

Representation of Teachers' Identity in EFL Classroom Interactions

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Abstract: This sociocultural linguistic study aimed investigating the teachers' identity representation in their classroom interactions. This study was conducted by considering the significant roles the teachers played in orchestrating classroom activities which involved the accumulation of the teachers' efforts, values and beliefs. The findings revealed that the teachers exposed their identity in different ways for both different roles and local positioning which were culturally, socially, politically, and religiously constructed. The teachers also perceived their identity which could be clustered into four broad areas which showed their understanding and the significant functions of their identity representation. Some pedagogical implications were derived from these findings.

Key Words: teachers' identity representation, classroom interactions

Classroom atmosphere generally mirrors the complexities of real community as it perpetuates naturally identity construction of a particular community. Classroom interactions reflect the complexity and heterogeneity of the real world. The nature of classroom interactions generally functions as a pot of information transfer which often involves negotiation of values and beliefs as the important features of identity. Vann, et al (2006) report a strong evidence that classroom can be the arena in which identity is forged. They point out that classrooms are considered as the central meeting places for cultural interactions due to teachers' increasing awareness that classes are the pools of newly shaped identity. Beside building identity, classroom interactions prove effectively to preserve values and identity (Norton, 2006). The selection of teachers' linguistic features indicates their commitment of revitalizing particular values and beliefs (Fought, 2006). In a more specific way, it is further confirmed that, teachers' language reflects their identity and their linguistic features which influence their pupil's identity. In addition, the nature of power relation in classroom interactions also resembles certain social structures which may determine learners' identity (Rogers, 2004).

The identity construction and representation within classroom interactions are getting more and more laudably important as far as English as an

International Language (EIL) concerns. Kumaravivelu (2012) strongly emphasizes the importance of identity formation because the teachers and the students are confronted with the language which is heavily attached with the sense of globality and coloniality. Teaching English is not neutral from socially, cultural, political, and economical domination. Any EIL teachers are in a high demand of exercising their role of agency which may filter 'some of the taken-for-granted theoretical and pedagogical assumptions about EIL' (p.13). They should equip themselves with strong awareness to detect what is happening within their multiple cultural classrooms for them to create fruitful classroom atmosphere and provide productive negotiation and potential tension the learners may bring to the classroom. It is further stated that exercising the agency may also help the EIL learners position themselves appropriately within certain historical and institutional contexts. It also supports the learners to encounter the issues of identity indiscretion and transformation due to globality and coloniality nature of EIL. English plays a very critical role in constructing roles, relations and identity the teacher and the students (Duff and Uchida, 1997).

Despite the significance of teacher identity in classroom interactions, to my knowledge, far too little attention has been paid to investigate how teachers expose their identity in classroom interactions. Park

(2012) recorded the teacher's identity shifts from her home country which was linguistically homogeneous to the heterogeneous English speaking country which enhanced her consciousness raising of being nonnative English teacher (NNEST). This study highlighted the importance of burgeoning sense of professional identity and working hard to establish legitimacy as being a qualified English teacher. Ha (2008) focused on the EIL teachers' identity formation within personal and professional contexts. She examined the processes of the teachers' identity reconstruction by mainly taking into account their experiences studying in English speaking countries as the point of departure and how their experiences were reflected on their identity formation in their home country, Vietnam. She explored how such conflicting situation challenged these teachers to maintain their Vietnamese identities. From teachers' narration, Connely and Clandinin (1999) highlighted how the teachers perceived their identity as a significant part of their professional work. This study also revealed that the teacher viewed their classroom interactions and teaching materials as the arena of their identity reflection. However, there is a need to explicate how teachers actually embody their identity in classroom interactions.

Within Indonesian context, some studies have also been already devoted to investigating teachers' identity. Susilowati (2008) found out that the teachers selected the teaching materials which portrayed how the interlocutors in the texts navigate the exchange meaning for identity negotiation. This study, unfortunately, did not involve teachers who essentially plot a route for classroom activities. A narrative study done by Rohmah (2008) traced the English teacher's long identity journey which was reflected on writing. This study portrayed the trajectories of the teacher's identity formation which was indicated by the constructions, reconstructions, and negotiations of the teacher's identity. The narrative study which essentially reports the inner side of the researcher is limited to include the reflection of teacher's identity formation in classroom interactions. In addition, Dewi (2007) investigated the shifts of nonnative English speaker teachers' (NNEST) professional identity when they were embarked to English community and culture in an English speaking country. This study specifically examined what professional Indonesian identity the teachers brought into the English speaking country, the identity changes during their study, and

the shifts of professional identity. The influence of professional identity on the teachers' identity formations was also explored but did not yet uncover the teachers' identity shifts in their teaching contexts. Susilowati's (2010a) surveyed teachers' perception on the importance of teacher identity representation in classroom settings and the students' perception on the importance of their teachers' identity representation (2010b). However, the nature of survey did not provide a clear picture how actually teachers made use of linguistic features as their identity representation. Even when the teachers have narrated their ways of exposing their identity in classroom (Susilowati, 2010b) and efforts for shaping the students' identity (Susilowati, 2010c), but the substantive clue for their identity representation is not yet explored. These previous studies should be richly equipped with more empirical data to precedent teacher identity representation not only as linguistic repertoires but also learning resources. Therefore, the teacher's identity representation in classroom interactions is plausibly important to investigate.

The above previous studies led me to hypothesize that teachers tend to reflect their identity in classroom interactions through their utterances, which may also be perceived by the teachers beyond the linguistic functions. This hypothetical notion, however, is far from being conclusive. Therefore, the present study addressed this issue by investigating utterances produced by English teachers at the university level as their identity representation. From the above discussion, a research question was derived. The research question was then broken down into two sub research questions as the following. (1) How do the English teachers represent their identity in their utterances in classroom interactions? (2) How do the English teachers perceive their identity representation in their utterances in classroom interactions?

METHOD

The sociocultural linguistic approach accommodates and integrates different angles derived from different disciplines to capture identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Bucholt and Hall, 2008; Norton, 2009). Interactional sociolinguistics is also used it focuses on negotiation of identity which is explored in the interlocutors' language choice and code switching (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). This study was done in State Islamic University "Maulana Malik

Ibrahim” of Malang Indonesia and involved some content course teachers on the voluntary basis. In spite the fact that the only medium of instruction was English, from my preliminary observation, teachers of content courses seemed more lenient to provide spaces for other languages to take place. This might provide greater possibilities for teachers to flexibly code switch from one language to another not only for the sake of facilitating language learning but also exploring their identity as well. This linguistic phenomenon could become crucial data to indicate identity representation (Bhatt, 2008; Susilowati, 2011). Observations equipped with video recording and field-notes were done on the teacher subjects’ classroom interactions to capture their identity representation. The data were further analyzed by operating any suitable principles of Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005), namely emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality or partialness. Interviews with the teacher subjects were done to explore how they perceived their identity representation.

RESULTS

The teachers’ utterances represented their identity in classroom interactions in distinctive ways. The teachers’ religious teachings which were deeply rooted on their teaching commitment were essentially the point of departure for their identity representation. It was not surprising to find out that the religious identity emerged across contexts and roles. In addition, different degrees of power relation also accompanied the teachers’ identity which might transported multiple identity and created certain classroom atmosphere.

The teachers’ utterances represented their identity representation, which was primarily triggered by the different contexts in classroom interactions. Firstly, the immediate emergence of the teachers’ identity reflected the culturally bound and socially constructed identity representation which was enhanced by the need of exposing attitudes in different tense, facilitated by the power relation in different ways, expressing the teacher’s commitment beyond their teaching objective, and exposing the need to be respected. Secondly, the teachers’ ways of exposing particular roles indicated their identity as the problematizer, the member of stereotyped cultural community, the membership of academic community, the language evaluator, and the inclination toward the youth’s life. Thirdly,

the teachers’ ways of indexing to particular groups showed the teachers’ local, national, religious, and academic identity. Fourthly, the teachers’ ways of exploring cultures of institutionalized practice triggered their identity to show the cultural distinctions on different sociolinguistic functions, the cultural similarities for interactional purposes, the culture of institutionalized power, the sociocultural differences to represent social similarities and similarity of the native and target cultures of certain social status. Lastly, the teachers’ ways of exposing their hybrid identity exhibited their native ideological understanding, their religious view for maintaining interaction, their cultural awareness, and their passion on teaching. The ways of reflecting the teachers’ identity could indicate the different local positionings and contingent broad categories which saliently reflected five main roles, namely as (1) educator, (2) enhancer of critical evaluator, (3) ownership of vibrant identities, (4) explorer of culture differences, and (5) agent of identity.

From the teachers’ point of view, the teachers’ identity representation was seen from different angles, which can be clustered into four points. Firstly, the teachers perceived identity with its multiplicity, flexibility, relational, fragmented, context-dependent, context producing, and socio-culturally constructed. This nature of identity was broadly perceived from two dimensions, personal and professional. Secondly, the teachers perceived the four important functions of their identity representation, namely filtering universal values from the target culture, exposing their efforts of occupying the third place between the native and target cultures, showing their strong identity, and delivering parental role. Thirdly, the teachers also believed that language was as a reflection of their identity and a different language brought its own sense which could accommodate the teachers’ academic and personal needs. This triggered the appearance of code choice for meeting specific need which could not be satisfied by English. For these teachers, English was an instrumental language. Fourthly, the teachers perceived the roles of their identity representation as an educator, filtering values, moderating differences between the native and the target cultures, and also exposing their strong identity to face the globalized world. The teachers also acknowledged their position as an identity agency and the benefits of their identity representation for the students’ identity shaping; but, role model was considered the most stimulating one. However, the teachers warned not

to over-value the target culture and every teacher should be aware of their own identity for successful shaping of the students' identity.

DISCUSSION

As the analysis shows, the contexts played a critical role in determining the functions of teachers' identity representation in their classroom interactions. The variety of contexts created different ramifications of the teachers' identity representation. These findings put more emphases on the relational nature of identity, which generally emerges in the interactions to respond to the circled social meanings in relation to other participants who possessed certain social functions and other identity positions which were not mutually exclusive.

This relation can be traced from the findings which noticeably exposed the different identities as seen from the different ways of identity representation. For instance, the teacher exposed their identity which immediately occurred in the classroom interaction. In this case, the teacher initially took a role as an advisor who supplied suggestions relevant to the topic being discussed. However, the linguistic contexts of the excerpt simultaneously exhibited the teacher's power which came out due to his culturally strong position as a teacher. These contexts clearly showed that such identity was 'actively, ongoingly, dynamically constituted in discourse and constitutes discourse' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 4) through particular structured patterns of the languages and discursive practices to maintain the social practice within classroom interactions (Clarke, 2008). In this sense, the existence of the contexts determined the spectrum of the teachers' identity.

Within these wide ranges of contexts in classroom interactions, the teachers' identity representation was primarily for delivering their values, beliefs, and attitudes which, to a certain extent, tend to be culture-bound and religious loaded. For exposing culture bound values and beliefs, the teachers utilize language, due to its intimate relation to cultures, for their identity representation. The teachers exploit their native language, either Javanese or Indonesian or both, as the vehicle of delivering their identity, which involuntarily stimulated code choice to exist in their classroom interactions. The code switch essentially deploys more cultural weights on delivery of the intended messages which implicitly or explicitly

contained the values, beliefs, attitudes, or other goodness. As pointed out by Hawkin and Norton (2009: 3), the language the teachers employ in their classroom interactions is as 'the tool through which representations and meanings are constructed and negotiated, and a primary means through which ideologies are transmitted'. Language itself is not neutral, but is shot through meanings, inflections, intentions and assumptions of the culture attached to the language. Code switching (CS) is remarkably resilient in carrying the teachers' identity and, therefore, escorts its linguistic functions even though different motivations of exposing identity through CS can take place salient to the surrounding linguistic contexts when it occurs. Due to the fact that the teachers and the students share quite similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the CS tends to function as an 'exploratory choice of representing multiple identities' (Kamwangamalu, 2010: 124). These multiple identities were more visibly depicted from different ways of the teachers' identity representation, which evidently infused different functions of the teachers' identity representation.

For exposing the religion-bound values and beliefs, the teachers tended to explore the connection between the topic being discussed and the religious concept, in this case, Islam teachings. The top down policy of setting up 'Ulul Albab' concept which aims at integrating Islam teachings into classroom activities seems the stimulating factor which enhances the teacher to include Islam teachings in their classroom interactions. However, the teachers' subconscious ways of exposing their religion-laden matters clearly indicates that the integration of religious teachings had been deeply rooted on their teaching commitment. The teachers posit Islam as the foundation which infiltrates every single aspect of their teaching, which consequently appears on their identity representation. For the teacher subjects, the religion is the most pivotal key which determines their identity and their teachings. Accordingly, the teachers have done any effort to productively utilize even the very small opportunity of their classroom interactions for depicting the Islam teachings in their classroom interactions. When the teachers can fruitfully make use of their religious teachings for enriching their teaching, the religion functions as fundamental values and judgments which shape their identity. The teachers' religious views and evaluative moral statements in their classroom interactions are significant markers of the diffusion of religion in their identity. When we look

at the trajectories of their identity, the religion is the point of departure of the construction, negotiation, reconstruction, depiction, and dissemination of the teachers' identity. In this sense, the religion traces its function far beyond what Ha (2008) found as the key of moral carrier. For the teachers under the study, religious teachings are positioned as both 'being' due to its fixed teachings which remain in its purity over time and space and as 'becoming' due to its spacious flexibility for the teacher to develop their identity over time and space. Thus, 'being' and 'becoming' sense of the teachers' religion can harmoniously go together in constructing the teachers' identity.

It is also worth noting that the teachers' identity representation involves their power relation. To a certain extent, the teachers depicted their identity with the sense of power domination with different degree of seriousness. In some cases, the humorous nature of power relation can implicate a stronger tension on the classroom atmosphere, depending on the context previously exist. It seems that the teachers' way of conversing the implicatures plays a crucial role in establishing the power relation in the classroom interactions. A careful look on the findings scrutinizes to a point that power relation is necessitated in delivering the teachers' intended message. Despite the fact that power relation may bestow negative impacts on the students and classroom atmosphere, a particular situation unavoidably demands the teachers' power relation. Creating a punishment effect on the students stipulates the teacher's power domination. In this context, the openly stated strong statement can be effective in implicating the teacher's punishment to the targeted student. Similarly, the teacher's power relation needs to become more visible to return the teacher's talk after a long students' session. The teacher's repeated utterances successfully distribute the teacher's power relation to the whole class whose immediate participation is inflicted without necessarily creating such a serious tone on the classroom atmosphere. The sense of the teacher's power domination is also naturally smoothened due to the instant need of delivering the teacher's utterances for the business of teaching. Such power relation is also created by projecting the outside class phenomenon which is relevant to the classroom need. In this case, the teachers can moderately lower the sense of power relation by quoting the other's experience to show how the teacher's power relation takes place in different setting. As the projection emotionally engages the

teacher's personal experience, less tension of power relation can take place.

Interestingly, the teachers rarely employed code switching to their native language for escorting the teachers' power relation. The teachers utilized merely English for transporting their power relation. This shows that the target language sensibly possesses a specific degree of formality which attains its strong influence on creating the classroom tone and can provide the students access to learning and negotiate relationship with the target language cultures (Norton, 2011). However, delivering power relation in classroom obliges the teacher's careful consideration. The teacher should cautiously consider the students' position in classroom discourse and 'critically set up the classroom interactions to enable the students to name and struggle against some of disempowering tendencies of linguistic practices of the target cultures' (Norton and Toohey, 2011: 418). The students' impression of being 'under teacher's domination' should be avoided to obtain more positive impacts of delivering such power relation. This needs the teachers' awareness that they are in the key position to address the multicultural atmosphere in their educational contexts to anticipate and, more necessarily, prevent inequality because the particular learners may be marginalized members of the wider community. They should keep in mind that they teach English which can serve to both empower and marginalize (Hawkin and Norton, 2009). Above all, the teachers are in the definite position to create classroom interactions which provide the students 'the right to speak and to be heard' and opportunity for the students to donate their investment as 'contributions that the students make to language learning and the complexities of L2 classroom' (Hall, 2011:161). In this sense, teachers' identity representation which is appropriately wrapped within power relation can grant beneficial impacts on the students' process of learning.

The above discussion leads to the pedagogical implications which can be substantially utilized for enriching the classroom interactions for more industrious EFL teaching and learning. Some recommendations are proposed.

CONCLUSION

For deriving the pedagogical benefits of this study, I recommend any English teacher to maximally utilize their classroom interactions as the fruitful arena

for their exploration of their identity. The findings indicate that the teachers' awareness of their identity negotiation created positive impacts which might enhance the students' investment on their learning. Secondly, I also suggest any English teacher to intentionally integrate their identity into their teaching. Carefully selecting teaching materials can be further explored to obtain the cultural, social and religious values as the starting point of their identity representation. Designing transformative classroom activities can be another alternative which may also trigger the students' sensitivity to connect their classroom activities to their real life. Thirdly, I advocate the integration of local culture and religious values on English classroom interaction because these two aspects richly contribute the identity formation. Strengthening the students' identity with these two aspects prominently cultivate the students' readiness to face identity crisis and, therefore, help them to be a good global citizen.

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