

## COMPARING SECOND LANGUAGE IDENTITY AS EXPERIENCED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DURING THEIR STUDYING ABROAD

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### Abstract

Language and cultural identity are things that can be summarized in terms of language identity. The construct of second language identity has a strong relation with study abroad. Second language identity tends to appear in continuous classical conditioning through study abroad. However, no further investigation about this issue has been researched in Indonesian international student context. This study purposed to explore how is the second language identity constructed through the interactions during study abroad. Through narrative interviews, this study will explore more about how second language identity of two international students constructed in their study abroad countries. The result of this study is second language identity construction is more powerful based on self-desire of participants and who the interlocutors are. Further, by knowing how the second language identity is constructed when international students are in native and non-native English-speaking countries, this study will give an empirical contribution about how English language learning patterns depend on the environment. Thus, the English teacher or language expert later could adapt English learning patterns through the construction of other people's language identity.

**Keywords:** *international students, second language identity, study abroad*

### Sari

Bahasa dan identitas bahasa merupakan hal yang bisa disimpulkan sebagai istilah identitas bahasa. Identitas bahasa kedua mempunyai hubungan yang erat dengan studi di luar negeri. Identitas bahasa kedua cenderung muncul pada pengkondisian alami secara berkelanjutan melalui studi di luar negeri. Bagaimanapun, tidak ada investigasi lebih lanjut tentang masalah ini yang telah diteliti dalam konteks pelajar internasional Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana identitas bahasa kedua terbentuk melalui interaksi-interaksi selama studi di luar negeri. Melalui wawancara secara narasi, penelitian ini akan menyelidiki lebih lanjut tentang bagaimana pembentukan identitas bahasa kedua pada dua pelajar internasional di negara-negara tempat mereka belajar. Hasil dari penelitian ini yaitu konstruksi identitas bahasa kedua

lebih kuat berdasarkan kemauan dari dalam diri peserta dan siapa lawan bicara para peserta. Selanjutnya, dengan mengetahui bagaimana pembentukan identitas bahasa kedua saat pelajar internasional berada di negara penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli bahasa Inggris, penelitian ini akan memberikan kontribusi empiris tentang bagaimana pola pembelajaran bahasa Inggris berdasarkan pada lingkungan. Demikian, para guru bahasa Inggris dan ahli bahasa dapat mengadaptasi pola pembelajaran bahasa Inggris melalui pembentukan identitas bahasa orang lain.

**kata kunci:** *pelajar internasional, identitas bahasa kedua, studi di luar negeri*

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## Introduction

The current studies that investigate the construction of second language identity tend to be influenced by social contexts, such as cultural identity, group identity, and occupational identity. Sato (2014) highlighted that language identity is somehow constructed by continuous classical conditioning. Through narrative inquiry, he found that participants can build their second language identity through social interactions in the place they are living. By then, these continuous interactions deliberately constructed the participants' self-enlightenment to become aware of linguistics and pragmatics at the same time. Differently, Sung (2017) exposed that it is not necessarily about the whole environment, but more on who are the interlocutors, who could be as native or non-native of English speakers. When the participants were exposed to multiple language identities thoroughly, they would have self-perceived proficiency of English based on their communication experiences. These experiences could happen not only to migrant workers, but also to students (Block, 2009). Nam (2018) found that the English-speaking countries where the students live abroad have power in relation to construct participants' second language proficiency, which extended to identity. In other words, the uniqueness of natural interaction during study abroad had a big impact on constructing participants' second language identity. Based on the studies above, it is concluded that the main social context that plays important roles in constructing second language identity are social interactions and multilingual interlocutors.

This issue had been revealed before in Southeast-Asia context which was conducted by Kang (2012) that shows how migrant subjects continuously negotiate their notions and ideologies about language resources with local varieties like Singaporean-English. Another study which was conducted in East-Asia context was by Sato (2014). He examined the construction of second language identity in the context of study abroad. The findings revealed that all of the participants constructed new target language subject positions. The existence of these two studies shows that continuous classical conditioning through study abroad gives positive impact related to second language identity.

As observed above, no investigation about this issue has been researched in Indonesia context. However, the issue brought in this study is still the highly accommodation cost which causes global mobility for academic purposes are highly privileged for some researchers. Nevertheless, study about language identity is supposed to be conducted in Indonesia even though there are a lot of multilingual students, but the inferiorism related foreign language because anxiety and other factors are still high (Thompson & Lee, 2013). By knowing how the language identity is constructed when Indonesian students are in native and non-native English-speaking countries, this study will give an empirical contribution about how English language learning patterns depend on the environment. Thus, the English teacher later could adapt English learning patterns through the construction of other people's language identity. Research questions guide this study are:

1. How do the participants interact with the study abroad environment in native and non-native English-speaking countries?
2. How is the second language identity constructed through the interactions during study abroad?

## **Theoretical review**

### **Conceptual Review of Language Identity**

Every individual has two values of their self which are religion and culture that construct their identity. Nevertheless, in study abroad context identity is also influenced by the nature of the studying program (inside and outside the class) itself, the

countries/regions receiving them, the nationality of the student. In Talburt & Stewart's study (1999), They are pointed out in identity there is influence by race. Another study, social class, also has an impact on identity as pointed out by Kinginger (2004). Language is a fundamental aspect that is closely related to cultural identity. Language and cultural identity are things that can be summarized in terms of language identity. The concept of language identity has been pointed out by Block (2009). He pointed out that there are three contexts that may contribute to the construction of second language identity for EFL learners. Those are identity in adult migrant context, identity in study abroad context, and identity in foreign language context.

Drawn from the previous studies above, this research is more on second language identity as experienced by international students during their study abroad. The term of language identity refers to a relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication which might be known as a language, a dialect, or a sociolect (Block, 2009). In his review, he emphasized that study abroad in a second language learning context has increased recently for undergraduate and postgraduate students who seek to balance their foreign language context learning with more similar to what migrants' experience when they cross borders and are immersed in new circumstances (languages and cultures). Language identity is also closely related to the social context which includes age, gender, racial identities, etc. (Rassokha, 2010). The language identity what is meant here is focused on communicative competence, that is development in grammar, accent, and pragmatic ability.

Unconsciously we have acquired a language identity in our daily communication because basically identity is an abstract and multifaceted concept that plays a significant role in all communication interactions (Samovar et al., 2007). Second language identity tends to appear by continuous classical conditioning in the place they are living for a particular time (Sato, 2014). Also, language identity is the term that can intentionally constructed by depending on four elements such as elaborated in the following parts.

1. The duration of participants staying in study abroad country

Based on a study conducted by Sato (2014), he concluded that the research result can be assumed the duration of staying (study abroad) in SA countries can influence the appearance of language identity. Longer duration of study abroad may be a more intense experience than a shorter visit in terms of opportunities for second language identity. It could increase the possibility for participants to experience power connections at the daily social experiences between individuals that will impact their development of second language identity.

2. The interlocutors of the participants

The emergence factor of an individual's language identity is also influenced by their interlocutors. Native and non-native is the determinant of language identity. In Sung's (2017) study, the construction of identity is depending on whether the interlocutors are perceived as native and non-native English speakers.

3. The country where participants are staying (studying abroad)

The impact of English proficiency gains is also certainly determined by study abroad country choice (Nam, 2018) because the offered programs by host institutions of participants, where it assumed that English-speaking countries are certainly the emergence determinant of language identity for particular English dialects.

4. The self-intention/desire to acquire the language identity target

The appearance factor of language identity is not just based on communities or interlocutors but also an individual's language identity appears based on desire or self-intention. Further, the sense of nativeness of English speakers is an inevitable thing in terms of study abroad. In Jenkins' (2007) study, participants must acquire a near-native English accent to be seen as successful English speakers when they have studied abroad at a particular time.

### **Previous Studies**

A previous study in native English-speaking countries was by Jenkins (2007). He explored a group of 'non-native' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors'

identities in the United Kingdom and found that they expressed a certain degree of inconsistency about their English while they had a desire to signal some kind of the first language (L1) identity, they also felt some kind of obligation to acquire native English accents to be seen as kind of native speakers. Another study was by Kang (2012). He investigates Korean instructive migrants in Singapore and proves how subjects constantly negotiate and reclassify their thoughts and belief systems about language resources. Not only worldwide dialects but also local dialects like Singaporean-English was reported as their very own major aspect of social positioning. Based on these previous studies, language identity can be intentionally constructed by positioning one's in a particular social setting such as the duration of participants staying in study abroad countries, the interlocutors of the participants, the country where participants are staying, and the self-intention/desire to acquire the language target.

Study abroad experience has a certain impact on one's second language identity, but it is not clearly explained as a tool that can shape one's language identity. In contrast, study abroad experience can gain a language competence that is supported by personal developments that may well have been negotiated by the use of a second language (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott & Brown, 2012). Nevertheless, students tend to think that study abroad is a comprehensive and possibly life-changing experience with big possible outcomes. Second language scholars primarily focused on language proficiency achievements in a setting in which participants are likely to use a second language (Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007). Thus, study abroad is a holistic approach that has a particular impact on participants' identities (Jackson, 2008, 2010). As for other things that will help students succeed in learning a second language in study abroad, is not merely based on the intentions of a student, but also there are other factors like what have concluded in Kinginger's (2011). He pointed out that the success of language learning in study abroad is not barely based on the characteristics and intentions of the students, but also it depends on how the students have gotten in their circumstances or host community.

Different nationalities enrolled in study abroad programs and countries receiving the students make study abroad programs quite varied. Furthermore, Benson et al. (2012)

explored the construct of second language identity through the analysis of students' experiences in terms of study abroad. Also, he concluded that besides at home, development of a second language identity tends to appear in specific study abroad, or at least experience it in a circumstance that uses it daily as pointed out in previous studies (Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007). Further, the study about the use of a second language that interconnects with an individual's identity through short-time study abroad has been examined by Sato (2014). Based on these previous studies above, study abroad may well be the right tool to see how an individual's second language identity is constructed.

### **Methods**

Narrative inquiry is shown to be an ideal research design since this study will reveal the complexity of human behavior by the perspectives of the participants (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry is used as a research design in terms of revealing life history, language learning history, language learning experience, language biography, autobiography, and autoethnography (Benson, 2014). Previously, it was used to explore the perspective of the construct of learners' identity through oral or written accounts of the participants when they were learning a foreign language (Miyahara, 2009). The narrative inquiry will be used as the origin of self-reflective statements from the participants' experiences when they were studying abroad. This research design is selected since the construct of participants' second language identities are difficult to observe directly. The narrative inquiry will be the ideal tool for representing and understanding the experiences of the participants with a concern related to research ethical code.

### **Settings and Participants**

First participant is Lily, she is a graduate student in Suranaree University of Technology and majoring biochemistry. Lily, a Javanese woman, already live in Thailand for two years. Previously, Norma already had overseas experience, but it is only short visit in South Korea for a week. She was born in Pemalang, Central Java. Her mother tongue is Javanese while her second languages are Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Thai. Norma were using English since she was in senior high school because she was enrolled in

international school in her hometown (RSBI), while she has to keep using Bahasa in her daily life in Indonesia. In addition, now she is using English and Thai as a medium for study in her current college in Nakhon Ratchasima province in Thailand. Norma is selected as one of the participants for representing non-native English-speaking countries.

Second participant is Abigail. she is an undergraduate student in university of Surrey, in Guildford, England, majoring international hospitality and tourism management. She lives in England almost nearly two years since she graduated from senior high school in Indonesia. Abigail was raised in two languages at the same time which are Bahasa Indonesia and English. Abigail currently using English as her second language and already got much exposure to it since she was in junior high school in Bandung, West Java. Most of the time she was using Bahasa Indonesia as her main language till she moved to Guildford to continue her study. Previously she was live across Java with her parents. Abigail is selected as another participant for representing native English-speaking countries.

The method of data collection that will be used in this study is the interview, in which it is able to collect the statements from the participants in the form of narrative. Narrative interviews are considered to be a valuable method for exploring and negotiation meanings in a natural setting (Cohen et al., 2007). This method is also selected because it is not just to find holistic experiences, analyses words, and reports detailed views of information; but also, it will be able for participants to speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings (Berg, 2007).

The applied method of data analysis used in narrative research is thematic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), in which narrative statements by participants will be analyzed by coding and categorize the data into some certain thematic headings. After collecting the statements, participants' responses will be transcribed, and their narratives are going to repeatedly examined to identify statements related to construction or change of language identity, which are then will be categorized into four headings: the duration of the participant was staying in study abroad country (DPS), the interlocutors of the



participant (IP), the country where the participant was studying abroad (CPS), and the self-intention/desire to acquire the language identity target (SILI).

### **Results and Discussion**

From the data, it was found that both Lily and Abigail had a decent privilege to experience second language identity construction since they were children. Lily lived nomadenly all around Java to accompany his father. Lily's parents agreed to put her in bilingual school. Indonesia is indeed a country of multilingualism; this was in order to make her exposed to Bahasa Indonesia and English at the same time. Similarly, Abigail was brought by her father to all over Java in order to follow the country service of her father. Thus, in terms of second language identity construction, they did not find it difficult. Instead, since they were designed to be in international interaction, their self-desire to learn and build their own second language identity was also automatically constructed.

#### **Lili & Abigail's Childhood**

Lily spent her childhood in elementary school in Pemalang, the north coast of Central Java, then Lily had to follow her father's service and took her junior high school education in Purwokerto, Central Java. After she finished her junior high school education, Lily had to go back to her hometown since her father had to settle in Pemalang. Lily got some turbulence when she had to deal with the transition of Purwekerto's accent and Pemalang's accent. Further, Lily decided to attend a bilingual school in Pemalang where she was forced to use English and Bahasa Indonesia at the same time as the medium of communication.

As did Abigail, she spent her childhood living nomadenly because she had to follow her father's service. Abigail spent her elementary school in nomadenly all around Java island. Since she was a child Abigail was taught to English not just by the school but also by her mother, which she demanded to have great emphasis on academic results and she was forced to implement 'not supposed to speak her opinion on anything unless she was asked' learning style by her mother. Then, Abigail had to move to Bandung, West Java, and spent her junior high school education in an official state school.

Besides that, she also had English course for three years. Abigail began to have huge exposure to English when she was in junior high school. After she graduated, she joined military high school in Magelang, Central Java, which she only learned English by herself and only got full English exposure when she had to visit her sister in Melbourne.

### **How Lily found her second language exposure, but not formed into identity**

After finishing her undergraduate degree, Lily continued her study in technological university in Thailand for two years. Indeed, on campus she has to use English as the medium of communication as what she used to do in the lectures or group activities and she also mostly interacts with her Indonesian friend when she is in the dorm. Somehow, she was directly exposed to Thai language as what she usually gets when she talks with merchants in the market or does other daily activities. Although she had much exposure to Thai, she tried not to adapt her language or accent into the interlocutors' identity. Another finding is Lily did not want to use Thai most of the time because she was afraid it would be a habit that can ruin her English and Bahasa Indonesia language structure. Not trying to mix the language between English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Thai was a certain difficulty for Lily because some reasons, such as, she did not want Thai language become her language identity which could impact how she uses her main language identity as her mentioned:

“For me, I try my best to not engaged to Thai, because I afraid it will become habit, because I think language is about how you use it every day, so I do not make them go along between English and Thai.”

As a result, Lily 'chose' to keep Bahasa Indonesia as her identity rather than Thai or English. This also may be known by how she only wants to socialize with the person who has the same main language identity which is her dorm mate. Further, as time goes by Lily found her structured written communication has changed. Unconsciously, sometimes when she overmixed all the languages, she wrote her name into Thai's written structure.

### **How Abigail found her second language identity**

Since she was a child, Abigail already had much exposure to English. Studying in England was a tipping point for her because she had much more exposure there, such as

the academic and the environment she was living in. She also had a job in a certain restaurant as a sandwich artist that obligated her to greets and serve the guests.

“I do a part time job in here, I work at a particular restaurant as the sandwich artist where I serving the sandwich to them. It’s not a waitress but they just called it a sandwich artist and have direct interaction with the customers, that’s how the hospitality here.”

Also, for particular times, such as when the first time she attended the class she found difficulty when talking to the native English speakers. They said some words that she did not understand and sometimes they talked too fast, and finally she had some difficulty processing it. As she found a way to solve it, sometimes she dealt by making it sounds alike. From those experiences she did enrich her exposure to the target language. Unlike Lily, Abigail had the intention to not fully socialize with the people from her country in order to get out of her comfort zone to use English as her language identity more frequently instead of Bahasa Indonesia.

Until the interview stage of this research was conducted, the willingness of the answer that she gave at some points was already using English as her identity and also this could be a reflection of the use of her second language identity. Further, Abigail tried to adapt her identity to the interlocutors’ identity who most of them are British people and she also learned many language things, for example slang that is used by the people where she lived.

Block (2009) said about the identity in study abroad regarding the connection between study abroad and second language identity construction where students have boundless access to the kinds of activity that stimulate the development of communicative competence. Some issues related to the duration of participants staying in study abroad countries, the interlocutors of the participants, the country where participants are studying abroad, the self-intention/desire to acquire the language identity target will be discussed in this section.

### **Willingness to evolve with the interlocutors’ language identity**

As found in Lily’s and Abigail’s experiences, many findings could be seen how they go along with their second language identity. Lily cannot acquire her second language identity due to her unwillingness but Abigail easily acquires her second language

identity because of her willingness to go along with interlocutors' identity. As proposed by Sato (2014), willingness is the most crucial as well as contributing issue in the development of second language identity. It means that when someone does not have a willingness to communicate or interact with second language environments, then the construction of second language identity will be difficult to happen. The interview with Lily and Abigail depicted different willingness to communicate in their second language environment.

Lily's narrative:

“Almost every day, mostly when I'm in dormitory, actually it's dormitory for international student, but the students here are kind of individual, so I pretty seldom to have interaction with the others, I think it's just with some of them, like the person next door, but mostly I interacted with Indonesian. For non-Indonesian, mostly outside of the dorm, like in the lab, class, because there are people from many countries in my class.”

Abigail's narrative:

“There are some Asian too, but I just felt like I have come this long, why don't I socialize with the non-Asian people? So I started to think like it doesn't mean I don't want to socialize with the Asian anymore. Honestly, I am kind of lazy to meet people like Indonesian, I just felt like that I'm still in my circumstance though. I felt like I wouldn't grow. So I have to meet more people.”

From these narratives we can conclude that an individual's second language identity could appear not only from how long the duration of the participants staying in their study abroad countries.

### **Strong self-desire to acquire second language identity**

Besides the willingness, there supposed to be the strong desire from the participants to find their second language identity because there is a possible chance to meet the difficulty when the participants interacted with their interlocutors. The strong desire or intention to find the way to be seen as their interlocutor's identity. Lily sometimes found the difficulty when she had interaction with the merchants but the desire based on her narratives seems to be low to acquire the target language. Further, she only dealt with some certain gestures just to make the merchants understand about her points.

Lily's narrative:

“It's really different here, when we just begin the interaction, they just feel shy, because they can't understand my language, as a result sometimes I only use Thai a bit or use body gestures, so I just point out what I mean.”

Abigail, who continued her study in England, experienced her second identity construction in a slightly different way than Lily. Abigail sometimes found difficulty with British people because she was not used to hearing some words and certain accents that she never learned before.

Abigail's narrative:

"...when I was in school (Indonesia) it's kind of easy to catch up the accent, but here, their interaction and how they talk is kind of hard to understand by my ear that is not used to hear them, ...I dealt with it by making it sound alike."

"I think I have more interaction here, I feel like I more confident with my English, I learn a lot of slang, the terms used by other people here and I learn something new, not just English as grammarly, but also I learn their culture sometimes, and the language that used to reply certain words."

She dealt with it by making it sound similar as British as what found by Jenkins' (2007) participant felt some kind of obligation to acquire native English accents to be seen as kind of native speakers. These exposures also push her to more confident of her language to communicate with other people.

### **Second Language Identity Construction from Multilingual Environment**

The construction of a second language identity in a multilingual environment also be one of interesting issues due to the findings in Lily's narrative in context of English as foreign language and how she dealt with multilingualism in Thailand and how Lily and Abigail got the exposure of English since they were children in Indonesia. However, the construction of second language identity of individuals is also influenced by depending on their interlocutors. As in Sung's (2017) study that interlocutors are perceived as native and non-native English speakers that may as one of the issues that appears in Lily's & Abigail's narratives where Lily might be more get evolved to her second language identity which is English rather than Thai if the interlocutors are native English speakers as the interesting point as on what Abigail got in her study abroad circumstances. Furthermore, even though Lily was reluctant to the Thai language, emergence finding was found in her narrative. Lily found that as time went by, she unconsciously realized that her written structure had changed into Thai's structure.

Lily's narrative:

"I think it's because I hear them most of the time, so it becomes a habit. I don't know why when I overmixed all of those languages, Thai, English, Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, so sometimes

when I'm tired typing, it's like reversed, I don't know why when I type my name it becomes L-Y-L-I."

This finding could be supported by what Sato (2014) said that second language identity tends to appear by continuous classical conditioning in the place they are living for a particular time.

### **Conclusion & recommendation**

Through the previous discussion, second language identity construction is more powerful when the interlocutor themselves has their self-desire to construct the second language identity. The situation, indeed, also contributes to the construction of second language identity. Although someone lives for a long time in foreign country, it does not automatically shape their second language identity. There should be more than survival exposure on second language use. This research, however, portrayed the lens of Indonesian students who spent two years studying abroad. This contextual limitation shall be used as further studies to elaborate more experiences of international students as worldwide participants.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest was reported.

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