

Building EFL Students' Reservoir through Multimodal Classroom: Teacher's Perspective

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Abstract—The ever-growing ideology of English as global language has brought significant effect to education. Moving from *the want* to learn the language, English literacy has become *the need*. Learning English thus becomes an urge, especially in English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. Teaching English needs to go over teaching the elements of the language itself, but more to encouraging learners to be able to negotiate meaning in their purposeful interaction. In EFL teaching and learning setting, various studies focusing on the pedagogy have been conducted. This study is, indeed, leading to the pedagogy of English, focusing on the resources that teachers can utilize to create a conducive environment for learning and building the students' reservoir. In addition, the concept of space in educational setting has given a valuable contribution to carry out pedagogical approach multimodally. This paper examines the employment of multimodal classroom in an EFL university context in Indonesia to develop students' reservoir of English. How multimodality and the use of technology provide affordances and possible constraints to the teaching and learning process is as well presented according to published researches on the same field of study.

Index Terms—EFL context, multimodal space, students' reservoir.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human communication is about producing and negotiating meaning in interaction. Moreover, each human interaction "is always new in some way" [1], which explains that meaning undergoes production and reproduction each time people communicate. All the produced and negotiated meanings in the interaction become the symbolism and embodiment of culture of a community in which those people belong to. In relation to the meaning production, it is imperative to note that language is not the only semiotic resource employed, as "the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged through a variety of modes or channels, of which language is one; but not, of course, the only one – there are many other semiotic modes besides" [2]. This notion, thus, encourages researchers to no longer see language as an isolated system, rather, to investigate the combinational use of language and other semiotic resources in meaning-making processes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Multimodality

Multimodality, or multisemiotic, is the simultaneous employment of several meaning-potential systems such as language, picture, music, layout, colour, gesture and so forth

to construct meaning [3]-[5]. Those meaning-potential systems are labelled as modes, which are "semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action" [4]. As the centrality of the notion is on the use of multiple modes attended to as part of meaning-making, it is imperative to note that each mode is supporting one another according to their own affordances, that is what a semiotic resource permits to do which brings "consequences for representation and communication" to best encoding meaning [6].

The study on multimodality has been of great interest in the last decade after the shift from long use of monomodality. Apart from three-dimensional space [7]-[9], multimodality is applied in various discipline including but not limited to Mathematics [10], Science [11] and Literature [12]; across various genre including printed advertisement [13], webpage [14], [15], online newspaper [16], and textbook [17].

B. Multimodality: on Time and Space Dimensions

The notion of multimodality is time-engaged and spatially realised. As regards the time dimension, this is perceived as resemiotization [5]. This process "is about how meaning making shifts from context to context, from one stage of a practice to the next". It allows the already-provided meaning in one medium to be recontextualized in other semiotic resources regarding to the appropriateness of mode in certain context. Take Jember University undergraduate student's final project as example on how multimodality is perceived as resemiotization. Under the requirement of the curriculum, students are required to compose a final project based on their interest. First, they need to discuss their topic of interest with their supervisor, which later they need to formulate their idea from that discussion in the form of written research proposal. As this proposal is accepted by both supervisors and examiners after going through presentation and examination process, the students are then allowed to undertake their research. The final product of this process is a printed bachelor thesis. This example shows how National Curriculum is resemiotized through students-advisors oral discussion, then by a written research proposal, next by carrying out research, and finally by a printed bachelor thesis.

Kress *et al.* [7] and Stenglin [9] both discuss multimodality in spatial dimension. Space is "the organization of all three-dimensional spaces: indoor and outdoor as well as built spaces and the natural environment", especially, the three-dimensional built space which "comprises three intersecting planes: an overhead plane consisting of a roof and/or ceiling, a wall plane and a base plane comprising a floor": museum [9]. How space embodied multimodality can be analysed through how ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings are constructed within the dimension of space with

the help of multimodal objects, room layout, design, lightening and so forth. Example of this is, as provided by Kress *et al.* [7], the English classroom. How teachers configure their classroom by employing various modalities is on their careful considerations as their way to introduce and let their students experience English through teaching-learning process, while at the same time to answer and challenge the National Curriculum. Jewitt [8] sees this configuration of pedagogy as design, in which arrangement and display of classroom, employment of technology and other resources are parts of it.

This paper focuses on the employment of multimodality in classroom setting to build students' reservoir of meaning in English for Foreign Language (EFL) context. The affordances and constraints that multimodality brought towards pedagogical practices are presented in the following discussion.

III. AFFORDANCES AND CONSTRAINTS OF EMPLOYING MULTIMODAL RESOURCES

The employment of multimodality and new technology in the 21st-century classroom provides several affordances towards teaching and learning context. Firstly, multimodal and digital literacy provide abundant of accessible resources and materials for learning on the internet. The University of Sydney web pages provides useful materials for learning academic writing genre in university context. Through its Learning Centre website, http://sydney.edu.au/stuserv/learning_centre/resour.shtml, plenty of downloadable materials are available for both its students and non-students around the world. In addition, The Oatmeal, <http://theoatmeal.com/comics/ie>, is also an impressive web pages that provides writing-related materials packaged in the form of comical strip, employing both language and visual imagery to make meaning.



Fig. 1. The use of i.e. (taken from:

<http://s3.amazonaws.com/theoatmeal-img/comics/ie/3.png>).

Those web pages are the product of new genre created by the new technology in the form of multimodal hypertext platform. This hypertext pages employs various modes e.g.

language, pictures, layout, colour, and hyperlink, to support the meaning-making processes. Through this hypertext platform, students are able to implement autonomous learning out of the classroom, in support of their role as independent learners [18]-[21].

The second implementation of the new technology is that it provides platform for writing assessment and for giving students' feedback. The use of Wikis in students' writing assignment is reported to contribute to students' awareness of linguistic features such as grammar and sentence structure in their learning writing process [22]. It also promotes students' consideration of their readers, seen from the usage of interactional resources such as "hedges, engagement markers, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions" in their posts [22]. These findings promote that learning objectives contributes to students' success in their academic life [23].

Subsequently, S  r's [24] study on the use of screencasting software namely 'Jing', a technology-based video recording broadcasted through the internet that includes "video-recordings of a computer's on-screen activities", also provides positive value of computer-mediated program. 'Jing' provides sophisticated platform for teachers to 'write' their feedback by recording their evaluation process on students' work, thus students can hear and see the feedback given by their teachers as if they were on face-to-face evaluation.

The advantage of technology is also evident in the pedagogical design such as blended learning. Macquarie University, for instance, employs iLearn site to support the blended learning for its in-campus and distant students, asides from face-to-face teaching activities for in-campus students and Echo360 for its distant student. Teachers can employ the iLearn site as platform for assessing students' writing in which students post their short commentaries or argumentation on particular issue addressed by their teachers. Other researchers investigate the use of social media such as Facebook [25] and YouTube [26] to promote multimodality in their writing pedagogy.

Despite of its affordances, employing new technology in classroom in general also has some constraints. The first barrier relates to attending technology into classroom. Time allocation as well as human resources are also considered to contribute to its limitations. In addition, the technological development is even reported to contribute to serious issue related to plagiarism in academic writing context.

Access to sophisticated technology is needed in order to bring computer-mediated communication into classroom pedagogy. However, "computer-based technologies are still largely the privilege of teachers and students in the more wealthy industrialised countries" [27], in a case that not all institutions have the financial ability to accommodate this pedagogical design. To overcome this situation, institution's preparedness is needed regarding to the budgeting issue before deciding to employ technology to their curriculum.

In addition, the limited time available to compose multimodal materials and the differences in techno-literacy background, both from students and teachers themselves, constrain the use of technology to enhance classroom activities [28]. Based on these reasons, it is imperative to conduct training for teachers beforehand that can help them

to cope with technology when it comes to applying multimodal teaching in class.

The third issue on its constrains relates to plagiarism. In relation to the digital literacy, plagiarism can be defined as “literary theft, stealing (by copying) the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as one’s own without crediting the source” [29]. It is considered a “heinous crime within the academic community” [30], with mostly addressed to international students [31]. For this reason, university as academic institution posits this issue on academic integrity among its academicians.

Concerning to plagiarism issue, it is imperative to provide students with the knowledge about citation and referencing system, as it is argued that “study strategies, and knowledge of genres and plagiarism rules, are not written in the DNA” [32]. Teachers have to make this knowledge explicit in their teaching and learning process. It is also on students’ responsibility to do self-learning, practicing paraphrasing regularly, as well as attending workshop on academic writing or visiting self-study centres provided by their university.

IV. THE USE OF MULTIMODAL SPACE IN SPECIFIC LANGUAGE-RELATED CONTEXT

English is perceived as foreign language in Indonesian context. However, this situation is challenged by the head department of English, Faculty of Humanities (previously Faculty of Letters), Jember University, as this institution encourages its academics (lecturers, students, staffs) to make English as the academic language in this academic environment. No written discourse is manifesting this convention, bringing both positive and negative impacts to the community. Teaching-learning processes are administered in English, but Bahasa Indonesia and even local language are naturally spoken between students. The phenomena foster a group of students of English department to take initiative in establishing academic English community, which later named as English Corner (henceforth EC). By the department, a special room, which in this discussion is labelled as classroom, is provided for the community to operate its activities. A lecturer is appointed as the coordinator of the room as well as supervisor for mentors volunteering in this community.

Joining as member and volunteering as mentor during my second year of undergraduate in EC allowed me to take part in some activities as well as to manage the classroom. As mentor, I was assigned to a small study group, consisting of ten first year students of English department. Three of my mentees were international students from Thailand and the rest were Indonesian coming from different ethnicities. The description of social activities afforded by the dimension of space of the classroom is presented as follow. To note that all figures displayed in the following discussion belong to myself, thus all rights reserved.

A. Discourses and Genres

Fig. 2 below is the electronic version of the printed X-banner displaying activities and services provided by EC for its member. In real situation, the X-banner was displayed outside of EC classroom as announcement for English

department students, functioning as promotional media to persuade English department students to becoming member of EC.



Fig. 2. X-banner: Activities and services provided by EC.

Displayed in Fig. 2, ‘ngopi’ is a specialized discourse of the community member. In Bahasa Indonesia, *ngopi* means having a cup of coffee. However, for this community, the meaning of *ngopi* goes beyond what it literally means: discussing topic of interest for members’ undergraduate final project. The topics of the discussion are relating to Linguistic studies such as Phonetics, Discourse Analysis, Second Language Acquisition, and so forth. During the discussion, members are constrained by rules as well as by academic discourses of the department. Thus, members should demonstrate their role as academician, using academic language.

All facilities provided by EC are only for its members. Thus, the sign in Fig. 3 (notice printed in red) acts as community’s regulation which allows and constraints English department students to participate and experience those activities. In other words, before joining my study group, my mentees had to assign themselves as member of EC.



Fig. 3. 'Members Only' sign.

B. Classroom Design

The classroom is designed to accommodate twenty people in a way that it affords various arrangement to be made (see Fig. 4 for the displays and arrangements of the EC classroom). To support this function, folded chairs are chosen to be placed in this classroom so that they can be moved and removed depending on the activities conducted. The choice of material for seating affords classroom to be arranged in various seating arrangements, e.g. traditional or semi-circle layout. These arrangements fit for a formal occasion, for example when I was conducting a TOEFL preparation session for my study group. The floor is also covered by carpet, which is not installed in any other classrooms in the faculty, so mentors can conduct a non-formal and less structural activities. There was a time when I removed all the chairs and let my mentees sat on the floor, because I wanted to build a deeper interpersonal relationship with my mentees in an informal discussion or sharing session. These arrangements support the notion that classroom configurations have significant influence on the activities inside the classroom as well as the bounding between teachers and students [33].



Fig. 4. EC classroom layout.

Regarding to furniture layouts, mentor's desk is placed in front of the classroom but it is not permanently set there, so basically it can be moved. However, mentors have agreed that it is perfect to place the desk in front of the classroom so that it will be easier for them to control the class. When the classroom is set on traditional seating arrangement, mentees' seat position is facing the mentor's desk so it allows face-to-face interaction between mentors and their mentees. In addition, file organizers are set on specific places that is on the additional table near the mentor's desk and on the display cabinet near the cupboards respectively. These organizers, and the cupboards, are functioning as storage, in which documents and reading materials are organized according to its type. This arrangement helps members to shorten their time when looking for certain document or book. As for additional information, the reading materials provided in EC

are not only valuable academically but also have entertainment feature, so that members will find English enjoyable to learn.



Fig. 5. Some reading material collections of EC.

On the wall (see Fig. 4 about classroom arrangement above), pictures of members' participating in conference and exchange program are displayed to encourage the old and new EC members to join such activities to develop themselves as academicians. Subsequently, posters containing motivational words are on display to keep the members on track and be persistent as academicians. Further, maps of America and some landscape pictures of famous places all over the world are exhibited to build and broadening members' vision of the world, as the symbolism of hope and dream. All things considered, the employment of multimodal arrangement and the displayed objects are of community's consideration on how can members best perceiving the world, especially as academicians.

V. LIMITATION

This study is only seen from teacher's perspective. Thus, further study on students' view on the employment of multimodality to build their reservoir of English need to be conducted to provide a scientific prove on the effectivity of engaging multimodal resources, including ICT, in enhancing students' meaning-making process.

VI. CONCLUSION

Multimodality enables and constraints meaning-making process according to the affordances of the employed modes. In classroom setting, design and arrangement are multimodally employed to help make the classroom an effective learning environment. Such multimodal arrangement is chosen in favour of institution's careful consideration on how to accommodate the meaning-making process through classroom's social activities as well as to achieve the social purpose of the institution.

Teachers and institutions can make use of the affordances that new technology offers to design their pedagogical practices. Subsequently, the new technology promotes new approach to multimodal literacy. Thus, by introducing students to this literacy, it opens possibilities for students to get to know more about English. In addition, employing new technology in teaching promotes creative learning environment. Students can explore their creativity when composing their writing by employing various modes, for

example. Furthermore, they can access various materials on the internet that can help them to independently learning particular academic genre that they encounter during their study periods.

In regards to the barriers of attending technology inside the classroom, it is important to note that being multimodal does not always have to depend on the sophisticated technology because it is on teachers' consideration to make the most of available sources to promote effective learning. Teachers also should consider the negative impact of technological development to academic context, especially regarding to plagiarism issue, by providing an explicit teaching on plagiarism and referencing system for their students.

Altogether, the succeed of employing multimodality to classroom pedagogy is worth promoting to build EFL students' reservoir of English.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in writing this research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All activities related to the research, data analysis, paper writing are done solely by the author only.

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