SPEECH COMMUNITIES AND LANGUAGE REPERTOIRESAMONG ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

English Education students in Indonesian universities occupy a distinctive sociolinguistic position: they are simultaneously learners of English, future teachers of English, and active members of multilingual communities in which Indonesian, regional languages, and English coexist. This article examines how concepts of speech community and language repertoire apply to the classroom interactions of these students. Drawing on sociolinguistic frameworks proposed by Hymes (1974), Gumperz (1968), and more recent scholarship on multilingualism and translanguaging, the analysis addresses three interconnected questions: what defines the speech community formed in English Education classrooms, how students deploy their full linguistic repertoires during interaction, and what pedagogical implications follow for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Indonesia. The article argues that English Education classrooms are best understood not as monolingual target-language environments, but as dynamic multilingual spaces where code-switching and translanguaging serve legitimate communicative and cognitive functions. Practical implications for classroom language policy and teacher development are discussed.

Keywords: *Speech Community, Language Repertoire, EFL Classroom, Code-Switching, Translanguaging, Multilingualism, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Language in the classroom is never a neutral medium. Every utterance a student produces—whether in the target language, the first language, or some hybrid of the two—reflects choices shaped by social roles, communicative norms, and the speaker's accumulated linguistic resources. For students enrolled in English Education programs at Indonesian universities, these choices are especially consequential. They are simultaneously language learners working toward proficiency in English and prospective teachers who will one day make language-policy decisions in their own classrooms. Understanding how they use language in academic settings is therefore not merely a matter of applied linguistics; it is a question with direct implications for teacher education.

The concept of the speech community has been central to sociolinguistics since the 1960s. Gumperz (1968, p. 381) defined it as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use." Hymes (1974) later expanded this notion by emphasizing shared rules of speaking rather than shared language per se, making the concept flexible enough to accommodate multilingual settings. More recently, scholars such as Blommaert (2010) and Canagarajah (2013) have pushed further, arguing that the bounded notion of speech community is insufficient for capturing the fluid, layered nature of communication in globalized, multilingual contexts. In its place, concepts such as language repertoire and translanguaging have gained traction.

Despite this theoretical evolution, empirical attention to English Education classrooms in Indonesia as specific sociolinguistic environments remains limited. Most studies on EFL in Indonesia have focused on learner proficiency, teaching methods, or curriculum design rather than the micro-level interactional dynamics through which students navigate their multilingual identities. This article aims to fill part of that gap by examining how the speech

community framework—refined through repertoire-based and translanguaging perspectives—can illuminate what actually happens when English Education students interact in class.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical foundations, distinguishing among key concepts. The main discussion then analyzes three dimensions of classroom interaction: the defining features of the speech community formed in these classrooms, patterns of language repertoire deployment, and the pedagogical consequences of those patterns. The conclusion draws together the main arguments and offers recommendations for EFL teacher education in Indonesia.The article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical foundations, distinguishing among key concepts. The main discussion then analyzes three dimensions of classroom interaction: the defining features of the speech community formed in these classrooms, patterns of language repertoire deployment, and the pedagogical consequences of those patterns. The conclusion draws together the main arguments and offers recommendations for EFL teacher education in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Defining Features of the English Education Classroom Speech Community

English Education classrooms in Indonesian universities exhibit a number of features that collectively constitute them as a distinct speech community. First, participants share a communicative goal that is simultaneously linguistic and professional: they are not merely practicing English for general communication but learning to analyze, teach, and advocate for English as a subject of formal instruction. This dual orientation creates a community in which metalinguistic discourse—talk about language itself—is unusually prominent. Students regularly discuss grammar rules, pronunciation norms, and discourse conventions in ways that are unusual in other EFL contexts.

Second, the community is governed by overlapping and sometimes competing norms. Institutional norms, often made explicit in syllabi or classroom rules, prescribe English as the medium of instruction. Yet peer norms, which emerge organically through classroom socialization, frequently permit or even encourage use of Indonesian for tasks such as clarifying confusing instructions, managing group dynamics, and building solidarity (Cahyani, de Courcy, & Barnett, 2018). The coexistence of these norms means that students are always negotiating their language choices rather than simply following a single rule.

Third, the community is stratified. Not all members participate equally, and participation is shaped by proficiency, confidence, and social positioning. Students with higher English proficiency tend to take longer conversational turns, volunteer answers more readily, and engage in more complex lexical and syntactic choices. Students with lower proficiency may rely more heavily on Indonesian or produce shorter, more formulaic utterances in English. This stratification is not merely a reflection of individual ability; it is also a product of the interactional ecology of the classroom, which can amplify or diminish confidence depending on how mistakes are handled (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Table 1. Key Features of the English Education Classroom Speech Community

Feature	Description	Example in EFL Classroom
Shared linguistic norms	Members agree on what counts as appropriate language use	Students accept that English is the medium of instruction in class activities
Shared communicative goals	Interaction is oriented toward collective or individual objectives	Group discussions aimed at completing academic tasks in English
Code-switching	Shifting between languages depending on context or interlocutor	Switching to Indonesian when explaining difficult grammar concepts to peers
Register variation	Adjusting formality level based on audience and purpose	Formal English with lecturer vs. informal English or mixed code with classmates
Multilingual repertoire	Command of multiple languages or varieties	Students draw on English, Indonesian, and regional languages as needed

Source: Compiled from Gumperz (1968), Hymes (1974), Cahyani et al. (2018), and Mercer & Dörnyei (2020)

Table 1 summarizes five features that recurrently characterize the speech community formed in English Education classrooms. These features are not static; they shift depending on the type of activity underway, the participants involved, and the degree to which institutional norms are being enforced at a given moment. What gives the community its coherence is not uniformity in language use but shared awareness of these features and the ability to navigate among them.

2. Language Repertoire Deployment in Classroom Interaction

Observation of classroom interaction in English Education programs reveals that students draw on their full linguistic repertoires in patterned, context-sensitive ways. The language choices students make are neither random nor simply a product of proficiency limitations; they are functionally motivated. At least three distinct motivations can be identified: epistemic, relational, and evaluative.

Epistemically, students switch to Indonesian or mixed codes when the cognitive demands of a task exceed what they can comfortably manage in English alone. This is particularly evident during peer discussions of abstract linguistic or pedagogical concepts. When asked to explain the difference between direct and indirect speech acts, for example, a group of students might begin the discussion in English, shift to Indonesian when the explanation becomes difficult, and then return to English when reporting back to the class. This pattern, well documented in EFL research in Asia (Lin, 2019; Cahyani et al., 2018), suggests that the L1 is not an obstacle to learning but a cognitive scaffold.

Relationally, code-switching serves to index solidarity, affiliation, and humor. In the pre-task phase of activities, students frequently use informal Indonesian or regional language varieties to joke, commiserate about assignments, or negotiate roles within a group. This use of L1 for rapport management is consistent with Goffman's (1981) observation that interaction always involves multiple layers of footing, not all of which are oriented toward the official business of the interaction. Dismissing such exchanges as off-task misses their function in building the interpersonal trust that makes subsequent task engagement more effective.

Evaluatively, students sometimes switch codes to signal epistemic authority or to align themselves with an imagined expert community of English speakers. Using a technical term from linguistics in English during an otherwise Indonesian-medium peer discussion, for instance, can mark a student as knowledgeable without requiring the entire utterance to be in the target language. Canagarajah (2013) describes similar practices among multilingual academics and argues that they reflect sophisticated, hybrid communicative competence rather than incomplete acquisition of the target norm.

Table 2. Patterns of Language Use Across Classroom Interaction Contexts

Interaction Context	Dominant Language	Code-Switching Frequency	Primary Function
Lecturer–student (formal)	English	Low	Instruction / Q&A
Student–student (task-based)	English + Indonesian	Moderate to High	Negotiation of meaning
Small group discussion	Indonesian / Mixed	High	Peer scaffolding
Informal pre/post-class talk	Indonesian / Regional	Very High	Social bonding
Written academic tasks	English (target)	None	Academic literacy

Source: Adapted from Lin (2019), Cahyani et al. (2018), and classroom interaction data in Indonesian EFL contexts

Table 2 illustrates how language use varies systematically across interaction contexts. The pattern it captures—more English in formal, lecturer-directed interaction; more Indonesian or mixed code in informal, peer-directed interaction—reflects the interplay between institutional and peer norms described in the previous section. Crucially, neither pole of this continuum represents failure. Students who switch to Indonesian for peer scaffolding purposes are not abandoning English; they are deploying their full repertoire strategically to achieve communicative goals that English alone, at their current stage of development, might not allow them to achieve as effectively.

3. Pedagogical Implications for EFL in Indonesia

The analysis above has several implications for English Education pedagogy. First, it challenges the English-only classroom policy that many Indonesian universities continue to enforce in EFL contexts. While the goal of increasing English exposure is legitimate, a blanket prohibition on L1 use ignores the evidence that strategic L1 use supports rather than undermines language development (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Lin, 2019). A more productive stance would be to help students develop metalinguistic awareness of when and why they are making language choices, turning code-switching from an unreflective habit into a deliberate pedagogical tool.

Second, teacher educators should address the professional dimension of their students' multilingual identities explicitly. English Education students are not simply language learners; they are language teachers in formation, and the decisions they make about language use in their own future classrooms will be consequential. If they experience English-only instruction throughout their own training, they may replicate that approach uncritically. If, on the other hand, they encounter and critically reflect on translanguaging pedagogy, they are better positioned to make evidence-based decisions about language use in their own teaching (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013).

Third, the stratification of participation in classroom speech communities suggests that proficiency-related anxiety is a significant barrier to full participation for lower-proficiency students. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) argue that motivation is deeply contextual and that classroom environments can be engineered to reduce threat and increase the value students attach to participation. Specific strategies include task design that rewards communication over linguistic accuracy, deliberate grouping practices that distribute proficiency levels to facilitate peer scaffolding, and explicit instruction in the communicative norms of the classroom speech community—including norms that permit and value multilingual resourcefulness.

In the Indonesian context specifically, these implications intersect with broader issues of language policy. The national curriculum for English Education programs is oriented toward producing teachers who can deliver instruction in English and develop students' communicative competence. However, most schools where graduates will eventually teach

are environments where students bring a diverse range of regional language backgrounds, and English competes with Indonesian and local languages for communicative space. Preparing English Education students to navigate these realities requires going beyond target-language proficiency to develop sociolinguistic competence—the ability to understand, analyze, and respond to the multilingual dynamics of any given classroom community.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined English Education classrooms in Indonesian universities through the conceptual lenses of speech community and language repertoire. Three main arguments have been developed. First, these classrooms constitute distinctive speech communities characterized by overlapping institutional and peer norms, dual communicative goals, and stratified participation. Second, students draw on their multilingual repertoires in patterned ways motivated by epistemic, relational, and evaluative purposes—and these patterns are best understood as functionally purposeful rather than as signs of linguistic deficiency. Third, these findings have concrete pedagogical implications: English-only policies should be reconsidered in light of the evidence for strategic L1 use; teacher education should develop metalinguistic and sociolinguistic competence alongside target-language proficiency; and classroom environments should be designed to reduce participation barriers associated with proficiency anxiety.

The broader theoretical point is that the speech community framework, when updated with repertoire-based and translanguaging perspectives, remains a valuable tool for analyzing the interactional complexity of multilingual educational settings. It shifts attention from what language students are using to how and why they are using it—a shift that is both analytically richer and practically more useful for teacher educators and curriculum designers.

Future research should extend this analysis through systematic classroom observation and discourse analysis in specific Indonesian universities, attending to the ways in which institutional contexts—department cultures, lecturer attitudes, and assessment practices—shape the speech community norms that students experience. Longitudinal work tracking changes in students' language repertoire deployment across their years of study would also contribute to a fuller picture of how multilingual identity and professional socialization interact in the formation of English teachers in Indonesia.

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