good plan.

14. Bayu: Are you going to bake choco chips cookies like last time?

15. Riri: Well, yes. That is my favourite. But we will also try to make ginger cookies.

16. Santi: Lucky you. Your mom is a real baker, isn't she?

17. Bayu: Ha ha. Do you still want to stay home alone?

18. Riri: Or, would you like to join me to learn baking cookies? You can come to my house.

19. Bayu: It's a good idea. Or will you go fishing with me and my dad?

20. Santi: I think I would like to bake cookies with Riri. Thanks for inviting me, Riri.

21. Riri: No problem. I will tell you the time on Friday.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 40 - 41)

Interestingly, dual roles are played when illustrating Hannah's mother, an American mother whose daughter, Hannah, is a pen-pal of an Indonesian girl, Alia. In her email to Alia, Hannah writes "my father died a few years ago so my mother runs the house and the family business" (p. 4). While it is obvious that Hannah's mother runs the business because her spouse has died, one assumes that the reason the writer chose this particular job for Hannah's mother is to show that women in the United States can have equal job opportunities as gender inequality in the USA has been lessening (Davis & Robinson, 1991). This value is represented in the textbook in contrast to the way Indonesian women are represented. Moreover, in the letter Hannah is shown as an active girl who loves sports such as tennis and basketball. She even wants to be a park ranger, a job associated with men's work. In another example a woman who appears to be non-Indonesian is shown here: "her position at the CEO of the oil company, she mostly spends her time in New Zealand" (p. 137). These are obvious examples of the difference in the construction of the identities between the Indonesian and Western women that clearly reinforce the cultural differences. Students would be aware of this.

The representation of gender in *Bahasa Inggris* is also characterised by boys and girls in their daily activities. Girls are mostly shown as diligent and involved in indoor activities that require less energy compared to boys who are depicted as involved more in outdoor activities. In the excerpt 5 above, the type of activities planned for the boy (Bayu) and the girls (Santi and Riri) are gendered. Gebregeorgis (2016) says "the depictions of girl and boy characters in the domestic and leisure activities legitimise the hegemonic gender-stereotypic belief that women – and by extension girls – are more suitable for domestic activities than men and boys" (p. 130). In the excerpt 5, Bayu and his father are shown to choose fishing as an activity for the long weekend while Santi, Riri and Santi's mother are shown cooking.

2.2. Ethnicity and religion

Indonesia is well known as a multicultural country with significant cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity ranging throughout the islands. One way this diversity is expressed is in the form of images and texts. As can be seen on the image 1, the conversation between Edo and Slamet shows they come from different areas, Jepara and Raja Ampat.

Image 1. Conversation between Edo and Slamet in a party (Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 17)

There are also several sentences in the various tasks that mention other areas in Indonesia and the ethnicity as shown in excerpt 6 and 7. In addition, some words used in a question in the textbook relate to an attribute of the ethnicity. As an example, "Is that Anna? "I can't _____ her. She looks different when she's wearing *kebaya* and *sanggul*" (p. 173). The italic words are associated with traditional costumes and hairstyle of women in some areas in Indonesia. Further, a folk tale from West Sumatra, Indonesia entitled *Malin Kundang* is presented. Then, in terms of the religious diversity, girls are shown wearing hijab.

Excerpt 6

22. Your sister has graduated from a culinary arts program in Padang, West Sumatra. She wants to be the best chef and plans to open her own restaurant.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 30)

Excerpt 7

23. Alia in her letter wrote that her _____ is Batakese, but she can also speak other languages, like Madurese, Indonesian, and English.

(Widiati, Rohmah & Furaidah, 2017, p. 9)

Cultural diversity is well represented in the textbook in the choice of name of places, words, and pictures. There are great benefits to raising students' awareness of the disparity that exists in Indonesia as it is a serious issue. A number of quarrels, conflicts, violence, and showdowns in the real and virtual society (the Facebook and the Twitter) have been caused by these differences in the community. In order for there to be peace, diversity must be accepted. As Guo and Jamal (2007) argue, having a clear understanding

of cultural diversity can promote acceptance and respect and also avoid bias and prejudice.

2.3. Cross-cultural encounters

The final subject for evaluation of this textbook is that of the cross-cultural encounters depicted. The first example is evident in an email written by Hannah, the American girl, to her Indonesian pen pal, Alia. In her email (p. 4), Hannah tells about herself and her family. Cultural differences are apparent in the gender equality in the USA when compared to Indonesia. Further, Hannah who has three dogs says that she loves pets a lot. She writes "They need lots of attention as you can imagine" (p. 4). In America, it seems that pets are seen as more than an animal and are treated almost like a member of a family. Some even have birth certificates and their birthday is celebrated. According to Cohen (2002), in American society most urban dwellers have strong bonds with their pets and consider them as belonging to their family circle. A different situation applies in Indonesia, in which pets are just animals and there are few people who treat their pets as the way Americans do. Socioeconomic factor may apply here too as more affluent people can afford to treat their pets like one of the family, but in general Americans are seen as more concerned about their pets than Indonesians.

A representation of the identity of a non-English native speakers' culture is shown in a letter wrote by Saidah, a girl from Malaysia, to Alia. She says *"at school, we are supposed to use English at all times, so we have become quite fluent although sometimes we slip back into Malay, which is our mother tongue"* (p. 5). This shows that English is not always associated with Western countries, but can be part of the identity of a particular group of people like Saidah. It shows that English as an international language is no longer used only by Western people which helps to disprove the stereotype that English is always associated with white people.

Representation of the local culture, the native speakers' culture, and the international culture in ELT are all essential to enable students to experience and interact with different cultures. Therefore, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) argue, three cultures (source culture, target culture, and international target culture) should be included in ELT, especially in English textbooks. In the ESL/EFL classroom teaching and learning, the primary resources that provides access to the world are textbooks, especially in Indonesia where many schools (especially in rural areas) encounter difficulties in obtaining supplementary media for students. Thus, English textbooks should present these three cultures. Although *Bahasa Inggris* has offered these three cultures, they are not in a balanced proportion. The international target culture is given the least amount of validity with little focus on how English as an international language is used to facilitate

communication involving participants from different linguistic backgrounds. The native speakers' culture has the correct proportion as it shows students the different lifestyle and way of thinking portrayed by Western characters in the textbook like Hannah, her mother and the woman who lived in New Zealand.

The key issue is that the representation of local culture gets the dominant proportion in this textbook. In terms of addressing the issue of language and nationalistic attrition, this is the sign of a good textbook. In the past, most textbooks used for ELT in Indonesia only depicted a Western lifestyle and students were consequently disadvantaged. What was already a difficult language to understand became harder because the students did not have any background knowledge about the topic. The representation of local identity in the current textbook helps students to grasp the target language because they are more familiar with the context. In addition, knowing and understanding who we are matters because "it shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 228). Identity is crucial not only to how people can be understood by others and vice versa, but also helps to develop relationships within the society. In language learning, having a good understanding of one's own identity helps to increase the sensitivity of the role of an individual in society because this will be challenged by exposure to the culture of the target language we learn. At the same time, having a strong understanding of the learners' identity as an Indonesian can gradually diminish the problem of the local language and nationalistic attritions that was pointed out as one of the objectives of the implementation of Curriculum 2013.

According to this analysis on how social identity is represented in *Bahasa Inggris*, the objective of Curriculum 2013 to equip learners with intercultural competencies has not been completely achieved. Intercultural competency, as highlighted earlier, is the ability to establish and maintain communication with least distortion with people from different linguistic backgrounds. A minimal amount of international culture is presented in *Bahasa Inggris*, the only example found in the letter written by Saidah, the Malaysian girl. The whole section of this part, is about Alia, an Indonesian girl who got an email from Hannah and Saidah (p. 4 & p. 5). In this section, English is clearly useful to bridge the intercultural communication between an Indonesian, a Malaysian, and an American. This section provides the students with access to an obvious function of English as a means of international language and gives them a view of cross border communication.

Nevertheless, this is not enough to develop students' awareness of intercultural competency. The minimal amount of exposure to the intercultural interaction in *Bahasa Inggris* provides the students with a limited sense of how English is used to facilitate communication across boundaries. This is necessary because, as Neuliep (2006) argues, intercultural competency helps individuals to predict attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of people from other cultures in order to maintain effective interaction. Having

contact with different cultures, especially international cultures, can provide a great chance for learners to develop intercultural competencies, an area in which *Bahasa Inggris* falls short. In other words, *Bahasa Inggris* is not compatible with the objective of Curriculum 2013 to equip students to acquire intercultural competency.

CONCLUSION

Smith (1976) claims that the goal of ELT in this global era is to be able to communicate learners' ideas and culture to others. The centrality of native speaker culture in ELT is no longer prioritized but the goal is rather to incorporate the culture of the learners and the international culture, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) argue; three cultures (source culture, target culture, and international target culture) should therefore be included in ELT, especially in English textbooks. *Bahasa Inggris* as a compulsory English textbook in Indonesia aims to equip the students with intercultural competency as an objective of Curriculum 2013. On the basis of the three cultures' presence as criteria of the appropriateness of English textbooks, *Bahasa Inggris* does not provide enough exposure to international culture to develop and raise students' awareness of the intercultural competency.

However, the domination of local culture within the text is helpful to its students in creating awareness of the diversity that exist in Indonesia. The depictions of Western cultural identity, which are presented in a completely different way to that of local identity provides students with opportunities to examine the distinctions. They can develop the ability to negotiate and examine biases, different perspectives and prejudices, and to develop critical thinking. The students may have different perspectives and opinions about what is being illustrated in *Bahasa Inggris*, which may not be in accordance with real life or vice versa.

Some suggestions for using this textbook: firstly, there are no textbooks that can completely meet the need of students; therefore, teachers need to supplement the use of textbook with other materials to fulfil the need of their students (Harwood, 2014, p. 1). Secondly, teachers would benefit from a critical analysis of the content of *Bahasa Inggris* before using it and adapt it if necessary according to the context of their learners. Thirdly, teachers need to conduct a cultural reflection with their students and colleagues because different opinions and understanding may potentially arise.

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