Exploring Language Repertoire in EFL Classroom Interaction

Rendi Afriadi

1 Padang State University, afriadirendi@gmail.com

©2021 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC-BY-SA) (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

DOI: 10.30983/mj.v1i1.4727

Submission: April 20, 2021 Revised: June 10, 2021 Published: June 30, 2021

Abstract

The use of languages other than English in EFL classrooms has long been debated, in which some discourage it while others promote it. The current trends have challenged this notion by asserting the fact monolingual classrooms might seem a bit unrealistic, especially for low-level students, and students’ L1 can be utilized in the classroom to help them during the process. This study aims to explore how students’ language repertoires are exploited during classroom interaction and what functions they serve in the process. To obtain the data on this interaction, some EFL classroom meetings were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were then analyzed to classify the language repertoires used. The analysis reveals that the language repertoires used in the classroom interaction are varied encompassing the national language, local language, and target language. It implies the view that EFL classroom should be taught in English only should be reconsidered and EFL teachers can make use of various language repertoires including students’ L1 for the betterment of the learning.

Keywords: EFL, classroom interaction, language repertoire

1. Introduction

EFL classroom interaction possibly occurs through various languages since teachers and students have established their language repertoire before their classroom interaction. Language repertoire itself is the collection of ways individuals use language and literacy and other means of communication to function effectively in the interaction.1 In other words, students and teachers have at least stored their native language or L1 in their language repertoire while in the Indonesian EFL context this repertoire might be a local language, national language, and foreign language including the target language of English.

1 Nancy Hornberger and Sandra Lee McKay, Sociolinguistics and Language Education (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2010), p.528.
Although classroom participants bring various language repertoires, there have been some arguments on how this different repertoire in this case students’ L1 and L2 should be treated in the classroom interaction. Cook & Moore in Nambisan suggest that in most English language learning classrooms, whether it is in ESL or EFL context, an endorsement for monolingual practice with English as the only language used in the interaction has become increasingly so common that it makes the teachers feel guilty if they allow their students to use their L1 in the classroom. Moreover, Howatt in Alshehri mentions that some well-known English teaching methods such as direct method, audiolingualism, communicative language teaching, and task-based language teaching favor the full use of the target language or English in the learning process. In brief, the ideas that students’ L1 use should be discouraged and English should be fully used in EFL classrooms have long been ingrained among English language teaching practitioners.

Despite the long-held notion that a monolingual classroom is the ideal EFL classroom interaction, some experts have voiced their challenges to this idea. They suggest that instead of discouraging it, teachers can utilize students’ L1 in the classroom to help them in learning. According to Cook, students should be provided with the opportunity to interact in their first language, through which they are able to make connections between their dominant language and the one they are learning as well as to build the linguistic knowledge that has been available to them in order to become good communicator in English. Furthermore, the exclusion of students’ L1 will prevent them from being able to activate previously existing structures and knowledge from their first language and utilize these in their English development. Students’ L1 not only helps them in understanding the target linguistic knowledge but also in acquiring vocabulary. A study conducted by Tian and Macaro indicates that students who received language input in their native language from their teacher during vocabulary acquisition get more benefits than those who received input only in the target language. Similarly, Ke & Lin also suggest that the use of L1 helps enhance students’ learning especially grammatical structures. In short, the proper use of students’ language repertoire in this case their first language potentially assists them to gain language mastery in terms of grammar and vocabulary.

During the classroom interaction, various languages such as a local language, national language, and target language are exploited through translanguaging practice. It is “the movement between communicative modes and features of different languages”

---

2 Kavitha A. Nambisan, “Teachers’ Attitudes towards and Uses of Translanguaging in English Language Classroom in Iowa” (Iowa, Iowa States University, 2014), p.1.
meaning that translanguaging allows teachers and students to use languages other than English in the classroom interaction. It provides the possibility for students and teachers to use their full language repertoires to achieve learning goals. It is probably due to the fact it is easier for students to understand the learning materials if they are presented in their first language, and their language anxiety from the lack of linguistic competence can be minimized, which they might encounter in the monolingual classroom, thus enabling them to participate even more in the classroom.

In EFL classroom, students and teachers use their various language repertoires through various ways of communication. Adinolfi & Astruc identify three realizations of language repertoire use or translanguaging. The first one is inter-sentential codeswitching which occurs within discourse level and within each turn. In other words, classroom participants make language shift within different sentences. The second realization is intra-sentential which occurs within a syntactic level or within each sentence. In other words, classroom participants make language shift in the same sentences. The third realization is full translanguaging, in which classroom participants use either the target language or other languages fully. Besides these three realizations, Mwinda & Walldt add that translation can also serve as one of the strategies of translanguaging. Through translation, classroom participants do translanguaging by translating their ideas or expression from one language to another.

Several related studies have been done on how language repertoires are exploited through translanguaging practice in the Indonesian EFL classroom context. Roza investigated students’ interaction in translation class and found English, Indonesian and Minang languages were used in the interaction. Kartikasari & Rerung found in their study that students showed their preference for the Indonesian language when it came to instruction and explanation, and teachers, in spite of their disfavouring attitude towards L1 use, allowed students to use the Indonesian language if the use of English made them uncomfortable. Another study by Budiman & Kristfani revealed that most students wanted their teacher to use their L1 in the learning process because they felt more motivated, comfortable, and secured to express their ideas and to understand the material. Khairunnisa & Lukmana revealed in their study that most Indonesian EFL teachers showed positive attitude towards the use translanguaging in their classroom.

---

Most of the previous studies on language repertoire uses in EFL classroom have significantly focused on the aspect of attitude and perspective. In other words, few studies concern on classroom participants really use various language repertoires in EFL classroom interaction, particularly in West Sumatra context. Therefore, this study will make an attempt to explore this issue, specifically the realization of language repertoire through translanguaging during the teaching and learning process.

2. Method

This study is descriptive research because it aims to describe the factual phenomena of how language repertoires are used in EFL classroom interaction. The data for the research were collected from classroom interaction in which the researcher recorded three meetings in English class to obtain the utterances spoken by both teacher and students. The collected data in form of teachers’ and students’ utterances were then transcribed and analyzed by paying attention to the repertoire. The language repertoires were then identified into the local language, national language, and target language. Moreover, how these different repertoires used in the interaction were also identified: intra-sentential codeswitching, inter-sentential codeswitching, full translanguaging, or translation.

3. Results and Discussion

The transcription analysis reveals that the teacher and students use all of their language repertoires in classroom interaction. These repertoires include the local language of Minangkabau, the national language, and the target or foreign language. Of all these three languages, classroom participants dominantly interacted in Indonesian language, followed by English, and Minangkabaunese. In other words, teachers and students rarely spoke in their local language during the learning process. In fact, there were only three occurrences of this local language as illustrated below:

....
T: How are you today?
Ss: Fine
T: Fine?
S: Not really good
T: Kenapa not really good? Udah makan? Lah makan kan?
Ss: Udah (laugh)
T: Jadi dimana not very goodnya?
....
....
T: Number one, please Hanum nomor satu. What is your answer?
S: Ummm I think it’s B
S: (Laugh) Iya
...
The above excerpt from the transcription of the classroom interaction illustrates the use of local language by the teacher. In the first excerpt, the teacher translates the question *udah makan* in the Indonesian language into *lah makan kan* in the Minangkabau language. The use of this local language incited laughter responses from the students. In addition, in the second excerpt, the teacher also roughly translates the question *karena bagus kedengarannya* into *rancak se bunyijo mode tu*. Similarly, the use of local language in this talk also led to the laughter response from the students. In other words, the use of local language in this EFL classroom interaction occurred through translation, and it serves as the intermezzo or to make a joke rather than learning-related context.

Indonesian language and English were the most prevalent language repertoire exploited in classroom interaction. The shifts among these repertoires were realized through intersentential codeswitching, intrasentential codeswitching, full translanguaging, and translation.

The first realization of language repertoires is shown in intersentential codeswitching illustrated in the following transcription:

... 
T: jadi mana jawabannya yang benar? Please show me. 
Ss: ummm B 
T: Is it B? Coba diread dulu. Apa yang dibutuhkannya disana? 
S: Subject dan Verb 
T: Are you sure? Apakah kalimatnya tidak punya itu? 
S: Ada, Sir. 
T: Berarti udah complete dia kan 
... 

The second realization of language repertoires is shown in intrasentential codeswitching illustrated in the following transcription:

... 
T: Tadi kan kita udah bahas bentuk-bentuk kata kerja. Now let us discuss how to use each form of verb. Tapi, sebelumnya ada pertanyaan tidak? 
Ss: No, Sir 
T: Is it clear enough? Atau tidak mengerti sama sekali (laugh) 
S: Cukup jelas, Sir 
T: Okay, now let us move on to the next one. 
...
The above excerpt from the transcription of the classroom interaction illustrates the use of Indonesian and English by the teacher. In the first excerpt, the teacher made a movement from English to Indonesian language repertoire vice versa through intrasentential codeswitching in *Iya berlebih connectornya ya, so we need to remove salah satu dari connectornya* and in *Iya, apa namanya? Biar seimbang biar balance structurenya*. Similarly, in the second excerpt, the teacher made a movement from English to Indonesian language repertoire vice versa through intrasentential codeswitching in *So, verb tiga itu kita gunakan with to be or have, has, had. Without them, verb three belum sepenuhnya bisa jadi verb of the sentence. Question?* and in *now, coba lihat the example nya. Kira-kira sudah benar belum itu. The book written in Arabic.*

In addition to intersentential and intrasentential codeswitching, the use of language repertoires through translanguaging practice was also realized through translation as follows:

---

T: So, Eka belum datang ya?
S: Iya
T: Any news from her? Ada kabar dari dia?
Ss: Belum
T: Did she come on last meeting? Datang dia minggu kemaren?
S: Datang. Dia lagi di jalan
T: Oo masih di jalan, okay So, what did we discuss in the last meeting? Pertemuan terakhir kemaren kita bahas apa?
...

---

T: What page? Halaman berapa?
S: Page Fifty two
T: Fifty Two? Okay lima dua ya?
Ss: Iya, Sir
The above excerpt from the transcription of the classroom interaction illustrates the use of Indonesian and English by the teacher. In the first excerpt, the teacher made a movement from English to Indonesian language repertoire through translation. In this case, the teacher translated *any news from her?* into *ada kabar dari dia?* and *did she come on last meeting?* into *datang dia minggu kemaren?* Similarly, in the second excerpt the teacher also made a movement from English to Indonesian language repertoire through translation. In this case, the teacher translated *what page?* into *halaman berapa?* and *do you have any homework?* into *ada PR nggak?* Unlike the previous two realizations which allow the movement from Indonesian to English and vice versa, translation occurred from English to Indonesian but not the other way around and from Indonesian to Minangkabau as in the previous discussion.

Finally, language repertoires were also realized through full translanguaging in which the teacher fully use students’ L1 in the talk as given below:

... 

T: Do you have any homework? Ada PR nggak?  
Ss: Yes, Sir  
T: Ok. Let us discuss it first. Kita bahas dulu ya. Setelah itu, baru kita lanjutkan  

...
The above two excerpts demonstrate the use of full translanguaging in EFL classroom interaction. In this case, the teacher fully used the Indonesian language in the talk without making any switch to English or the local language. It is clear that full translanguaging in this context was employed by the teacher to explain learning materials to the students, the use of to be as a main verb in the first and adjective clause in the second. It will be much easier for the learners to understand the material if it is explained in the language they fully understand, in this case, the Indonesian language. Bruen & Kelly in their study indicated that the use of students L1 to explain complex terminology, concepts, and grammatical structures helped students in learning since it can facilitate a reduction in their cognitive overload and learner anxiety. Moreover, Subekti found that the use of Indonesian language helped lower students’ language anxiety allowing them to participate more in the process.

From the findings, it is evident that teachers and students in EFL classroom interaction have indeed made use of their various language repertoires with different levels. The repertoires used in the interaction encompass the local language, the national language, and the target language, in which the national language is the most dominant repertoire spoken by both teachers and students followed by the target language and the local language. These findings are in line with Rasman, whose study revealed that students and teachers interacted in the Javanese EFL classroom using Indonesian, English, and Javanese, in which Javanese was the rarely used language of interaction. Anwar, Salija & Abduh also found that teachers and students used the language repertoires in their interaction including Indonesian, English, and Buginese, in which Buginese was the least frequently used. This study along with the two previous ones indicates that there seems a tendency among classroom participants to speak in their local language during the teaching and learning process although it is highly possible that they use the language in their outside classroom interaction. It might be caused by the language policy in Indonesia which outlines that the Indonesian language should be used as the medium of instruction at schools and other educational institutions. The fact probably makes students and teachers feels inappropriate to speak in their local language in the learning process.

This study also reveals that various language repertoires are exploited in classroom interaction through codeswitching, translation, and full translanguaging. In this practice, the teacher switched from various repertoires, Indonesian, English, and Minangkabaunese, and in some occasions, the teacher did a translation from one repertoire to another and spoke in the certain repertoire fully. Such practice of exploiting various repertoire is also evident in Adinolfi & Astruc who found that during the course of the learning process, students and teachers did codeswitching between

---

English and Spanish. Moreover, Saputra & Akiib also found in their study that teachers mixed language repertoire in the learning process through both intersentential and intrasentential codeswitching between Indonesian, English, and local language. In short, language repertoires are exploited in classroom interaction by mixing them or translating from one repertoire to another.

4. Conclusion

From the above findings, it can be concluded that the use various language repertoire can help the teacher run the learning process. The use of local, national, and target language can be realized in the classroom through intersentential codeswitching, intrasentential codeswitching, full translanguaging, and translation. The use of various repertoires can help teachers explain the materials clearly and also carry out interaction more smoothly. Thus, it is suggested that EFL teachers should exploit their language repertoires English class in the classroom than focusing on one language only.

References


Nambisan, Kavitha A. “Teachers’ Attitudes towards and Uses of Translanguaging in English Language Classroom in Iowa.” Iowa States University, 2014.


