

The Potential of Utilising Shared Linguistic Repertoire for Facilitating Interactions in EFL Classrooms

Dery Tria Agustin¹, Pramugara Robby Ana²

[¹dery.agustin@upy.ac.id](mailto:dery.agustin@upy.ac.id)

¹Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta

[²pramugara@upy.ac.id](mailto:pramugara@upy.ac.id)

²Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta

ABSTRACT

Inclusion of linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom has been an issue of ongoing debate among ELT scholars. While some believe in the effectiveness of English-only (monolingual) pedagogy, others view linguistic repertoire as resource that can benefit English language learning. Following a bi/multilingual approach to ELT, this paper reports findings of a qualitative study investigating four Indonesian English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers' beliefs and practices, focusing on (1) how the teachers used shared linguistic repertoire during English language instruction and (2) how their uses of shared linguistic repertoire facilitated classroom interactions. Data sources included interviews, classroom observations, and documents. The findings demonstrate that uses of shared linguistic repertoire facilitated both teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, serving a range of pedagogical functions. This paper concludes by providing implications for teacher education and suggesting areas for future research.

Keywords: English language teaching, linguistic repertoire, classroom interactions

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of whether to use or not to use languages other than English (LOTE) in the English language classroom has been debated among scholars. Some believe in the effectiveness of teaching English by using English only, a dominant belief in English language teaching (ELT) (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Menken & Sanchez, 2020). Others view the potential of utilising all the languages that teachers and learners know, technically referred to as linguistic repertoire, for facilitating learning.

Proponents of English-only instruction assert that exclusive use of English promotes English language acquisition (Krulatz et al., 2016). It is so since English-only instruction, the proponents propose, “offers a richer, more optimal learning environment” (Brevik &

Rindal, 2020, p. 926). They therefore argue that LOTE should be excluded from the English language classroom (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Problematising English-only instruction, Auerbach (2016) notes that the idea of “using only English was rooted in regimes of ideology rather than in evidence-based findings regarding its effectiveness for English acquisition” (p. 936). In the context of ELT, the ideology underpinning English-only instruction is often referred to as monolingual ideology or the ideology of English monolingualism (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). The idea of not making use of other languages when teaching English has raised concerns among researchers (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Opponents of monolingual approach to ELT (e.g., Auerbach, 2016; Tollefson, 2007) point out that learners’ mother tongues can be utilised to benefit L2 teaching. According to Illman & Pietilä (2018), a “more recent understanding of multilingualism recognizes the potential of an individual’s linguistic repertoire” (p. 238) to be used as classroom resource. It is stated that utilising learners’ linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom can advance English language learning (Galante et al., 2020) and is therefore believed to promote learners’ English language development (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Examining learners’ perspectives on teachers’ use of first language or mother tongue (L1) when teaching English, Macaro and Lee (2013) report that both young and adult learners did not favour exclusion of their mother tongue from their English language classroom.

Previous studies into the language of instruction in the English language classroom, especially studies conducted in other contexts, have examined several issues. They include learners’ perception of English-only instruction (Macaro & Lee, 2013), teachers’ perception of plurilingual instruction (Galante et al., 2020), target language use in EFL classroom (Krulatz et al., 2016), teachers’ use of first language in the Norwegian EFL context (Brevik & Rindal, 2020), role of L1 in the EFL classroom in Yemen (Bhooth et al., 2014), teachers’ use of mother tongue in the EFL classroom in Türkiye (Sali, 2014), learners’ and teachers’ experience of multilingualism in the English classroom (Illman & Pietilä, 2018), and ideological shifts among educators, that is, a shift from a monolingual to a translingual stance (Menken & Sanchez, 2020). These studies found that L1 use can serve several functions. Use of mother tongue helped learners understand instructions given by the teachers (Bhooth et al., 2014), facilitated learners’ understanding of difficult words (Macaro & Lee, 2013; Sali, 2014), helped teachers to explain complex grammatical points (Bhooth et al., 2014; Krulatz et al., 2016), allowed teachers to elicit learners’ responses in the target language (Illman &

Pietilä, 2018; Sali, 2014), and assisted learners when doing group activities (Bhooth et al., 2014). To date, it is stated that there has not been adequate research investigating teachers' actual use of linguistic repertoire in the EFL classroom especially in the high school setting (see Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Sali, 2014). Accordingly, this paper seeks to add to this understudied area by offering evidence from Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the context where the study reported in this paper took place, more than 700 languages exist (Eberhard et al., 2020). Majority of Indonesian people are bi/multilingual, speaking an indigenous language as their mother tongue and Indonesian as the national or official language. The spread of English to Indonesia adds to the complexity of linguistic landscape in the country. In terms of the status, English in Indonesia was designated to be a foreign language. This formed the basis of EFL teaching. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, most learners, as will be elaborated below, speak more than two languages, that is, Indonesian and an indigenous language (e.g., Javanese) or more than two languages, that is, Indonesian and indigenous languages (e.g., Javanese & Sundanese). Therefore, this study makes use of the term LOTE and linguistic repertoire to encompass all languages that can be used by the teachers and the learners in the classroom. In terms of English language curriculum, neither does ELT curriculum mandate a strictly 'English-only policy' nor explicitly prohibit the use of LOTE during instruction. Nonetheless, the curriculum emphasises the idea of learning by practising. For example, Government Regulation No. 59 year 2014 concerning the 2013 curriculum states that the purpose of ELT is not only for understanding and applying concepts but also for performing social functions. To achieve the purpose, learners need to perform meaningful or useful activities, that is, activities that reflect real-world settings, in English.

Previous studies into the language of instruction in the Indonesian EFL context have investigated a range of issues. They include learners' perceptions of teachers' use of L1 (Anindya et al., 2022; Resmini, 2019), teachers' and learners' perceptions of L1 use (Hasrina et al., 2018; Nahdiah, 2022), teachers' practices and perceptions of L1 use (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021), and L1 interference in English language acquisition (Septianasari et al., 2019). Important findings of these studies include facilitative role of L1 for giving instructions or directives (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021) and explaining complex concepts (Nahdiah, 2022; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021), learners' negative attitude towards teachers' use of L1 (Resmini, 2019), perceived usefulness of L1 for learning new vocabulary

(Resmini, 2019), role of L1 for promoting learners' understanding (Anindya et al., 2022) and engagement in the lesson (Anindya et al., 2022), and L1 interference in acquiring English (Septianasari et al., 2019). To this end, it is evident that some of the findings appear to be competing. Competing findings yielded by the above-mentioned studies suggest that the issue of the use of LOTE in the English language classroom is not conclusive yet and requires further studies.

Against the backdrop of multilingualism in Indonesia, the curriculum encouraging extensive (if not exclusive) use of English, and inconclusive findings regarding use of teachers' or learners' linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom, this paper aims to add to the conversation by presenting results of a study examining four Indonesian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices. Drawing on the study, this paper focuses on how the teachers used shared linguistic repertoire when teaching and how their uses of shared linguistic repertoire facilitated classroom interactions. The paper aims to answer the following research questions.

1. How do Indonesian EFL teachers use shared linguistic repertoire in the classroom?
2. How do their uses of linguistic repertoire facilitate classroom interactions?

Answering these questions would help teachers and prospective teachers especially those working in Indonesian and other EFL contexts to decide whether, when, how, and to what extent they need to use linguistic repertoire for the best interest of the learners. Following this introduction section, this paper presents the method, results and discussion, and conclusion. The method section explains the philosophical paradigm, research approach, research design, approach to participant recruitment, and data collection and analysis. The results and discussion section answers the research questions by providing case-based illustrations of linguistic repertoire utilisation by the teachers during instruction and elaborating how use of linguistic repertoire facilitated classroom interactions. The conclusion section presents a summary of the main findings and the implications for teacher education programs.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The findings reported in this paper are derived from a larger research study (hereafter 'the study' or 'this study') investigating four Indonesian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices.

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Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, the study made use of a qualitative approach (Merriam, 2009) and a multiple case study design (Cresswell, 2007). The four teachers, constituting the cases, were selected purposefully using a snowball approach to sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At the time of the research, all the teachers were working as permanent English teachers (holding the status of government employees or PNS) at state junior/senior high schools in West Java Province, Indonesia. While Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 2 (T2) were teaching at a senior high school (or SMA), Teacher 3 (T3) and Teacher 4 (T4) were working at an Islamic junior high school (or MTs). The four teachers held a relevant academic degree (i.e., a bachelor's or a master's degree in English language education) and had been teaching English for more than five years. This paper does not mention names of the teachers and the schools due to ethical considerations.

2.1.Data Collection

Working in the field with each teacher, data sources included an interview before the first classroom observation, three classroom observations, an interview after each observation, and documents. The interview before the first observation was a semi-structured interview. This interview aimed at eliciting the teachers' beliefs about the use of linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom. The interviews after observations were video-stimulated recall or VSR interviews. The main purpose of conducting these interviews was to explore the teachers' thinking processes when teaching (Borg, 2006). All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in a language that the teachers chose. Two teachers selected English and the other two selected Indonesian. Although using English, they managed to articulate ideas clearly. When conducting classroom observations, the teachers' practices were video recorded. Prior to observing, written consents had been obtained from both the teachers and the learners' parents. In collecting documents, the researcher collected lesson plans, textbooks, and documents of the curriculum used (i.e., the 2013 curriculum, hereafter 'the K13 curriculum'). Doing fieldwork over a period of three months, the researcher obtained adequate data.

2.2.Data Analysis

Prior to analysing the data, audio recordings of all the interviews had been transcribed verbatim and transcripts of the interviews conducted in Indonesian had been

translated into English. Using a multiple case study design, data analysis followed two stages, that is, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The former refers to analysis of each case (or each teacher) and the latter refers to analysis across cases (or across teachers). In the within-case analysis, the researcher content-analysed data obtained from the interviews especially the interview before observation to reveal each teacher's view on the use of linguistic repertoire during instruction. All statements reflecting such a view were coded and collated into themes (see, Braun & Clarke, 2006, for further elaboration of using thematic analysis). Two main themes were identified: a monolingual and bi/multilingual view on ELT. Having finished the within-case analysis, the researcher conducted cross-case analysis, building general explanations that cover all the four cases.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis revealed that two of the four teachers appeared to hold the monolingual approach to ELT (or teaching English using English only). They viewed the use of LOTE in the English language classroom as an impediment to learning progress. Nonetheless, classroom observations showed that all the teachers including those who believed in English-only instruction made use of shared linguistic repertoire, in this case, Indonesian, on several occasions. Justifications reported by the teachers included the learners' limited skills of English. The following two sub-sections present the teachers' uses of Indonesian in the classroom and how their uses of Indonesian mediated classroom interactions.

3.1 The Teachers' Uses of Shared Linguistic Repertoire in the Classroom

This section provides case-based illustrations of how each teacher participating in this study utilised Indonesian when teaching.

Teacher 1 (T1 – she/her). At the time of the research, T1 was teaching English at a senior high school located in the centre of a town in the north-eastern part of West Java Province, Indonesia. The school was reportedly considered as one of favourite schools in the regency where it is based. Majority of the learners going to the school were those speaking Javanese as their first language and Indonesian as their second language. Believing in the monolingual approach to teaching English, T1 attempted to use English only during learning and teaching activities. Despite her belief in English-only instruction, uses of Indonesian

appeared to be inevitable. There were occasions on which T1 had to use Indonesian. For example, when a learner did not know how to express ideas in English, he switched to Indonesian. T1 asked him to use English. However, realising that the learner did not know what to say, T1 helped the learner to organise what he wanted to say in Indonesian first and then helped him say the English equivalent (Classroom Observation 2). Employing Indonesian, T1 managed to assist the learner to produce the intended English word and maintain the flow of interaction with him.

Teacher 2 (T2 – he/him). T2 was T1's colleague, teaching at the same senior high school. Believing in the idea of teaching English using English only, T2 attempted to translate his belief into practice and maintain his use of English as the language of instruction. Taking into accounts his learners' varied levels of English ability, T2 utilised Indonesian on several occasions. For example, T2 used Indonesian for conveying the meaning of important words or keywords that learners needed to master (Classroom Observation 1). Another example, T2 made use of Indonesian to clarify what he meant when explaining a lesson (i.e., a lesson on giving suggestions and recommendations) (Classroom Observation 1). He reported that uses of Indonesian were needed to accommodate learners who had not been able to understand explanations given in English only (Post-Observation Interview 1). In addition, T2 did not prohibit uses of Indonesian among learners when having group discussions (Classroom Observation 1). Considering the learners' English ability, "I allow them to speak Bahasa Indonesia" (VSR Interview 1). T2 was afraid that prohibiting uses of Indonesian would prevent some learners from participating in the discussions, reducing the level of engagement that he was expecting from the learners.

Teacher 3 (T3 – she/her). Unlike T1 and T2, T3 was teaching at an Islamic junior high school in a village about 15 kilometres to the west of a major city in the eastern part of West Java Province, Indonesia. At this school, some learners speak Sundanese as their first language, some speak Javanese as their L1, and vast majority of the learners speak Indonesian as their second language. T3 did not seem to subscribe to the idea of teaching English using English only. "I think it is okay to use Indonesian to facilitate learning" (VSR Interview 1). Without using Indonesian, T3 reported, the teaching and learning activities in her classroom would not work. T3's use of Indonesian included when explaining grammatical points (Classroom Observation 1). She stated, "If I explained simple past tense in English, I think learners would find it difficult to comprehend my explanations" (VSR

Interview 1). T3 also allowed the learners to use Indonesian for asking questions (Classroom Observation 1). She added, “If I required the learners to speak English only, they would not be able to ask questions because they have not been able to speak English” (VSR Interview 1).

Teacher 4 (T4 – she/her). T4 was T3’s colleague, teaching at the same Islamic junior high school. Like T3, T4 did not seem to believe in the idea of using English only during learning and teaching activities. Talking about the learners, T4 stated that the learners’ English ability was so limited than they cannot provide an answer when being asked their names in English. T4 observably made use of Indonesian on some occasions. For example, T4 employed Indonesian when explaining materials and when interacting with the learners such as when giving instructions (directives) and asking questions to the learners (Classroom Observations 1). The following moment demonstrates how use of Indonesian facilitated teacher-learner interactions.

T4 : Any difficult word?
 Learners : (no response)
 T4 : *Ada [kata-kata] yang sulit?* [Any difficult word?]
 Learners : *Gak ada.* [No.]
 (Classroom Observation 1)

The exchanges above demonstrate how utilisation of Indonesian helped T4 to maintain interactions with the learners and keep learning and teaching activities progressing.

3.2 The Teachers’ Uses of Shared Linguistic Repertoire and Classroom Interactions

The findings elaborated in the preceding section illustrated how the teachers’ uses of shared linguistic repertoire, in this case, Indonesian, during English language instruction helped to maintain the flow of classroom interactions and keep learning and teaching processes progressing. These findings seem to support Sali (2014) who states that L1 use can facilitate classroom interactions. This paper demonstrates how use of Indonesian mediated both teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions as follows.

In terms of teacher-learner interactions, this study found that utilisation of Indonesian served several functions. First, use of Indonesian facilitated teachers to explain the lesson. For example, employing Indonesian helped T2 to convey meaning of important words that

learners need to master. This finding appears to corroborate Macaro & Lee (2013) stating that “the most common function of L1 use is to provide information about the meaning of lexical items” (p. 718). Another example, L1 use helped T3 to explain grammatical aspects. This finding confirms previous studies (e.g., Bhooth et al., 2014; Krulatz et al., 2016; Nahdiah, 2022; Sali, 2014; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021) which found that use of mother tongue can help learners understand explanations about target language grammar especially complex grammatical points. The last example, utilisation of L1 helped learners, especially those having relatively lower levels of English skills, to understand a question posed by the teacher. This was evidenced in T4’s classroom when T4 was trying to ask the learners whether they found any difficult words but the learners did not respond due to incomprehension (as illustrated in the exchanges above). Sali (2014) states that use of L1 can provide learners with instant understanding of what the teacher has just said.

Second, use of Indonesian helped the teachers to organise classroom activities and maintain interactions with the learners during such activities. For example, using L1 when giving instructions (directives) allowed T4 to convey what she wanted the learners to do. This finding supports Bhooth et al. (2014), Sali (2014), and Sundari and Febriyanti (2021) who found that L1 use helped learners to understand instructions. Another example, L1 use helped a teacher to elicit responses in the target language from the learners. As illustrated earlier, T1 managed to elicit intended English words from a learner presenting his work in front of the class. This finding appears to support previous studies (e.g., Illman & Pietilä, 2018; Sali, 2014; Resmini, 2019) regarding how use of L1 can advantage vocabulary learning. As Sali (2014) puts it, L1 use can be useful for “eliciting more learner responses in L2” (p. 317). Another function of L1, especially when teaching learners having limited levels of English competency, included facilitating the learners to ask questions to the teachers. This was evidenced in T3’s classroom where the learners were not able to ask the teacher questions unless they used Indonesian.

In addition to teacher-learner interactions elaborated above, this study found that L1 use was also useful to assist learner-learner interactions. All the teachers participated in this study did not prohibit their learners to use Indonesian when doing groups tasks or having group discussions. Banning Indonesian in the classroom, as T1 pointed out above, would reduce learners’ levels of participation and engagement in a given task, which may

negatively affect their learning. This finding seems to support Bhooth et al. (2014) who state that L1s can assist learners when carrying out group works.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the construction of knowledge about the use of linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom both nationally and internationally by presenting results of a study investigating four Indonesian EFL teachers' use of shared linguistic repertoire (i.e., Indonesian) during English language instruction in the junior and senior high school setting. It is clear, from the findings elaborated above, that all the teachers participated in the study utilised varying amount of Indonesian when teaching. Generally, uses of Indonesian facilitated classroom interactions, in this case, teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, and helped both the teachers and the learners to navigate the teaching and learning processes. For the teachers, utilisation of Indonesian helped them to explain meaning of important words or keywords, explain (complex) grammatical points, clarify instructions (directives) given to the learners, and elicit responses in the target language (English) from the learners. For the learners, use of Indonesian facilitated them to comprehend questions posed by the teachers, ask questions to the teachers, and carry out and accomplish group activities.

Findings of this study support a line of previous research pointing out the idea of using shared linguistic repertoire as a classroom resource or as an additional tool that can be used to support English language learning and development. Accordingly, this paper argues that use of linguistic repertoire should not be banned from the English language classroom because all the language that teachers and learners know, as findings of this study suggests, may be needed to facilitate classroom interactions, supporting teaching and learning. Implications of this paper includes the following. This paper proposes that teacher educators need to educate teachers and prospective teachers to be cognisant of (1) when to use and not to use L1 and (2) how and to what extent they should use L1 for assisting learning. Educating teachers and prospective teachers regarding utilisation of linguistic repertoire in the English language classroom requires a sound framework which is developed based on empirical studies. This is an area, this paper suggests, future research needs to address as a way forward.

FUNDING

The authors did not receive any funding for the preparation of the manuscript.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Dery Tria Agustin obtained a PhD in Education (TESOL) from the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia. He is currently working as a lecturer in the Department of English Language Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. His areas of interest include teacher cognition, teacher cognitive development, English language ideologies, and Global Englishes.

Pramugara Robby Ana is a lecturer at the Department of English Language Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. Currently, he is a PhD candidate at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Malaysia. His research interests include heutagogy, education, English literature, and tourism.