

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, which covers the rationale for doing the research and its significance, as well as an overview and context of the study. It is divided into several parts: background of the study, purpose of the research, research questions, and data collection and analysis. Finally, this chapter is closed with an outline of the organization of the research paper.

### 1.1 Background

As the world becomes borderless due to globalization, almost everyone nowadays is exposed to the English language. For many Indonesians, the first ‘formal’ exposure of English is probably in their primary school, as English is commonly taught at this level of education. Similarly, Crystal (as cited in Pennycook, 2013) suggests that over 50 million children in the world study English as an additional language in primary schools and over 80 million in secondary schools. The learning of English as an academic subject continues to higher education level.

In the Indonesian academic context, there are schools that promote international education and environment, as well as adopt international curricula. Among many are ACG School Jakarta, BINUS School Serpong, Bandung Independent School, Temasek Independent School, and Stamford School. This means that the school system uses English as the main medium of communication in the teaching and learning processes. The English subject is also found to be mandatory in most higher education majors and universities departments in Indonesia. In the professional context, most job requirements in Indonesia ask for some kind of English proficiency ‘proofs’ for the applicants to be employed. It seems that it is more desirable for the recruiting agents if the applicants have a certain degree of proficiency in English. In most of the job vacancy fliers I read, companies put English skills and proficiency as a preferable qualification, and, in some cases, even as a key requirement. I have also observed that many Indonesian commerce like to use English as a way to advertise themselves on social media,

presumably to gain more sales value and attract more costumers. Furthermore, middle to high-class restaurants in Indonesia are also found using English on their menu descriptions, which seems to add prestige to their business, and sometimes making the price more expensive. In many Indonesian communities nowadays, it is nothing new to find some people sprinkle English words into the conversation. This way of using English, although I believe there are purely personal reasons behind it, it can be attributed to social factors as well, as in wanting to be perceived prestigious or gain better social status. In this regard, the English language seems to have an important socio-economic value in the perception of many people.

Niño-Murcia (2003) states that English has become “a requirement imposed by globalization” (p. 1). A piece of the evidence for this, is the fact that English has become the dominant medium in which information is being communicated in most media across the world (Crystal, 1987; Steger, 2013). In addition, the number of non-native English speakers worldwide is steadily increasing and is gradually outnumbering the number of native speakers (Crystal, 2006). Being exposed to English very early on makes some people accustomed to talking in English, and some of them may even refer to the English language as their first language.

Language, however, does not merely present linguistic features but it also brings along cultural values and ideologies of where the language comes from (Lin, 2014). As the English language is used more often in many parts of the world as a medium for communication, the ‘foreign’ cultural values and ideologies could as well be subconsciously permeating into the non-native speakers of English and making these cultural domains being carried along in their daily lives. Global interactions through English results in the alteration of “contemporary social life” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 32). In other words, these global interactions have inevitably affected many aspects of people’s lives, including their identities. The exposure to the English language, along with its cultural values and ideologies, resulting from globalization can lead to, borrowing Hall’s (1996) term, a ‘crisis of identity’. According to Hall, global interactions and its transformations in modern societies shift personal identities, eroding one

sense of self as a unified subject; one's identity may then become fragmented and more complex. Identities are, however, always in a state of 'becoming' for it is dynamic and will always be constructed and reconstructed. This ever-changing sense of self may generate both tensions and conflicts within individuals. Knowing 'who we are' then becomes essential in understanding our stances and values so that we will not be easily influenced by the negative impacts of globalization.

Having been exposed to the English language since elementary school and when I was living in Qatar, where I was forced to use it almost everyday at school, I became very interested in the language, developing some sort of fascination towards it. I believe the exposure to English and my engagement with it throughout my life have, to a certain extent, impacted and shaped 'who I am' today. To better comprehend how English has influenced the way I am today, I aimed to conduct a self-study using narrative inquiry that uses written reflections of significant moments of my lived experiences to trace the impact of English on my identity as an Indonesian. Through this study, it is expected that a better understanding can be attained of how globalization has impacted our sense of self selves, while also impacting the world around us. That way, we can be more aware of cultural values and ideologies which we so often take for granted in our everyday lives.

Several studies regarding the role of English and the construction of identity have been conducted. However, these studies are mostly conducted in the form of case studies in the field of sociology. One of the examples was done by Hamid and Jahan (2015) who analyzed newspaper letters written by Bangla and English medium writers using Bourdieu's concepts of capital and symbolic struggle to show how the process of othering has taken place between the two groups, which then construct their identities through social positioning. Using the same kind of data form, Zacchi (2010) analyzed bulletins sent by rural workers of Brazil's Landless Workers Movement to identify what kind of identity conflict the use of English has impacted the people. Studies on language and identity in educational context have also been conducted. Using semi-structured interviews, Torres-Olave (2011) conducted a research regarding the impact of English classrooms in a

Mexican university program on students' identity where English is not the dominant language, which creates geographies of difference between them and those where English is the predominant language of instruction. Further, Kajee (2015) conducted a qualitative case study of 35 undergraduate students of education program in an Afrikaans-medium university in Johannesburg, South Africa. Liu and Xu (2011), using narrative inquiry, focused on Chinese English language teachers' identity in which liberal and traditional pedagogies coexist. More recently, Leigh (2019) used narrative inquiry in her paper that explores the professional identities of EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers in Shenzhen, China.

All of the aforementioned research studies discuss language and the identity of learners, teachers, and people outside educational settings; however, narrative studies on how the exposure of English language contributes to shaping the identity of the researcher is still scarce. By deliberately tracing and investigating the process of identity formation through one's significant lived experiences, it can allow us to enhance our understanding of who we really are, the events happening in our lives and to be aware as well as be more critical of the ideologies being exerted and the power being exercised around us. Eventually, exploring the impact of globalization on our sense of self allows us to learn better about ourselves, others, and the world.

## **1.2 Purpose of Research**

Given the interconnection between globalization, the English language and identity, as stated above, this study aims to trace and explore how the exposure to the English language has impacted my sense of self—my identity—as an Indonesian, which is to be explored through narrative inquiry.

## **1.3 Research Question**

In order to meet the purpose of the research, this study frames the research question as follows: How has the exposure to English contributed to shaping my sense of 'who I am'—my identity—as an Indonesian?

#### **1.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this research were taken from my personal experiences that revolve around my exposure to the English language and collected in the form written narratives. These narratives were titled as follows: (1) My First Encounter with English, (2) Being a Student in an International School and What Follows, (3) Falling in Love with English Literature, (4) English as My Major, (5) My Identity Markers. The data analysis involved teasing out recurring themes embedded within the five narratives, which then pointed to these three major themes: (1) being fascinated with English, (2) feeling superior because of English, and (3) expanding the Self through English. The themes were then analyzed using Gomzina's (2012) theory of multi-layered cultural identity and Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity and the third space.

#### **1.5 Clarification of Terms**

##### **- Globalization**

Globalization is a process that involves everyone, every place and every aspect in this world and what Robertson (1992) calls "the compression of the world as a whole" (p. 8). The interconnections make people, objects, and information 'move' way more flexible, or "liquified" (p. 4) and that globalization is identified by great flows of phenomena, including people, places, foods, and information (Ritzer & Dean, 2015).

##### **- Identity**

Identity is an entity that is constructed by two opposing elements: static and fluid elements. One's identity is seen as having a core which is the static element, while everything else around this core, the fluid elements, is dynamic and constantly evolving throughout the span of one's lifetime, depending on the context the person is in. The fluid elements are seen as a multiply layered nature (Gomzina, 2012).

##### **- Hybridity and Third Space**

Hybridity is a process where two cultures are mixed, making the initial cultural forms are put into question. Hybridity takes place in the third space where “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 55), meaning that identities that carry new forms of meaning emerge in this space (Bhabha, 1994).

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The narratives trace my significant moments of my experience being exposed to the English language, which then shows how the language contributes to shaping my identity. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the existing literature in the field of cultural studies and intercultural communication, specifically regarding language-culture-identity nexus. Moreover, the analysis of the narratives are expected to help raise people’s awareness of the impacts of globalization, enabling them to learn from my stories, which may, in turn, enable them to relate to their own experiences. Hopefully, this self-study can help readers have a better understanding of themselves, of other people, and of the social phenomena happening around them.

## **1.7 Organization of Thesis**

This paper is organized into five chapters as follows:

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the introductory remarks of the study that includes the rationale and the purpose of pursuing the study, the research questions, clarification of terms commonly used, and the significance of the study that explains the contribution that this study gives towards the field of cultural studies and intercultural communication.

### **2. Review of Related Literature**

This section explores the fundamental theories as well as other related research that has been conducted in the current topic that are used to help conducting this research.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methods in collecting and analyzing the data of this research.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The elaboration of the findings obtained from the data analysis is presented in this chapter. It is then discussed by referring to the research questions as well as the relevant theories.

### **5. Conclusion**

The final chapter of this research presents the conclusion which was drawn from the overall findings. Suggestions for future research in the current topic are also presented.