Constructing cultural identity in business narratives:

Evidence from English as a business' *lingua franca*

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ABSTRACT

This article elaborates on identity construction(s) as instantiated through English business narratives of the richest Indonesian businessmen and in what extent their use of words or phrases reflect any cultural group membership. This article aims at contributing a valuable insight on the cultural identity construction enacted through the choice of words and phrases in the use of English as a *lingua franca* in business context regardless its standard or non-standard uses. The data were taken from the English narratives of the top ten 2015 richest Indonesian people ranked by *Forbes* magazine. The author gained the data from several business events and interviews which were freely accessed in video forms in *Youtube*. A discourse analytic approach is employed as the method. It was found that the richest Indonesian businessmen construct several identities such a supporter of western value, a fan of religious and cultural integration, an Asian cultural member, and a family oriented person as well as and optimistic and appreciative business persons. Some of the identity constructions signal that they belong to certain cultural groups and some others are relevant to their position as businessmen.

Keywords: *identity, narrative, English, culture, business*

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important layers in todays' global communicative competence since it has become a business lingua franca(Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011). English is used to succeed business affairs in international interactions regardless the proficiency of the speakers and either or not they are native speakers.

People express themselves, things, and thoughts in English in global business interactions when they need to discuss, negotiate, promote products, or do other things pertaining to business affairs. Their linguistics choices are the sites to signal what variety(s) of language they use and what kind of person they construct, accordingly. Language use, however, enables the interlocutors to enact their identity, understand what identity is constructed by others, and share some understanding on what culture they belong to.

In this paper I investigate how the 2015 richest people in Indonesia (FORBES, 2015) construct their identities through the use of English when talking about their business and or business issues in Indonesia. As non-native speakers their use of English can be seen as a business' *lingua franca* regardless the dichotomy of its standard and non-standard use (Gee, 2011a; Marra, 2015).

METHOD

Gee (2011b)introduces the notion of "identity building tool" (p.110), which refers to some conceptual categories in relation to how to investigate language use and possible non-linguistic factors that influence language use. By using the identity tool, analysts can investigate linguistic resources in language use and out-of-language factors and then come up with a big picture of the language speakers' identity construction. For this purpose, Gee (2011a) offers a guide to the investigation by questioning six factors: 'How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to enact and depict identities (socially significant kinds of people)?' (Gee, 2011a, P.121).

Although Gee states that this guide is not "in order" (Gee, 2011b, p.x), its order use can make the analysis for this present study move from the micro to macro level. "Situated meaning" and "social language" tools are used to underlie the cohesiveness of utterances and the choice of words. These tools are categorized into the micro level of analysis in this present study. "Figured worlds", "Big D Discourse", and "Big C Conversation" tools are categorized into macro levels since they not

only function as investigating language use but also reflect things beyond the language which are still relevant to the micro level. The macro level looks at longer sections of discourses by considering the relevance of the language use to out-of-language factors that influence the language use. Yet, for this study, the "intertextuality" tool is not used because elaborating the identity construction here can be conducted by considering "juxtaposing different Discourses" (Gee, 2011a, p.121) by looking at a series of "big D Discourses" which manifests in language use. The juxtaposition can portray the intersection of the multiple identity construction although the "intertextuality" tool is not employed.

ANALYSIS

Excerpt 1 below was gained from a discussion session between Chairul Tanjung (hereafter CT), #5 richest person in Indonesia 2015, and the audience at the *Credit Suisse Asian Investment Conference* conducted in 2013. CT was the keynote speaker of the conference on Thursday, March 21, 2013. The conference's moderator introduced him as Indonesia's leading conglomerate businessman and an Indonesian government representative. The moderator mentioned that CT is the chairman of his own company, CT Corp, and the chairman of the economic council of the Republic of Indonesia (*Komite Ekonomi Nasional*).

Question: so, for foreigners to invest in Indonesia, how are the circumstances and also sometimes in Europe also they are quite afraid for Islamic forces in Indonesia, so could be great if you could inform a little bit more about it.

Excerpt 1

1. May I answer directly or just we collect. (*Yes, please*, a moderator said).
2. Ok
3. So, you know Indonesian is one of e..e..e.. the largest econom..
4. largest Islamic countries in the world.
5. But Islamic Indonesian is different like Islamic in the Middle East
6. and Islamic in other countries.
7. You know, oo we are very moderate islam, ya,
8. we are very open islam.
9. And is actually our culture is also blending with our religion,
10. so, even we are o oooooooooomuslim,
11. we are very respect with other religions too, ya,
12. not only Indonesian but also foreigners.
13. In Indonesia we believe we have the doctrine what we called it Pancasila
14. is actually we believe about the God
15. we don't care about the religion whatever
16. we always respect
17. even mosque, church, and temple can side by side in every city in Indonesia, ya.
18. So this is talking about the religion.
19. So this talking about why Indonesia is different with other Muslim countries.

CT introduces the idea of *a fusion between religion and culture* in line 9. In order to get an insight about *situated meaning* of this line, the previous lines do not seem to give enough "lexical cues" (Gee & Green, 1998, p.122), especially about what he means about fusion. Consequently, it is difficult to refer backward to situate the meaning of the fusion. Hence, going from line 10 onward can be helpful to grasp what is absent in the previous lines. In unfolding situated meaning, besides going backward, it is also possible to go forward by looking at words that 'follow a part of the text' (Gee, 2011, p.66).

CT's utterance in line 10 is expected to demonstrate the situated meaning of the fusion since it is initiated by conjunction "so" which normally functions as giving a summary of what has been discussed previously. Still, CT in line 10 only discusses about "Muslim," which is associated with "religion." The explanation about culture remains absent. Another clue that might be useful is the clause "even we are o ooooooooo muslim." This is a dependent clause, which will be followed by an independent clause.

Line 11 is an independent clause. Its syntactic structure fulfils a complete sentence as it is normally found in a canonical independent clause. This line represents the 'main claim' (Gee, 2011a, p.64) of Muslims who respect other religious believers (non-Muslims). Thus, by taking discussion about Indonesia and Islam into account and using the word "respect" as lexical clue, the notion of religious and cultural fusion becomes more obvious in this context.

The use of words and phrases in utterances from lines 12 to 18 indicate the switch from a discussion about Islam to a discussion about religious affairs in Indonesia. In line 12 CT explains that "respect with other religion" is not only applied for Indonesians but also for foreigners. Lines 13 and 14 represent his topic of discussion about Indonesian doctrine, namely "Pancasila" in believing in God as the central notion. The choice of the non-English word "pancasila" signals "culture" in line 9. The reason is that the term "Pancasila" is culturally specific, since it is not translated into English when it is said.

CT's utterance in line 15 explains the consequence of Pancasila doctrine, which enables Indonesian people not to care much about the Islamic religion itself, but rather about the Pancasila doctrine. According to CT, this notion leads to respect and interreligious harmony as mentioned in lines 16 and 17, respectively.

He makes comparison between religious matters and Indonesian culture between lines 9 and 17. He discusses about a specific term, Pancasila, which is an Indonesian doctrine in relation to religious harmony - as explicated in the previous section. In talking about harmony he uses lexis dealing with diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia such as "mosque," "church," "God" instead of Allah as a specific name for God in Islam, "respect", and "Indonesian" versus "foreigner". Furthermore, in contrasting between religion and culture in Indonesia CT emphasizes integration of the two (I used the word "fusion" in the previous section). Since the lexis and the pattern are quite complete in the comparison, **his language in use produces an identity of a person who prefers to view culture and religion as integration in Indonesia.**

He uses Islam and cultural harmony as his *figured world* in discussing about Indonesia's current condition. This kind of story is not uncommon in Indonesia since cultural diversity in Indonesia has existed for a long time. But, so far in the speech CT applied it to Indonesian people. Interestingly, CT's typical story reveals the extension of such a common phenomenon when he says that this harmony is applied to "not only Indonesian but also foreigners" (line 12). This typical story can function as building a "safe feeling" for the audience, especially foreigners, at the conference when it comes to "Islamic force" concern as voiced by a participant. CT 'invites the listeners to assume' (Gee, 2011b, p.171) that open, moderate, and particular Islam is a typical story for the Indonesian context when he addresses the question about "Islamic force" from an audience. Moreover, there are two central *'big D' Discourses* on Indonesia's religious life and economy in this piece of data which contribute to CT's identity construction. Firstly, Islamic force *discourse* is adduced from lines 4-18 by means of employing words and utterance patterns associated with friendly and open Muslims, as well as social harmony motivated by integration of religion and Indonesian-specific culture. CT's language use in these lines indicates his view about Indonesian Islam, which is relevant to *the Discourse* (with big D) about the Muslim world at the time of speaking.

In order to look deeper into *'big D' Discourse* about Islam in Indonesia, it is important to consider how Islam is represented following the question from the audience concerning European fear of Islamic force in Indonesia. At the time of speaking (in 2013), one of global trends about Islamic issue was terrorism force. BBC News reported an increase of global terror attacks in 2013(Cheung, 2014). The report claims that most of the attacks involved Islamic militant groups.

In addressing this issue, CT correlates Islam and terrorism force when it comes to a view about Indonesian Islam. The way he emphasizes Indonesian Islam, by explaining that Indonesian Islam is not the same as "other Islam", reflects a defence about terrorism force which is not relevant to Indonesia. Thus, the representation of Islamic force in Western media is not relevant to the Muslim way of life in Indonesia. Islamic force in Indonesia should not be seen as a threat to foreigners if they want to visit Indonesia and do business in the country. CT's utterance in this defence reflects his identity as **a person who believes that Indonesian Islam and Islamic Force are conducive for foreigners either for a visit or for doing business in the country.**

Secondly, CT's *discourse* on integration of religious and Indonesian specific values as exemplified in lines 9-17 reflects his belief in a *'big D' Discourse* of harmony in diversity. His

language use pertaining to coexistence of diverse religious believers as a result of integration contributes to a relevant discussion on the opportunity of foreigners to be a part of harmony in diversity in Indonesia. Thus, *Discourse* on Islamic force that makes foreigners fear coming to Indonesia is responded by CT's *Discourse* on diversity. CT signals positive encounter in order to make foreigners feel safe if they want to run business in Indonesia. In turn, this *'big D' Discourse* reflects **his identity construction as a part of cultural and religious integration as well as a part of diverse society in Indonesia**.

The discussions are exemplified in *'big D' Discourse,* namely Islamic force, integration between religious and Indonesian cultural values, and liberal economy in Indonesia. These *Discourses* interact with other *Discourses* in society, thus leading to 'certain debates (*Conversation*)' (Gee, 2011a p.57)or what is called *Big "C" Conversation*.

Discourse on Islamic force is associated with a debate on moderate Islam, which admits tolerance on one side and religious fundamentalism on another side. Since moderate Islam is characterized by CT as an open religious way of life (line 8), integrated with culture (line 9), and full of respect (line 11 and line 16), foreigners can see this *Conversation* as a positive signal to come to Indonesia. Although the country is dominated by Muslims, there is still an opportunity to cooperate with the Muslims in Indonesia. Both positive signal and opportunity are the result of CT's preference for explaining moderate Islam as a good thing. This *Discourse* interacts with another representation of Islam that is widely known by Western society, namely religious fundamentalism (Woodward et al., 2014). As explicated in *big D Discourse*, this type of representation entails terrorist attack and triggers fear in Western society to come to a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia. By engaging in Islamic force and representing Indonesia as a good Islamic country accordingly, CT engages in a debate on Islamic representation from a Western society perspective.

Thirdly, discussion on liberal economy fixes on the free market in which Western people have believed for a long time. Meanwhile, a religious country prioritizes authority instead of business competition. *'Big C' Conversation* about moderate Islam and liberal economy in *social languages* and *figured worlds* in the data above reveals that CT supports moderate Islam and liberal economy in that specific time and place. Thus, he **constructs an identity of a supporter of Western values in that specific time and place**.

By using the Gee's identity building tool ranging from *situated meaning* to *Big "C" Conversation*, typical identities are found to be constructed by Dato Sri Tahir (TH), #10 Indonesian richest people in 2015. He was asked by a BBC reporter pertaining to his opinion about the opportunity the foreigners have for doing business in Indonesia (bbc.com, 2013). TH answers the question as the following.

Excerpt 2

500.	I think ooo.. we have to be cautious you know when we talk about this subject.
501.	Because I think there is a background behind that. Like e..e..e.. resources we..
502.	we would like to have more added value.
503.	Like e..e.. coal mining you know.
504.	Oo.. we impose some tax because we explore and one day it will be finished.
505.	So we learn from the past experience.
506.	Banking industry is also full regulated business and capital *** (not clear).
507.	We would of course, we like a local bank, domestic bank to play also important roles.
508.	I think this is very fair.
509.	There is nothing negative on the particular

TH does not answer the question directly. His utterances are started by a series of description of Indonesian natural resources and how the resources like "coal mining" (line 503) have been managed in terms of Indonesian economic policy. Then, at near end of his utterances he uses the word "local" and "domestic" (line 507) which can semantically be categorized into the antonym of "foreigners." Finally, his though comes at the very end of utterances when he claims that he supports

local and according to him this support is "very fair" (line 508) and positive to some extent (line 509).

What is striking here is that the *social language* in this piece of data is not uncommon in terms of how an Asian individual structures arguments. In Asian culture, people tend to put their point of talks at the near end or the end of their talks. It is categorized into indirectness of speech and is one of the salient features of Asian verbal communication (Lim, 2017). An Asian status and culture seems to be his *big"D" Discourse* which contributes to influence his linguistic style although his English proficiency is slightly better compared to Chairul Tanjung's English use in excerpt 1. Thus, TH **produces an identity of an Asian cultural member who puts the main point of a talk at the end of the conversation.**

Furthermore, ss stated at the beginning of this paper, the identity construction is negotiated during (social) interaction. A language speaker does not produce any single identity but rather dynamic representation of self as the interaction progresses like in the following two excerpts.

Excerpt 3 and 4 below were taken from an interview between Mochtar Riady (MR), #9 richest person in Indonesia 2015, and Sabrina Chua (SH) from the *Digital Narratives of Asia* (*DNA*) (Digital Narrative of Asia, 2015). MR was introduced as the founder and chairman of Lippo Group, one of the Asia's largest and most diversified conglomerates (Lippo Group, 2017). MR was asked about his experience in working with Liem Sioe Liong one of Indonesian- Chinese descendent who was well known as an Indonesian richest conglomerate in Indonesian economic history.

Excerpt 3

Question: What was alike working with Liem Sioe Liong

435.	I think he is a very wise man.
436.	During sixteen years old..ee..sixteen years time working with him
437.	I never heard, i never hear he complain somebody else.
438.	Always talking good any ..at anybody.
439.	This is a very unique person.

MR describes Liem Sioe Liong as a "wise man" (line 435). It is categorized by a person who is "never complain" (line 437), "talking good" (line 438) to or about other individuals and "unique" (line 439). The MR description over his former boss in this context reflects his positive attitude when talking about a person who has employed him for "sixteen years time" (line 436), a long period of time. The dominant use of positive-meaning words and phrases when describing his ex- employer represents a *figured world* of focusing on someone else goodness. His position as one of the richest Indonesian businessmen and the way he figures a greatness of Liem Sioe Liong, **produce an identity of a businessperson who appreciate other influential individual in Indonesian business**.

The appreciation is still unchanging when telling about his reason to leave Liem Sioe Liong's company as in excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 4

Question: But you decided to leave BCA in 1990 mmh..how was it like telling Pak Lim, you know, your decision to leave

440.	Actually Mr Lim he insisted me not to leave,
441.	but I told him because we are old enough
442.	and your children my children also grow up
443.	and let them doing business separately not work together.
444.	And finally he do understand and then he agree to separate

MR reason to leave the Liong owned Bank is very family-oriented as it is reflected from his utterances in line 441-443. Meanwhile a common "big "D" Discourse" when it comes to leaving a company is career oriented or business oriented. A person who wants to leave the company normally comes to his or her boss with some professional reasons like a willingness to pursue a better career in other companies, a desire to open a new business, an expectation to get a better in come in other workplace, or some personal reasons as a result of mismatch between individuals and workplace environment (Branham, 2005). Yet, MR told that he came to Liem Sioe Liong with an argument that he wants to resign because he feels getting older and wants to see his children and Liem Sioe Liong's children to work and grow business separately. The way he described his reason to leave Liem Sioe Liong's company **produces his identity as a family-oriented businessperson who treats his boss as the same as him.**

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that some identities are constructed through English use of the 2015 Indonesian richest business-people. By looking at language choices and some pertinent out-of-linguistic factors, English as a lingua franca has been found going beyond the grammatical issues. The richest Indonesian people rather use English to express thoughts or opinion about business and or people in business than perform English proficiency. Subsequently, they construct a variety of culturally-related identities like a supporter of western value, a fan of religious and cultural integration, an Asian cultural member, and a family oriented person as well as business-related identities like a businessperson who appreciates other businessman and an optimistic person about the opportunity for doing business in Indonesia.

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APPENDIX:

Corpus materials:
Chairul Tanjung interview was taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0j7q1mKxFtU
Mochtar Riady interview was taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7KJbIFlOLk
Dato Sri Tahir interview was taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2V-5EIFnYg

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