EXPLORATION OF TEACHER'S IDENTITY IN EFL CONTEXTS AS CULTURAL RESOURCES

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Some studies have empirically proved that teacher identity representation can be productively utilized to enhance the students' learning. This case study, therefore, is geared toward investigating how teacher identity in English as foreign language (EFL) contexts can function as cultural resources which can endorse the students' English mastery. The findings show that in exploring their identity the subject teachers produce certain utterances function not only as information transfer but also as cultural resources. The teacher identity representation tends to be spontaneously and sporadically executed in classroom interactions. To a certain extent, these can bridge the differences between local culture and target culture as well as escort the students to interculturality. The findings also entail some significant implications for teaching and learning English which may provide spacious places for teachers to inoculate the students' identity. However, the conclusion should be carefully made due to some limitation of the present research.

Keywords : *teacher identity representation, cultural resources, classroom interactions*

1. Introduction

Identity is a pivotal issue in English as foreign language (EFL) contexts which may mediate its emergence due to the sociocultural setting. These dimensions are projected on the sociopragmatic aspects the students and the teachers are supposed to go through in classroom interactions. These aspects leads to acquiring intercultural competence, which requires "the ability to behave appropriately in intercultural situation, the affective and cognitive capacity to establish and maintain intercultural relationships and the ability to stabilize one's self identity while mediating between cultures" (Jensen, Jaeger and Lorentsen, 1995: 41).

This ability is necessitated for any learners to participate in target language (TL) interactions. EFL learners can draw on TL input provided by the teachers. In this sense, what teachers project in classroom interaction can be resourceful for the learners to afford the intercultural competence. These are the obvious impacts of sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching which put aspects of teacher identity as the critical component in language classroom. This is rooted from the beliefs that teachers are not value-free in executing their teaching but situated within broader contexts outside of school. Therefore, understanding teacher identity is apparently the key for understanding language teaching learning (Varghese, et al., 2005). Furthermore, Cross and Gearon (2007) found inseparable implications of the two premises of identity, 'identity-in-activity' and 'identity-in-discourse'

in foreign language contexts. It is interesting to note that in practice the teacher does not necessarily follow the conventional rules of "good language teaching" but markedly positions herself within a broader system.

These remark the significance of equipping teachers with sufficient professional learning which resonates teaching as a sociocultural activity, instead of ordinary language teaching learning procedures. Otherwise, teachers may fail to identify the relevance of their teaching to their own contexts. These ostensibly strengthen the previous findings from which emerge the red string on the functions of classroom context as the arena of identity construction and maintenance and how these may benefit learning process in some ways (Block, 2006; 2007; Susilowati, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c;2010d). The above discussion shows how language teacher explores their identity which tends to be culture bound and therefore can be cultural resources for their learning.

2. Research Objective

This study focuses on investigating how teacher represents identity in classroom interactions and how this may function as cultural resources which can facilitate the EFL learning.

3. Method

This case study involves a male English Poetry teacher of UIN Maliki Malang. Observations on classroom interactions and in-depth interviews with the teacher subject are done to gather the needed data which are then analyzed within sociocultural linguistic approach.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis shows that teacher identity representation is mostly triggered by the immediate interactional demand and social contexts and therefore tends to be spontaneously and sporadically done. In addition, some culture bound expressions accompany teacher identity representation which can be further utilized as cultural resources. To a certain extent, this may escort the EFL learners to intercultural stage which can facilitate the learners' engagement in TL interactions and even reach the TL culture. Below is a set of speech event which glaringly shows how culture bound terms may signal the existence of teacher identity which also serves as cultural resources.

The datum is selected from the teacher's long explanation of "Point of view" of English Prose class. In this specific context, the teacher and the students were confronted with the term 'tan'.

> …. the tan is (0.2) let's say thaaat a spot (0.2) usually caused by a pigment. Usually (0.2) **white people** have the hand (0.2) on the heat. And it interferes eer their skin (0.2) of the **tan** is more or less darker than the color of the skin and therefore they want to darken their skin by lying on the beach. (continue reading the text)

From the above speech event, the utterance "**white people"** is ideologically associated with specific personas and groups whose culture is represented through certain color of their skin. The teacher, however, positions "white people" equal to any other "colorful" races. In addition, the description of "tan" supplies the culture-laden term which shows the tendency of having different skin; the white prefer darker skin while the colored do efforts to make their skin brighter. This facilitates them to understand the socio cultural phenomenon of 'getting darkened' which is implied on the term "tan".

The findings implicate that the selection of culture bound materials can be fruitful resources of identity representation because these materials may contain any concept, values, and beliefs. Embedding cultural aspects on the material selections can be very productive sources for the teacher to raise the students' awareness of the importance of their local values and at the same time adopt and adapt the target culture to enrich their local culture. Within this boundary, respect toward local and target culture can be equally fertilized. In addition, explaining the topic and clarifying the target concept in teaching EFL can be the best time for the teachers to demonstrate their identity. Generally, within this session, the teachers can be flexibly do code switching as an effective way of identity representation. This code is still perceived as a part of teaching and, therefore, the students may take it as their learning resources.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, creating culture awareness can be blended with identity representation. The identity representation can inoculate target culture awareness by understanding their own local culture. In this sense, tunderstanding differences between the target and local culture may proceed them to their interculturality or even to the target culture. The finding also proposes the notion that teacher identity representation can be learning resources for the students in mastering the target language. Some cautions, however, should be carefully noted. In EFL contexts, it is worth noting for the teacher to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge and understanding of both local and target culture which may be blended to cultivate students' wider horizon in seeing glaring differences between the two without necessarily being ignorant toward one of them. In addition, due to limited number of data and time span conducting this study, the findings of the present study can be context and culture bound which may limit its transferability. Therefore, other researches with richer data obtained from more subjects with different backgrounds are plausibly needed to provide more rounded and conclusive findings.

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