

Identities for Enhancing Their Motivation in Learning English: A Case Study at Jenderal Soedirman University

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Abstract—Transportable identities may be defined as characteristics which are latent or implicit but can be invoked during the interaction for particular reasons (Richards in Ushioda, 2011:16). Students’ transportable identities can be a member of local sport club, small scale business owner, a member of university choir, a member of certain religious organizations, a broker, a band singer, or a band personnel. As language teachers, we need to understand this aspect now that by understanding their identities, our relationship will be closer and as a consequence their motivation to learn English can be enhanced as they are not merely treated as students or learners but perceived as a whole human being possessing multiple roles. This study is a case study focusing on one (or just a few) of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance (Denscombe, 2007:35). The study employed descriptive qualitative method. There were 38 respondents (5 lecturers and 33 students) involved in this research. The students were from English Undergraduate and English Diploma Program of Jenderal Soedirman University from 2019 and 2018 batches. To garner the data, there were two techniques employed namely questionnaire and interview. The results of the study showed that by understanding students’ transportable identities, teachers’ and students’ rapport was enhanced which impacted to the students’ motivation in oral skill.

Keywords—transportable identities, motivation, case study, techniques

I. INTRODUCTION

As teachers we must be able to build a good rapport with our students. It means, in essence, the relationship that the students have with the teacher and vice versa (Harmer, 2007:113). If this can be realized, the learning and teaching process can run smoothly indicated by the enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom which sustains students’ attainment in learning English as well as teachers’ satisfaction.

One of the learning aspects that must be taken into account seriously is their L2 or target language (English) motivation—a complex and abstract construct which ebbs and flows during their learning trajectory. To enhance their L2 motivation, one strategy that can be hired by teachers is by understanding their transportable identities encompassing all of the students’ identities outside the classroom or identities other than as language learners. By doing so, there are at least two advantages if teachers can understand their students’ transportable identities. The first is the emotional bond between teachers and students will be stronger. The second is the students’ motivation in learning English will be enhanced for they

will not be fearful anymore in making mistakes during their learning activities.

There are considerable number of studies scrutinizing the connection between language learning and identity. However, in this part there are only three studies discussed. The first is entitled “Second Language Learners’ Identity toward Their Home Culture: Adding Pragmatic Knowledge to Language Learning Curriculum”. It is aimed at understanding how English learners’ identities facilitate their confidence to use English within a native English speaking context. (<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ab73/93434ecd885fd>). The second is “Narratives of second language identity amongst young English learners in Hongkong” (<https://booksc.xyz/book/8196762/bea005>). It reports on an exploratory study responding to the problem of understanding on how young learners position themselves as the speakers of a foreign language. The last is “Making Transportable Identities Relevant as a Persuasive Device. The Case of Hillary Clinton’s 2008 Concession Speech.” (<https://tidsskrift.dk/her/article/download/97331/146465/>). It explores on how Hillary Clinton uses her transportable identities in her speech aiming at focusing on similarity between herself and her opponent Obama. The last one is the most relevant study with the current research yet it is quite different in some aspects especially in the purpose of study as this paper strives to investigate the impact of teachers’ understanding on their students’ transportable identities and their motivation to learn English. More distinctly, it will be focused on speaking as the empirical data were related with it.

II. IDENTITY AND TRANSPORTABLE IDENTITIES

Identity may be defined as, ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understand possibilities for the future (Norton in Paiva, 2011:61). Another scholar suggests that an identity is not an abstract idea or label, such as title, an ethnic category, or a personality trait. It is lived experience of belonging (or not belonging). A strong identity involves deep connection with others through shared histories and experiences, reciprocity, affection, and mutual commitments. (Wenger in Paiva, 2011:61). In addition, Murray and Christison (2011:5) say that identity is the view that individuals have themselves and of their place(s) in the world in the past, now, and in the future.

Identity and language learning is one of the most vibrant areas of current research that considers language learning as a fundamentally social process. While recognizing the limitations of more traditional psycholinguistics models that see language learning

as primarily an individualistic mental process, many scholars are now interested in the exploring the socially, culturally, and historically situated nature of language learning (Zuengler and Miller in Morita, 2012:26).

Language identity development is a holistic, complex process that includes linguistics, social, and cultural aspects (Block in Besser and Chik, <https://booksc.xyz/book/8196762/bea005>). According to Benson et al. in Besser and Chick, the concept of L2 identity covers some key tenets namely L2 identity are indistinct from one's personal or social identity, identities influenced by L2 learning have specific qualities that are often difficult to define, and when we acquire a L2, the second language identity work becomes an integral part of the wider task of the construction of narrative identities.

Zimmerman in Mieroop (<https://tidsskrift.dk/her/article/download/97331/146465/>) discerned three levels of identity, namely (1) discourse identities, (2) situated identities and (3) transportable identities. The first level refers to the discourse roles people can have in a conversation, like for instance speaker/listener. The second level of situated identities indicates the specific roles that "are rendered relevant in specific settings", for instance the role of patient in a doctor-patient interaction. Finally, the transportable identities (which have also been called "master identities" or "categorical identities" are "potentially relevant anytime, anywhere" and refer to particular characteristics of individuals, such as age, sex and race, "that are potentially usable across all social situations." And In addition, they may be defined as characteristics which are latent or implicit but can be invoked during the interaction for particular reasons (Richards in Ushioda, 2011:16). They are always in plural because people have heterogeneous aspects of identity or identities that they carry in our lives. For instance, they have identities as being a son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother. They have identities in terms of their profession, culture, the languages they speak, and interests that they have (interview between Ushioda and Joseph Falout, pedagogic implications of motivation research an interview with Emma Ushioda). Those variables can be used for specific reason for instance for motivating the students in speaking class or personalizing the learning activity.

Motivation and Its Salience in L2 Learning

Motivation becomes a sexy topic among researchers in various fields like psychology, human development, education, sociology, and business. The differences of their philosophical foundations and goals have resulted in the variety of angles, concepts, and terminology to portray word motivation yet using varied terms (Stirling, 2014:2).

The word motivation is derived from Latin *movere* meaning to move. What moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action—such basic questions lie at the heart of motivation theory and research. Remarkably, however, these deceptively simple questions have generated a wealthy of theory and research over the decades, provoked considerable debate and disagreement among scholars, spawned numerous theoretical models encompassing different variables and different understandings of the construct of motivation, and produced few clear straightforward answers (Dornyei, 2011:3).

Another scholar opines that motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence and quality of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior (Brophy, 2010:3). In a similar vein, William and Burden in Harmer (2007:98) maintains that motivation is a state of cognitive arousal which provokes a decision to act, as a result of which there is 'sustained intellectual and or physical effort so that the person can achieve some previously set goal.

With regard to the second or foreign language learning, the students' motivation is paramount owing to three excuses. First,

foreign language is complicated now that it has different structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, and culture between the mastered language or L1 and the language being learnt or L2. Second, learning a foreign language needs a strenuous effort in terms of physic, intellectuality, and emotion. Lastly, there are some involved facets like learning method, learning media, learning material, and environment that affects the attainment level of a language learner. (Brown, 2000:1).

In any case, Cheng and Dornyei posit that motivation has long been considered as one of the primary elements that controls L2 achievement and attainment. Motivation serves as the preliminary engine to prompt learning and later functions as an ongoing driving force that helps to sustain the long and usually tedious journey of acquiring a foreign language. Moreover, they say that the cleverest learners are unlikely to succeed in the L2 learning process if they do not have adequate motivation, while the others can attain proficiency in L2 in spite of their language aptitude and or any unpleasant learning circumstances.

The impact of motivation on the language learning can be connected with one of the most successful language learning experiences that occurred towards the end of the Second World War when the American military needed to train their personnel in the languages of the countries they would have to handle. In short intensive courses, the students learnt fantastically fast. Similarly, in Britain, Air Force personnel were taken to Cambridge and taught Russian, for example, with enormous success. (Harmer, 1998:8).

The above examples denote the significance of motivation in L2 learning process. There must be many other success stories that may have not been documented in L2 motivation literature. One of them was a story told by my colleague during a lunch break at the office. He told me that he had a friend with a poor English and then turned to have an excellent one inasmuch as he had a high motivation to learn English and keen of practicing. He joined an English course and then applied his English through the social media. Once my friend's story and the others' have been well-documented, L2 teachers as well as students can take some tips and tricks or motivational strategies advantageous for their career and study.

III. METHOD

This study is a case study focusing on one (or just a few) of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance (Denscombe, 2007:35). The study employed descriptive method, which involved collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are (Gay 1987). There were 33 students or respondents (the female respondents were 26) partaking in this research. They were from English Undergraduate (n=18) and English Diploma Program (n=15) of Jenderal Soedirman University from 2019 and 2018 batches. In addition, five English lecturers (2 males and 3 females) representing the senior having teaching experience between 15-25 years and junior whose teaching experience was under 1 year were also taking part in this study. To garner the data, there were two techniques employed namely open questionnaire administered to students and interview done with the lecturers. The former were not interviewed as they had provided complete responses in the questionnaire.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Students' Transportable Identities

Based on the results of questionnaire, the students have heterogeneous transportable identities that can be classified into three clusters namely religiously affiliated identities,

technologically affiliated identities, and culturally affiliated identities. They include being a member of beat box community, karang taruna (village youth organization), remaja masjid (mosque youth squad), motor community, start-up community, Pencak Silat (Indonesian traditional martial art), IPNU (Nahdlatul Ulama Youth Organization), dance community, and computer lover community. On average the students become the member of those organizations between 1-6 years. However, there was a student who had the longest membership compared to the other students. She has joined a motor community in her hometown since 8 years ago.

B. Lecturers' Voices on Transportable Identities (TI)

One of five lecturers taking part in this study thought that it was unnecessary to know students' transportable identities. He said "I think as lecturers we don't need to know their identities. The one that should know their identities are their academic advisors" (L.1.). His opinion is not faulty since he may teach some courses that do not demand personal interaction deeply hired to provoke students' volition to communicate in English verbally. However, his attitude can hinder the successful interaction between teachers and students proposed by Harmer who contends that teachers need to recognize their students' names which can also be categorized as transportable identities since names convey certain information in terms of religion, nationality, and ethnicity. In Indonesian context, a lady named Eni Nur Aeni carries two identities concerning her ethnicity (Sundanese or having Sundanese cultural element shown from the repetition of the last syllable *ni*) and her faith Islam (*Nur*, an Arabic word means light). Apart from building a successful interaction as a result of transportable identities recognition, Harmer also maintains that students also appreciate if teachers also have understanding of their characters. (Harmer, 2007:114).

Another factor that lead to respondent's 1 negative attitude toward the aspect is by the perception of most lecturers that knowing the students' identities is only restricted to specific activity particularly during the interaction between students and their academic advisors which usually occur outside the classroom. However, this interaction gives little contribution to students' oral skill inasmuch as the communication is usually done in L1 or their mother tongue.

His opinion is a far cry from the others who have positive attitude toward the matter. They believe that it is needful to know the students' transportable identities since by understanding them they can find a more effective way to approach them. In addition, they can know their potential more comprehensively.

C. Students' Voices on Transportable Identities (TI)

The students' voices on the aspect fall into three categories. The first was those who think that teachers need to know their students' transportable identities (n=18), the second was neutral students whose opinions were in between (n=3), and the last was those who did not approve if teachers know their transportable identities (n=12).

Those who belong to the first category believe that teachers need to know their students' transportable identities to make sure that their students are not parts of forbidden organization or radical group. On the contrary, the third group maintained that it was unnecessary for teachers to know their students' transportable identities since they were parts of their privacy.

D. Teachers' Understanding of Their Students' Transportable Identities (TI) and Its Effect to the Students' Motivation in Learning English

The samples on how influential teachers' knowledge on their students' TI are illustrated in the following stories. The first is told by my colleague and the second is my own experience. Both of them teach speaking.

He said that during speaking class, one of his students could speak fluently and enthusiastically when he asked her about

her TI. She joined one of MLM companies whose head office was in Jakarta and when he told her to explain to him and to the class the procedure to propose the financial aid from the company, she could explain it in a very detailed manner and also convincingly.

Another sample was my own experience when I questioned one of my students' TI. She could provide me very detailed information comprising some aspects like the leader of the community, the number of members, the time when it was established, the frequency of meeting, and also the places they had ever visited together. Again, this student spoke fluently and confidently.

The two data above show that when students are given the opportunity to unravel their transportable identities, they seems to be very motivated to communicate or it can be said they had a high Willingness to Communicate (WTC). It took place now that the topics were really close to their life or hyperbolically they were integral parts of their life. By recognizing their TI, students' motivation to speak up in English was boosted.

The findings are in congruence with what Norton in Zhalehgooyan (2017) opines that identity can serve as motivation either instrumental or integrative. Identity in the function of instrumental motivation depicts the language learner's volition towards learning a second language for practical goals, such as finding a job. However, identity as integrative motivation illustrates their needs to learn a language in order to integrate successfully with the target language community and escape from being lonely. He also instigates the term investment to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their eagerness to learn and practice it, but it is important to know the distinction between the two terms; while motivation can be seen as a primarily psychological concept, investment is a sociological one. Thus, in this way, he makes a meaningful link between a learner's wish and commitment to learn a language and their changing identities.

Similarly, Keith Richards in Ushioda (2006) provides empirical evidence to show that when you try to engage students' *transportable identities*, when you talk to them as people, when you connect with them that way, that actually it can help to motivate them in terms of effort and engagement in interaction.

The two scholars above highlight the salience of teacher's understanding of their students' transportable identities which can pave the way for the cohesiveness between teachers and students. If this circumstance has been built, both agents will be benefited. Teachers will be more relaxed in teaching and as a result students will be more motivated in learning. With regard to this, as teachers we should be able to explore our students' transportable identities for the sake of successful interaction that will result in desirable learning atmosphere. Accordingly, student's motivation and attainment in their L2 learning trajectory will be improved.

V. CONCLUSION

Identity and motivation are interconnected constructs. This paper shows that when teachers were able to understand their student's transportable identities, their rapport was better and as a result the students' motivation to learn English particularly in oral skill was elevated while their linguistic anxiety diminished. As teachers, we need to know this facet since it will sustain our profession and students' learning enthusiasm. The more we know their transportable identities, the more motivated our students in the classroom will be.

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