

English for Non-English Departments: In Search for an Essential Home Base

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Abstract: Promoting the quality of English for the students of non English Departments (henceforth English for undergraduates), which has been characterized as lacking prestige and resources, requires a serious promotion of its status. This means providing a proper home base for the English instructors where standards of profession and quality of service can be pursued, through a solid structure which could nurture academic culture. This paper will describe the various types of the existing structures of English for undergraduates. Illustration on the perseverance of Brawijaya University English instructors in searching for the intended home base through various efforts in staff development and serious research will be presented. What is meant by intended homebase is inspired by Swales's concept of discourse community.

Keywords: English for non-English departments, home-base, discourse community.

English for undergraduates has been characterized as lacking prestige and resources (Coleman, 1995; Sadtono, 2000). The characteristics are well reflected in the way the programs are variously structured in the system of tertiary education institutions. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of English for undergraduates, it is helpful to refer to Holliday (1997), who builds his analysis on the work of Bernstein in describing

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the conflict between two educational cultures i.e. collection and integration. By *collection* it is meant a situation where what is taught is collected into subjects or disciplines. By *integration* it is meant a situation where different subjects are integrated together. Claiming that the low status of English for undergraduates is not uncommon in many parts of the world, Holliday refers to the culture of the teaching of English for undergraduates as neither collectionist nor integrationist as the integration culture of the private-sector English as a foreign language teaching in Britain, Australasia and North America. He proposes a liberal approach to ESP through building status of English for undergraduates. This partly should be carried out by promoting the status of the English instructors through establishing a home-base where professionalism can be exercised.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of English for undergraduates in Indonesia related to two educational cultures mentioned previously, this paper will discuss various types of structure of English for undergraduates before describing the concept of a home-base. Illustration on how English instructors at Brawijaya University have been searching for a home base will be presented.

THE STRUCTURES OF ENGLISH FOR UNDERGRADUATES

The consequence of the English for undergraduates to be in a marginalized collection culture according to Holliday is that the English instructors suffer from professional schizophrenia, belonging to a fragile marginalized collection culture, isolated from both the collection and imported integration culture. Holliday (1997) claims that this might serve as an explanation for the phenomena that English instructors often teach "subject matter" associated with the specific disciplines which the members of the collection culture teach. In his analysis, he points out that this practice revealed how the English instructors wished to belong to the collection culture. Holliday's suspicion that it is the shaky ground that the English instructors are standing on that is antecedent to the identity with "the subject matter" is questionable. However, his depiction of the position of the English instructors is liable to further elaboration. This could be traced from the structure of the organization of English for undergraduates in Indonesia. The following section will describe three different structures of English for undergraduates taking ITB, UI and Unibraw to serve as illustrations.

Type 1: ITB

The structure of English for undergraduates at ITB serves to illustrate the situation where the university does not have an English study program. In this type, English for undergraduates is grouped under an MKU (*Mata Kuliah Umum*) Department. Other subjects organized under this MKU include basic cultural science, basic natural science, and Indonesian. In the past, this department also included the subjects like Five State Principles and National Resilience. The MKU Department itself is accountable to a certain Faculty in the university. At ITB for example, the MKU Department is accountable to the Faculty of Design and Art whereas at ITB, it is accountable to Faculty of Basic Sciences. The structure of this type recognizes a unit where service of English language teaching for other than the teaching of English for undergraduates is managed directly under the Rector. It is usually referred to as *UPT*, *Pusat*, or *Lembaga* (henceforth it is referred to as English Language Center). The instructors of English are administratively attached to the MKU Department and those working for the English Language Centre can come from the same department.

Type 2: University of Indonesia

Unlike type I, English for undergraduates is not organized under a certain department in any faculty. This type recognizes the existence of Faculty of Letters where most English instructors are posted. English for undergraduates is managed under an MKU department managed directly under the Rector. Other than English, this MKU department is responsible for the teaching of the National Resilience, Five State Principles, basic natural science and basic social science. An English Language Centre is structured directly under the Rector. It organizes *service English language* teaching for other than undergraduate students. The University of Indonesia is among those with this type of structure.

Type 3: Brawijaya University

The third type of structure is where neither Faculty of Letters nor Education accommodating an English study program can be found. Unlike type I, English for undergraduates is not organized under a certain study program in any faculty. Unlike type II either, English for undergraduates

is not organized under MKU department managed under the Rector. In this type, English instructors are administratively attached to various study programs and do their job individually. This type recognizes the existence of an MKU department managed directly under the Rector. Other than English, this MKU department is responsible for the teaching of National Resilience, Five State Principles, basic natural science and basic social science. An English Language Center is structured directly under the Rector. It organizes service English Language Teaching for other than English for undergraduates. Brawijaya University is among those with this type of structure.

The three types of structure described serve as an illustration of how the system of English for undergraduates is organized differently across universities. In fact, more variation of structure can be found. It could be argued that the different types of structure of English for undergraduates reflect the dynamic mentioned by Holliday as one of the characteristics of integration culture. Besides being dynamic, integration culture is essentially innovative because it is striving for identity (Holliday, 1997). Such being the case, it is necessary to recall that among several crucial factors for innovation to take place is a change agent who is typically someone in a higher position in the hierarchical organization (White, 1991). In the case of the organization of English for undergraduates, at least a head or a dean is needed to exercise his or her power as a decision maker to bring about the necessary changes. However, it is unlikely that the initiative comes from a head of department whose discipline is not English.

In the light of this argument, the position of the English instructors are too marginal to effect any changes, be it on the micro or macro level. It can be argued that the change agent, however, can be someone lower down the hierarchy, in this case, it is the English instructor himself. Notwithstanding this possibility, the structure of the organization as such will make it very hard for any concern of the English instructors to be accommodated by the higher level of management. Furthermore, since the structure of English for undergraduates does not provide proper mechanism of communication between English instructors, it is hard to imagine that individual instructors can communicate concerns on any significant changes to the higher level management. This is especially discernible when English instructors have to compete and share resources with other integrationists under an MKU Department (situation of type I and type

II). Several beaurocratic steps must be taken for the concerns of the English instructors to be accommodated by the top decision maker.

Compared to type I and type II situation, English instructors working under the structure of type III are not in a more disadvantageous position despite being organized under one unit. In such a position, organizationally, the English instructors gain some liberty from the beaurocracy existing in type I and type II structure. Brawijaya University will serve as an illustration for this argument in a subsequent section of this paper.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTER

Unlike English for undergraduates, which suffers from a lack of identity and focus, the English Language Center is usually established out of a need to train a small number of university lecturers who have a clear need of pursuing their further degrees abroad. Some universities run pre-departure courses which are well financed by sponsors. Such a program generates great prestige for a university as well as its language center. The small number of learners, as compared to teaching English for undergraduates, that it has to cater make it all possible for the instructors to exploit their creativity in applying all the principles of the teaching and learning. The position it enjoys being directly structured under the highest level of management in the university gives this Center the opportunity of being well resourced and its "independent" status as compared to English for undergraduates organized under the MKU Department allows this center to run income-generating activities. This, accordingly, is a more bearable working situation for the English instructors, as also expected by Coleman (1997) because it provides a more solid culture wherein organizational needs (White, 1994) can be realized.

From the ELT management point of view, the previously described structure of English for undergraduates can be a potential cause of difficulty for English instructors. Hence, very little advancement in the practice of teaching and learning has taken place. Of this, Coleman (1997) has noticed development in the areas of baseline research, materials development and teacher development.

THE HOME BASE

As depicted earlier, the structure of English for undergraduates at Brawijaya University is of type 3, in which English instructors are posted

with permanent teaching positions at 7 of the 10 faculties. This is different from the situation of type I and type II structures where the instructors are organized under an MKU unit. By design, the structure of type III does not provide any mechanism for the coordination of English for undergraduates among the English instructors posted at the different faculties. Striving for identity as Holliday sees it, the English instructors turn to the English Language Centre, which is structured under the university board of management, as an alternative organization providing an opportunity for them to communicate their immediate academic and professional concerns to each other. In other words, the Language Center, for the English instructors, serve as a home base for them.

What is meant by home base in this paper is academic unit (Directorate General of Higher Education, 1997) where the English instructors as academic members of the university or institution who have an agreed set of common goals can satisfy a set of organizational needs (White, 1992) necessary in the achievement of the common goals. My description of the home base is inspired by the concept of discourse community (Swales, 1990) conceptualized in six defining characteristics. For the purpose of this presentation, the characteristics will be described in different order from the original description.

A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals. Swales refers to common goal as a set of goals shared by the members of a discourse community. These public goals may be formally inscribed in documents, or they may be more tacit. The goals are public because it is open for hidden purposes. Handy's description (1978) on psychological contracts would serve as a suitable explanation on how the goal could be different in different individuals. With the assumption that the English instructors have a common goal i.e. improving the English proficiency of the students of non English departments, the intended academic unit would have the first characteristics of a discourse community defined by Swales.

A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to discuss the concept of genre. In order to get some understanding of the present characteristic, it is worth to quote Swales (1990:26) in full:

A discourse community has developed and continues to develop discursive expectations. These may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discursive elements and the role texts play in the operation of discourse community. In so far as 'genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them' (Martin, 1985:250), these discursive expectations are created by genres that articulate the operation of the discourse community. One of the purposes of this criterion is to question discourse community status for new or newly-emergent groupings. Such groupings need, as it were, to 'settle down and work out their communicative proceedings and practices before they can be recognized as discourse communities. If a new grouping borrows genres from other discourse communities, such borrowings should be assimilated.

I would emphasize what Swales says on the purposes of the criterion one of which is to question discourse community status for new or newly-emerging groupings. English for undergraduates has been classified as belonging to the community of ESP and it is sufficient to claim that it forms its own discourse community.

In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis. The specific lexis belonging to a certain discourse community is special use of terminology driven by the requirements for efficient communication between experts. This could be special and technical ways as in information technology discourse communities, or as in medical communities. Teaching English for undergraduates also owns its own specific lexis, being a branch of English for Specific purposes. Consider for example, the terms used in the analysis of needs such as 'necessities', 'lacks', 'wants', 'learning needs' and 'target needs' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

It has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members. Swales argues that this criterion is stringent. The participatory mechanisms will vary according to community: meetings, telecommunication, correspondence, newsletter, conversations and so forth. Swales' illustration points to a requirement of a base for lines of communication. He writes:

A, B and C may be lighthouse keepers on their lonely rocks, or missionaries in their separate jungles, or neglected consular officials in their rotting outposts. In all these cases, although A, B and C may never interact, they all have lines of communication back to

base, and presumably acquired discourse community membership as a key element in their initial training (Swales, 1990:25).

The base, I would argue, is what is lacking in teaching English for undergraduate community. The various structure of which, described previously, do not provide a strong base with proper mechanism of intercommunication among its members. This strong base is needed owing to the fact that in theory and practice, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (and hence English for undergraduates) always develops and English instructors have to keep up with the development.

A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback. Informational opportunities is the purpose of the participatory mechanism of a discourse community. The secondary purposes of the information exchange will vary according to the common goal. In the case of English for undergraduates, it is safe to say that it is to improve the English proficiency of the students of the non English Departments.

A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise. Discourse communities have changing memberships. Swales uses death and other less involuntary ways to illustrate the coming and going of the members of discourse community. He maintains that *survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between novices and experts.* This characteristic is also shared by instructors of English for undergraduates.

BRAWIJAYA UNIVERSITY: THE LANGUAGE CENTRE AS A HOME-BASE

I would insist that English for undergraduates bear all the defining characteristics of a discourse community described by Swales. Of the six characteristics, I have pointed out that the characteristic described in point 6 should further be pursued by English for undergraduates. This is *mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.* Brawijaya University, specifically, finds the previously described structure of English for undergraduates as inappropriate for the reasons already discussed. The Language Center, however, has been seen as a home-base. A home-base is not only an academic unit as one of the characteristics of a discourse community, but it is an academic unit which is capable of satisfying

individual, tasks and group needs (Adair, 1983; BACIE, 1978 in White, 1992). The following account will illustrate the efforts in developing the Language Center from a pre-departure training courses provider to an essential home-base for English for undergraduates. The description will include: (1) the university recognition of the professional attitude of the English instructors in order to obtain the university financial support for regular English courses for all young lecturers as part of their in service training; (2) establishment of the link with the British Council which resulted in staff development programs; (3) national workshops and seminars to establish a nationwide network of university English service teaching providers; and (4) research on *An Alternative Models of Teaching English for Undergraduates: An Analysis of Needs*. This will be briefly described in turn. The discussion on how the center was established will precede the description.

How the Center was Established

When it was established in 1970, the university was in a desperate need of upgrading the English proficiency of the lecturers who had to pass the selection test of winning an abundant number of scholarships provided for those wanting to continue their studies abroad especially in agriculture. Equipped with a language laboratory, the Center organized test-oriented programs and academic orientation courses in collaboration with the Australian Agency Universities Collaboration Scheme (AAUCS). English language courses like these are nowadays called pre-departure training courses.

It was the university policy then that English instructors from the various faculties had to devote some of their working time teaching these courses. With the intention of improving the quality of the pre-departure courses, the scheme also provided scholarships for English instructors. Some English instructors took the opportunity to also obtain their Masters and Ph.D degrees in TEFL or Applied Linguistics.

It so happened that the Center establishment was concurrent with the AAUCS operation, which then necessitated the employment of an expatriate English teaching specialist and which offered a number of scholarships for English Language study overseas. When the scheme pulled out from the university, and the pre-departure courses were no longer provided, the Language Center was entirely left on its own to survive

and maintain its existence. It should be noted that even if the Center was structured directly under the Rector, it was not included in the university statute. In other words, in administrative, academic and financial terms, the Center did not formally gain full recognition from the university.

English Courses for the Lecturers

The innovative nature of the integration culture and the strong perseverance of the English instructors met with a resurgence of interest by the university in upgrading the English proficiency of the lecturers. So, after a couple of years convincing the university of the professional capability that the Language Center could offer, starting from 1989, the Language Center has won the recognition of the university which then financially support regular English courses for all young lecturers as part of their in-service training. This has become a noteworthy start for the Center in preserving and developing its existence. The regular intensive course for the young lecturers and other courses conducted for the public at large as income-generating activities have enabled the Center to run its own staff development programs, in which teaching English for undergraduates has become the main concerns.

The Language Center and the British Council

With its reputation, the Center has been able to establish cooperation with foreign agencies such as the British Council, which then provided references on language teaching and resource materials through its *Book Presentation Program* and scholarships for non degree as well as degree programs in the UK for the English instructors, two of whom took the opportunity to take Master's degrees specializing in ESP. This accordingly increased the university's supports towards the development of the Language Center.

Nationwide Network of University English Service Providers

The more direct concern of the Center to English for undergraduates can be seen in the Center's effort in initiating the establishment of a nationwide association of English language teaching providers through organizing national annual workshops and seminars held from 1994-1998.

The 1997 workshop conducted at UNSRI was able to attract the attendance of five university rectors from ITB, Unibraw, Unpatti, Unlam and Unsri itself. The 1998 conference invited the director of academic affairs of DGHE who came in person to Unpatti, Ambon. In retrospect, what has been initiated by Brawijaya University in this case is trying to strengthen the existence of a discourse community for English for undergraduates.

Alternative Models in Teaching English for Undergraduates (Research)

The prominent contact of the Language Center with the stake-holding groups of English for undergraduates took place through a two-year study addressing the issue of the multifaceted problems of English for undergraduates, especially at Brawijaya University. The first stage of this study was a baseline study on the analysis of needs of English for undergraduates involving the students, the English lecturers, the subject lecturers and the university as well as faculty controlling authorities. The research tried to describe, among other things, the aim of English for undergraduates as perceived by the groups of respondents and the role of references written in English in the completion of S-I program. Based on the study's findings, five alternative models of teaching and learning were designed to be confirmed to the groups of respondents at the second stage. The two-year study carried out is not only important in building expertise and confidence of the staff. The fact that it is a highly competitive study funded by the Directorate General of Higher Education has put English instructors as having academically equal position as subject lecturers and has put the Language Center in a very strategic position in addressing the issue of English for undergraduates in terms of obtaining the university's serious support in the effort of improving the teaching and learning condition.

CONCLUSION

The previous brief account of the English for undergraduates and the English Language Center at Brawijaya University might go part way to responding to Coleman's (1997) curiosity that very often exactly the same English instructors are responsible for both English for undergraduates and pre-departure programs. What has been undertaken at Brawijaya

University seems to fit Holliday's analysis on the working ethos that these instructors have to apply - that is building the academic image through a recognizable, respected body which is seen to be looking after and being accountable for the quality and standards of the profession (Holliday, 1997).

In retrospect, the efforts of English instructors described above could be analyzed as the efforts of pursuing some discourse community's characteristics i.e. building mechanisms of intercommunication among its members and using its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback. By this, it is believed that it will raise the status of English for undergraduates to the members of the collection culture in the university. This is seen as important if teaching English for undergraduates is to achieve the intended goals. The home-base that the English instructors at Brawijaya University has been trying to pursue might still be a long way, but it is underway.

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