Language Education and Acquisition Research Network (LEARN) Journal
Volume 7, Issue 1, 2014

Mother Tongue and Identity in a Thai ESP Classroom: A Communities-of-practice Perspective

Pimsiri Taylor
pimsiritaylor@gmail.com
University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract

This study investigates the use of mother tongue in identity and participation of the ESP teacher and the student participants in a 40-hour English language training classroom at an engineering company in Thailand. Viewed through the lens of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the research shows that mother tongue of all classroom participants, Thai, contributes to identity and negotiation in the ESP classroom. Despite the different disciplinary cultures and values as well as professional discourses of the English language teacher and the engineering professionals, the classroom participants are able to use mother tongue as a shared repertoire and a discursive practice in negotiating identities and sustaining participation in the classroom community of practice. The research suggests positive roles of mother tongue in relationship building among classroom community members through the use of L1 in small talks and humour, which can result in story and knowledge sharing. Pedagogical and research implications are provided in regard to the use of mother tongue in English language teaching and learning, and specifically in ESP.

Keywords: mother tongue/ L1, identity negotiation, English for Specific Purposes classroom, communities of practice

Introduction

The concept of identity and participation has become increasingly mentioned in second language learning research as an alternative to second language acquisition focusing on the sociocultural factors which affect second language learning (e.g., Lantolf, 1994; Norton Peirce, 1995; Duff and Uchida, 1997; Norton, 2000; Morita, 2004; Norton and Toohey, 2011). Among various adopted concepts, the communities of practice or CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) is a social learning model which has also been found to explore identity and participation in relation to second language learning (e.g. Toohey, 1998; Morita, 2004; Haneda, 2006; Barnawi, 2009). Instead of focusing on the internal process of individual's learning, the model of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) proposes a view of learning derived from how one relates him/herself to the social world and social practice and as a result negotiates his/her identity with other social members within the community. For the field of English language teaching and learning, there are a number of studies investigating language classrooms (Haneda, 1997; Mavor and Trayner, 2001; Norton, 2001) as well as other classrooms where the second language or non-native language is used as a language of instruction or communication (Morita, 2000, 2004; Barnawi, 2009). Many of these literatures mentioned the fact that the target language (the English language) affects identity negotiation and construction, and participation (ibid.), as well as non-participation (Norton, 2001) in bilingual or multilingual communities of practice. When their knowledge of L2 fails, classroom participants (in classroom CoPs) switch from the target language to their first language (Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain, 2005).

In the area of ESP, the notion of communities is often mentioned in the form of discursive practices in communities (Kwan, 2014). The use of the term 'communities of practice' in ESP (as well as professional discourse) only began to appear in the mid 1990s, where works appeared within the context of how newcomers become mastered in the discursive practices in academic and professional CoPs (Belcher, 1994; Freeman and Adam, 1996; Blakeslee, 1997). Later on, there are a number of studies in connection with language and discourse of the ESP teacher and the students (e.g. Bhatia, 2007; Wu and Badger, 2009; Bhatia et al., 2011; Chen, 2011). While the studies use the CoP framework to examine ESP settings, a wide range of today's social and business processes mean that further studies of discursive practices in communities must be conducted in order to provide teaching implications in the ESP and corporate settings (Kwan, 2014).

Despite the existing ESL/EFL and ESP literature concerning CoPs, it is found that little has discussed the workplace ESP classroom as a CoP. As an ESP practitioner and a corporate English language instructor, I have always had this question of why some classes appear to proceed rather well whereas some do not. With this practitioner's enquiry along with the gap in the literature, this research project was initiated. The research questions are:

1) How do classroom participants, i.e. the language instructor and the students, negotiate their identity through social participation in the ESP classroom?
2) How does the use of mother tongue contribute to identity negotiation in this particular research setting?

To answer the research questions, an ethnographic approach is adopted and the research tools include participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. This methodology enables the researcher to use the CoP model as a theoretical framework to investigate identity and participation of the English language instructor and the training participants in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom at an engineering company in Thailand. By focusing on the use of the first language (L1) or mother tongue (the two terms which will be used interchangeably in this study), the research aims to unpack how L1 is in juxtaposition with identity and participation in the research setting. The results of the study will provide both pedagogical implications and research implications within the field of English language learning focusing on the context of ESP.

Literature review

The literature review draws the primary concepts necessary for creating a theoretical framework for this study. First of all, the discussion focuses on the notion of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as well as its development in various fields. Then, the second part of the literature review looks at the relationship between ESP and CoPs, especially in terms of identity negotiation in communities of practice in the ESP setting. While the research setting is viewed through the lens of communities of practice, it should be noted that prominent studies concerning the use mother tongue in ESL/EFL or ESP classrooms are found more in the field of English language teaching and learning. Therefore, in order to have a more profound understanding in mother tongue and identity, the final part of the revised literature places an emphasis on the mother tongue in identity negotiation in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Communities of practice (CoPs)

In the simplest sense, communities of practice or CoPs is referred to groups of individuals who gather together due to their shared common interests (Wenger, 1998). However, when the model was originated by Lave and Wenger (1991), CoPs were more concerned with groups of apprentices who practise professional skills and learn through the process of identity negotiation and social participation. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), 'communities of practice' are 'a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (p. 98). Within one particular community of practice or CoP, community members must negotiate their identities through participation in order to sustain their participation and community membership. When a member is able to successfully negotiate his/her identity while participating in the CoP, he/she is then learning through the process of identity negotiation and social participation (ibid). Based on the model of apprenticeship learning, CoP focuses on how newcomers becomes old-timers as they negotiate and construct their identities through social participation. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), newcomers' participation can appear in various forms, one of which is 'legitimate peripheral participation', a form of learning describes a process in which newcomers acquire the skill to perform by actually engaging in the practice in attenuated ways and then move toward full participation by mastering the knowledge and skills critical for that particular community of practice (p. 29).

In the late 1990s, Wenger (1998) developed the communities of practice model further. In his book *Communities of Practice: Leaning, Meaning and Identity*, Wenger (1998) proposed a definition of CoPs using the three components of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (figure 1). In Wenger's (1998) words, mutual engagement is a shared common interest of community members who join CoPs where joint enterprise is constantly renegotiated by individual members. This joint enterprise creates mutual accountability among members who live in the community with the shared repertoire of 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of existence' (p. 83). In addition to the three elements which define CoPs, Wenger (1998) also focuses more on a complex workplace in which multiple CoPs exist. In this regard, Wenger (1998) abolished the notion of legitimate peripheral participation and proposed the concept of 'boundary crossing' and the role of 'knowledge brokers' who bring in knowledge from different CoPs.

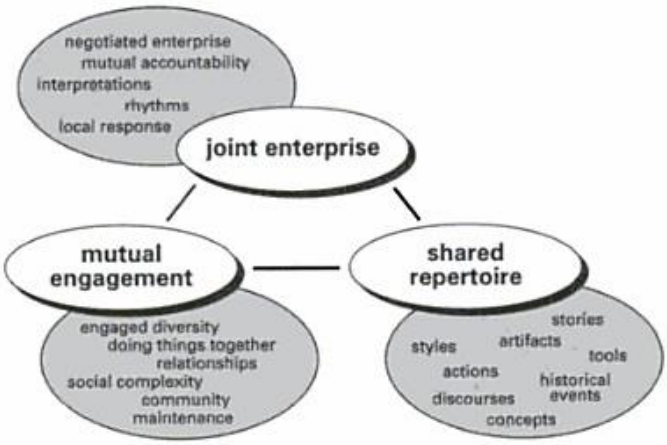

Figure 1 Dimensions of practice as the property of a community (Wenger, 1998, p. 73)

Since its original proposal in the early 1990s, the CoP model has been widely adopted both by academics and practitioners. Its innovative learning concept provides an alternative to a more traditional learning model which places a greater emphasis on the individual level and the acquisition of knowledge as an internal process (e.g. Bloom, 1956; Piaget, 1968; Mezirow, 1991). Apart from the application of CoP in the area of workplace or organisational learning (e.g. Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Fuller and Unwin, 2004a; Fuller et al., 2005; Harris and Simons, 2008; Aylen and Pryce, 2011), the notion of CoP is also evidenced in the studies of second language learning and English language learning where L1 and L2 affect how members participate in L2 communities (e.g. Toohey, 1998; Norton, 2001; Morita, 2004; Haneda, 2006; Barnawi, 2009). Specific to English for Specific Purposes or ESP, works concerning the CoP model are found to be more related to community members negotiating identities in professional discourses (e.g. Belcher, 1994; Freeman and Adam, 1996; Blakeslee, 1997; Bhatia, 2007; Wu and Badger, 2009; Bhatia et al., 2011; Chen, 2011).

ESP and CoPs

In a CoP, community members must negotiate their identities to participate successfully in the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Similarly, within the ESP context, with ESP classrooms in particular, classroom participants must also negotiate their identities and competence to participate as legitimate members. This is mainly due to the interdisciplinary nature of ESP, where the knowledge and skills of both the English language and the profession are significant. While social relationships appear crucial for social participation in CoPs, for ESP classrooms specific issues can contribute to identity and participation of classroom participants.

Among literature concerning CoPs and second language or English language learning, identity negotiation in L2 or English language classrooms for non-native speakers is often related to linguistic competence (i.e. L2 language proficiency) of language learners (e.g. Toohey, 1998; Morita, 2004; Barnawi, 2009). While this is a more common issue for English language teaching (ELT) including ESP, one particular dilemma in ESP classrooms which must be discussed is the subject knowledge of ESP teachers.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that ESP teachers ‘‘have to struggle to master language and subject matter beyond the bounds of their previous experience” (p. 160). To be able to do so, it appears that ESP teachers are required to have the knowledge beyond the English language. According to Ferguson (1997), the ‘knowledge of disciplinary cultures and values’ as well as the ‘knowledge of genre and discourse’ are also important for teaching ESP classes (p. 85). In ESP classrooms, it is the case where instructors are quite often working in a different discipline from that of the students, e.g. humanities-trained teachers and students working in the area of science and technology (Parkinson, 2013). Different types of knowledge, values and discourses, in this sense, enforce the process of identity negotiation among ESP classroom participants.

The use of L1/mother tongue and identities in English language classrooms

As mentioned earlier, there is evidence of studies in relation to how English language proficiency affects identity and participation in L2 classroom environments/CoPs (e.g. Toohey, 1998; Morita, 2004; Barnawi, 2009). A study by Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2005) suggests that classroom participants (both the teacher and the students) switch to L1 when their ability of L2 fails in the L2 classroom CoP.

The use of the first language of the speakers rather than the target language is still a controversial issue in English language teaching and learning (Sharma, 2006). The advocates of L2 use in the classroom point out a number of advantages when only English is used in English language classrooms. These include the greater exposure to English resulting in quicker learning process (Auerbach, 1993) and more effective results (Philipson, 1992) as well as students' confidence in using L2 (Jones, 2010). On the other hand, an 'all English classroom' enforced by teachers may obstruct meaningful communication leading to students' incomprehension and resentment (Harbord, 1992).

Mother tongue, in connection with translation in particular, not only solves communication issues but also acts as an efficient 'time saving device' for ELT professionals (Wharton, 2007) and ESP practitioners (Kavaliauskienė, 2009). In addition to facilitating communication, mother tongue can also build relationships between the teacher and the student (Harbord, 1992). While L2 is claimed to enhance students' confidence is using the target language (Jones, 2010), there is also evidence suggesting that L1 can be employed to support anxious, nervous, frightened and reluctant students with low-esteem and therefore helps the students to gain confidence in the classroom (Samadi, 2011). Despite various benefits of L1 in language classrooms, the overuse of mother means that students can be too dependent on L1 and as a result become disconnected with L2 (Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney, 2008). In this sense mother tongue then appears as 'an evasive maneuver which is to be used only in emergencies' (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 29).

Methods

The communities of practice model emphasises the significance of 'context' in which situated learning occurs (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For this reason, it is crucial that the context and the participants are discussed in this section. Research tools and data analysis are also part of the methods which provides justifications and explanations of the research process.

Context

The researcher was the English language instructor of the 40-hour English language training course in this study, which lasted from September to November 2011. The course objective was to provide knowledge and help the training participants (who are engineering professionals) to improve their technical report writing skills. As it was part of the in-house training programmes, the class was conducted at the training participants' workplace. The duration of the training was between 17.00 and 19.00 hrs every Monday and Wednesday.

Participants

For this research setting, there were ten training/student participants and one English language instructor who were all native speakers of Thai. Nine student participants were engineers and one student participant was a marketing executive whose work involved writing technical reports and business proposals (which required engineering knowledge). In terms of the English language proficiency, more than half of the students were intermediate level. Two were upper-intermediate and two were pre-intermediate (according to the placement test). Prior to data collection, all of the research participants were asked for their consent. After consent had been given, data collection began.

Research tools

This research project has adopted an ethnographic approach. This is due to the nature of the study which the researcher is a participant/practitioner in the studied ESP classroom, and thus cannot be totally excluded from the research setting. In other words, being a member of the classroom the researcher was 'living in the communities of the people being studied.... participating in their activities to one degree or another' focusing on 'what happens in a particular work locale or social institution when it is in operation' (Hammersley, 2006, p. 4). In this regard, participant observation became inevitable. The data was collected through the eyes of the researcher and recorded in fieldnotes.

To enable the process of 'triangulation' in research (Denzin, 1970; Stewart, 1998) to 'map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint' (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 254), other research tools of informal serial interviews and questionnaires were also employed in the study. The informal serial interviews occurred throughout the course when I wanted to explore certain issues as well as confirm data in the fieldnotes. Paper-based self-administered questionnaires were distributed two weeks before the course ended to complement the incomplete existing data and to confirm the data in the fieldnotes and the interviews.

In recording the data, I recorded all the conversations including interviews using a digital audio recorder rather than a video recorder to protect the participants' identity and privacy. Fieldnotes were typed in Word Documents to avoid the issue of readability. Questionnaires were kept in the original form; however the results were also tabulated and saved as a digital file for ease of use.

Data analysis process

The process of data analysis in this research was hermeneutic and circular (Patterson and Williams, 2002). Data interpretation began during participant observation and fieldnote taking. Listening to the digital audio clips and transcribing the classroom dialogues helped the researcher to interpret and see the significance in certain parts of the data (Ladapat and Lindsay, 1999; Bird, 2005). All the fieldnotes, the audio recordings, audio transcripts and questionnaire results were used as data for identifying and marking meaningful units as well as reviewing the emerging themes.

In this study the data analysis was both theory-driven and data-driven. Whereas part of the data was coded based on the themes in the reviewed literature, emerging data patterns beyond the literature review were also labelled. This resulted in an iterative process in data analysis where literature was further reviewed for a revised theoretical framework.

Findings

The findings are presented based on the emerging themes in the study. First of all, the use of mother tongue in identity negotiation in the studied classroom is discussed through the lens of CoPs. As the mother tongue emerges as a shared repertoire and a discursive practice, these concepts will be investigated in detail. Whereas the shared repertoire is evident in small talks, the notion of discursive practice is found more in classroom humour. Derived from the findings, these concepts of mother tongue as a shared repertoire and a discursive practice are analysed further in the ESP classroom context of this research.

Mother tongue/ L1 in identity negotiation in the studied ESP classroom

Conceptualising the studied ESP classroom as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), I found that the identities of classroom participants are much more ambiguous than the typology of newcomers becoming old-timers as first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), mainly due to the elements of the ESP discipline. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), newcomers are those with little knowledge and skills of a particular apprentice who develop to be old-timers as they become mastered in apprenticeship. Although I might be considered an English language teacher, I could still be an instructor in a 'strange and uncharted land' (Wu and Badger, 2009). As an ESP training course, technical report writing skills are a combination of two types of expertise: the English language and engineering. To participate in this particular classroom CoP, I must try to negotiate identity as an English language expert who is an 'expert newcomer' (Harris and Simons, 2008).

One issue as an ESP practitioner is the knowledge of disciplinary cultures and values as well as the knowledge of genre and discourse where the students were located (Ferguson, 1997). While I had prior experience teaching engineering companies, none of these firms were in exactly the same industry. Learning the language of the students' workplace CoP was therefore important for negotiating my identity while participating in the studied ESP classroom CoP. As Wenger (1998) states, learning the language of the community contributes to how a community member becomes an integral member of the CoP.

What is meant by language in the studied ESP classroom CoP does not only refer to the technical English as used in the real professional context. Also, it includes the understanding of the engineering language, e.g. their disciplinary cultures and values, and the workplace community's language. In other words, each engineering workplace CoP has its own elements of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire which are negotiated among community members. 'Routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of existence' are the shared repertoire which shape a group of individuals to become a community of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

At the beginning of the training programme, I entered the ESP classroom as an expert newcomer (Harris and Simons, 2008), an English language instructor with more knowledge in English but less in the engineering field and the company in this research. Despite my problematic role, I decided to adhere to my 'core identity' (Wenger, 1998) as an English language instructor while observing classroom social interactions and negotiating my identity accordingly. During the first ten minutes of the first lesson, all the conversations were in English. However, as I began to ask the students to introduce themselves in English, some of them appeared reluctant to speak English. According to the fieldnote data, some of the students even asked whether they could speak Thai from time to time. This is confirmed by the questionnaire results in which some of the training participants state '*my background knowledge is not solid enough'* or *'I have only a little background knowledge in English'*. With this in mind, I then used Thai, the mother tongue of both the students and myself to gain students confidence (Samadi, 2011) as well as to reduce linguistic barriers in communication and to build rapport (Harbord, 1992). At the same time, I was also aware of the fact that the overuse of L1 could disconnect the students from the English language (Rolin-Ianziti and Vrshney, 2008).

In this technical report writing class, it could be said that English was used in more common, casual conversations such as greetings. However, when the discussion topics required a more profound understanding, e.g. English grammar, I would switch to speaking

Thai to reduce linguistic barriers in understanding the concept, with a hope that this could help to retain students' participation. This is in conjunction with Walsh's (2011) notion of 'classroom interactional competence' (CIC) where teachers adopt the appropriate language and interactions in the classroom, which can help to motivate the students to participate (and consequently learn) in the classroom. For the studied ESP classroom, the use of mother tongue contributes to identity negotiation of the classroom teacher who tries to belong to the community and build relationships with the training participants.

Using the classroom participants' mother tongue, Thai, has further implications in addition to the benefits previously mentioned. When the classroom participants felt more confident in talking to the teacher due to fewer linguistic barriers, they were able to tell stories and share knowledge about their workplace CoP. For example, during one writing task where the students were assigned to write a proposal for an incentive programme, Thai was used in discussing the writing topic. This was where I learned about the company's work routines, work issues as well the employees' attitudes towards their workplace and their local/non-local colleagues. While it might be true that these stories can also be shared in English, certain issues which require cultural understanding of L1 speakers might not be accessed at the same extent. As Liu (2009) suggests, emotional resonance is shared among native speakers of the same language in communities of practice.

Mother tongue as a shared repertoire: Small talks

The different discourses between English language professionals and engineering professionals pose a question about the studied ESP classroom. If a CoP must consist of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, how can community members overcome this conflict? According to Lave and Wenger (1991), conflicts in CoPs can be resolved via the process of social reproduction where participants mutually engage and negotiate the meanings of the CoP. In an ESP setting, this mutual negotiation of the CoP language can be problematic. It seems that there is no recipe of what the shared, agreed language should look like.

Based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'situatedness', the shared language or the 'shared repertoire' of a CoP depends on the context of the CoP itself. In this study, it appears that the mother tongue of Thai was employed in conflict resolution among the English language teacher and the engineering professionals. Despite coming from different professional discourses, one element the classroom participants share was being native speakers of Thai. While English was the learned target language, the data shows that the use of mother tongue also created a sense of 'us' and 'them' and a sense of 'belonging' (Wenger, 1998) to Thai-speaking community and this was especially evident in workplace gossip or small talks.

In conceptualising the mother tongue of Thai as a shared repertoire, I analyse stretches of talk in the audio transcripts. There is evidence of workplace gossip (in Thai) where Thai employees gossiped about their expatriate colleagues who were regarded as 'Expats' rather than one of us who were Thais. Including me in these small talks means that I am an 'integrated member' of the workplace community of practice through my role of being involved in the talk (Tsang, 2008), and being allowed to know about the insider's stories. More importantly my ability to talk to the student participants in Thai creates a sense of 'belonging' (Wenger, 1998) as a community member who is a native speaker of Thai. For this research setting, while there appeared to be some kind of division between the English speakers (expat employees) and Thai speakers (local employees) which might be considered

racist, I decided not to propose this view to the students. This was mainly because the students might feel reluctant to share stories such as this with me.

Mother tongue as a discursive practice: Classroom humour

As mentioned earlier, mother tongue is used in identity negotiation and conflict resolution between the ESP teacher and the students who are engineering professionals. In the CoP model, the successful implementation of these processes is heavily influenced by social relationships among members (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The use of L1 in building rapport is evident not only in small talks but also in classroom humour.

Throughout the training programme, jokes and laughter were employed in every lesson by both the teacher and the students. Unlike some casual conversations in which English was also found, these humourous talks were exclusively in Thai, the mother tongue of all classroom participants. Ross (2013) states that humour is an aspect of language in which individuals show their 'allegiance to a group' and not only 'social context' but also 'personal taste' appear crucial in creating and receiving humour. In this sense, the humour found in this ESP classroom can illustrate an individual's 'shared understandings' or 'existence of common ground' with other interlocutors in a social setting (Marra and Holmes, 2007). While the shared humour can be regarded as the shared repertoire among the classroom participants, there is strong evidence that humour in this classroom is a discursive practice. By the term 'discursive practice', it is 'the production of meanings by participants as they employ in local actions the verbal, nonverbal, and interactional resources that they command' which 'requires attention to how employment of such resources reflects and creates the processes and meanings of the community in which the local action occurs' (Young, 2008: 2).

It should be noted that humour is not necessarily effective in every classroom. For humour to be understood and accepted in a community, it requires not only shared understandings, but also the shared production of meanings by classroom participants. In the studied ESP classroom, humour was perceived by the students as a desirable behaviour (whereas it may appear as undesirable in some classrooms). Students made jokes with each other and with the teacher, and the classroom teacher also reciprocated humour accordingly. Data shows that humour in this ESP classroom was based on cultural understandings among Thai native speakers, e.g. the use of words such as *'hi-so'*[2], as well as shared production of meaning occurring during the training, e.g. the perception of one student as a joker and making jokes with him. As the class progressed, humour became clearly evident as a discursive practice, and it was the use of mother tongue which contributed to the peer acceptance of humour.

What does the use of mother tongue/ L1 inform us about this ESP classroom?

The use of mother tongue in casual conversations in the studied classroom significantly contributed to social relationships among classroom participants. It helped both the student and the teachers to negotiate their identities and participate legitimately throughout the training programme. With smooth relationships enabled by the use of Thai, the ESP teacher who was an 'expert newcomer' (Harris and Simons, 2008) was able to learn more about the students' workplace stories and their professional discipline and discourse.

[2] The term *'hi-so'* is a shortened expression for high society. It is used to refer to people from the high-class society. As a colloquial term, *'hi-so'* is also employed as an adjective to describe somebody who can do something really well. It can also be used to describe something that is very good, i.e. beyond what is normal.

On the other hand, the students felt more relaxed and confident to participate in an L2 classroom where language barriers could prevent them from fully communicating in this classroom CoP. The evidence in this study shows that the use of mother tongue could help to retain students' participation despite their English language proficiency.

L1 use in humourous talks, specifically, is beneficial for classroom participants. With the mother tongue of Thai employed exclusively in humour, the shared cultural understandings can make humour more effective. When humour is effective, classroom participants can make most use of humour. As Watson and Emerson (1988) state:

> *When humour is planned as part of the teaching strategy, a caring environment is established, there is an attitude of flexibility, and communication between student and teacher is that of freedom and openness. The tone is set allowing for human error with freedom to explore alternatives in the learning situation. This reduces the authoritarian position of the teacher, allowing the teacher to be a facilitator of the learning process. Fear and anxiety, only natural in a new and unknown situation, becomes less of a threat, as a partnership between student and instructor develops.*
> (p. 89)

Despite the aforementioned advantages, it should be noted that the use of mother tongue in casual conversations including humour in this study is a 'shared repertoire' and a 'discursive practice'. Viewed through the lens of CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the mother tongue of Thai is employed by classroom participants to negotiate their identities to participate in the technical report writing classroom. However, to make this L1 use successful, it must be negotiated through the CoP's 'mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire' (Wenger, 1998).

Research limitations

This ethnographic study explores one single ESP classroom at an engineering company in Thailand. Thus, it should be kept in mind that this research is context specific and the results may not be generalised in other contexts. Nonetheless, the research can still act as a guideline for academics, researchers, practitioners and those who are interested in a sociocultural approach (i.e. CoP) to English language teaching and learning, with a special attention to ESP and English language training in the workplace as well the use of mother tongue in this context.

As all classroom participants in the research setting are native speakers of Thai, there is also a research limitation of the monolingual context. Although there are more non-native English teachers than native English teachers worldwide (Harbord, 1992), there is a case where the classroom participants are multinational and/or multilingual. In such as a classroom environment, the results of this study may appear too simplistic and thus may require a further development for research implications in multilingual classroom settings.

Pedagogical implications

The results of the study provide pedagogical implications for English language teachers with a special attention to ESP practitioners in a number of ways. These include:

- ***The use of mother tongue to build relationships within the ESP classroom***
  Despite the dilemma of different disciplinary discourses, ESP practitioners can employ the use of L1 in the classroom to build relationships with students. These social relationships are significant for creating a friendlier learning environment. Feeling that the teacher is not an authoritative figure and that he/she can talk the 'same language', the students are likely to share stories whether about themselves, their job, or their workplace. Since there are fewer boundaries in sharing knowledge, i.e. professional boundaries and linguistic boundaries, the ESP practitioner is able to learn more about values and attitudes within the professional discipline.

- ***The use of humour in L1 in the English language classroom***
  ELT and ESP practitioners can consider using humour to create a less stressful classroom environment where individuals are allowed to make human error. The cultural notes shared among the L1 in particular can ensure that jokes can be better understood and perhaps accepted among peer. Moreover, with a less authoritarian position, the teacher then becomes a true CoP member, who facilitates learning through mutual negotiation, joint enterprise and shared repertoire within the CoP. The teacher-student dyad where the teacher dictates the community is disregarded in this sense.

- ***The roles of ESP practitioners***
  This study views the ESP teacher as a community member who must also negotiate his/her identity, similarly to other classroom participants. As a member who is not fully expert but rather an expert newcomer, ESP practitioners should participate in ESP classrooms as an individual who is willing to learn from the students/professionals whose knowledge and skills are vital for the ESP practice. While the ESP professional is the 'language teacher', the student/professional is also regarded as the 'subject teacher' (Chen, 2011). Instead of the more traditional teacher-student dyad relationship, teachers interacting with students within a less hierarchical structure of communities of practice can lead to smoother relationships, which can encourage story and knowledge sharing within the classroom community.

Research implications

This research views the studied ESP classroom as a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through the roles of community members, the ESP teacher and the students must negotiate their identities to participate in the classroom. This sociocultural approach to language teaching and learning can act as an alternative for ELT and ESP academics and researchers to adopt the CoP model to explore classroom social interactions in relation to language teaching and learning. One fruitful research line is how an individual (both the teacher and the students) relating him/herself to the social world and the social practice in an ESP classroom is in juxtaposition with knowledge sharing and professional boundaries. Identity and social participation in this sense can also be linked to the ESP notion of 'negotiated syllabus' where the content is based on the mutual agreement between teacher and students within the classroom context based on the 'wishes and needs of the learners in conjunction with the expertise, judgment and the advice of the teacher' (Hyland, 2011, p. 208).

In addition to the application of the CoP framework, how mother tongue or L1 is in connection with identity and participation in an ELT/ESP classroom CoP also presents as an interesting agenda. Notwithstanding the benefits of L1 in identity and participation in an ESP classroom CoP in this study, it will be useful to explore the downsides of mother tongue in this context. In a bilingual or multilingual classroom, in particular, the investigation can include L1 and L2 use and the process of code-switching in relation identity negotiation and participation.

Conclusion

Based on an ethnographic approach, this research explores the use of the mother tongue in identity and participation in a 40-hour English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom at an engineering company in Thailand. Through the lens of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the data analysis and interpretation shows positive elements of mother tongue used by both the teacher and the students in the studied ESP classroom CoP. Being native speakers of Thai, all classroom participants use Thai to build relationships, share workplace stories and disciplinary knowledge, as well as sustain participation in the classroom community. Mother tongue emerges as a 'shared repertoire' (Wenger, 1998) and a 'discursive practice' (Young, 2008) involving in identity negotiation and participation of the English language and engineering professionals.

Conceptualised as a shared repertoire and a discursive practice, L1 is exclusively found in small talks and humour. As an 'expert newcomer' (Harris Simons, 2008), the ESP practitioner is able to use mother tongue in casual conversations including humourous ones to build relationships and belong to the ESP classroom community. While this appears useful, the use of mother tongue is context dependent. Academics, researchers and practitioners who wish to adopt these concepts in their practice must therefore be aware of this aspect of the study.

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