English as a foreign language lecturers' language power bases in the high context culture of Toraja

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

This study overviews the English as a foreign language (EFL) lecturers' language power bases in the high-context culture of Toraja. The writer applied a qualitative study method with a case study design. The writer applied purposive sampling and the subjects of this study are three EFL lecturers. The writer got the data through video observation and interviews. The data analysis technique used is using transcription and coding. It is revealed that the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power-referent power, coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, and expert power-were observed in the high context culture of Toraja, a common cultural practice among the Toraja learners. Referent power was evident when the lecturer was able to establish a connection with the learners based on shared cultural norms. Coercive power was demonstrated when the lecturer used guilt to pressure learners who were unwilling to do a class presentation. Reward power was characterized by the lecturer providing incentives to learners who complied with requests. Legitimate power was observed when the lecturer maintained strict control over the classroom. Additionally, expert power was identified when the lecturer shared their knowledge and expertise in addressing gaps in the study area.

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1. INTRODUCTION

High-context cultures, such as Toraja, are known to place a high value on contextual cues and implicit communication, where power dynamics may be deeply embedded in cultural norms and values. In such cultures, language power bases, which refer to the sources of power that individuals draw upon to assert their authority or influence, may be unique and different from those in low-context cultures [1], [2]. Exploring the language power bases of English as a foreign language (EFL) lecturers in Toraja could provide insights into how cultural context shapes their use of language in classroom settings. Language power bases play a crucial role in EFL classrooms as they can impact the dynamics of teacher-student interactions [3], classroom management [2], and students' language learning outcomes [4]. Understanding the language power bases that EFL lecturers utilize in a high context culture like Toraja can shed light on how they establish and maintain authority, build rapport, and effectively communicate with their students, which can have implications for EFL pedagogy and teacher training in a similar cultural context.

Several studies related to language power bases in the classroom have been carried out by several researchers such as the results of studies that confirm that legitimate power used by lecturers implied threatening acts which may impose the students' esteem [5], the various forms of power that were at play within the classroom setting [6], related expert and referent power [7], It was found that the student's utilization of the internet has positively impacted their academic self-assurance, independence, and connection with their lecturers. However, it has also widened the gap in the student-lecturer relationship in terms of expert and referent power. While, related to contexts of inclusion and exclusion is framed by concepts of "general" and "concrete" selves, as well as classroom power dynamics that involve assigning ownership, creating alliances, and engaging in persuasion [8]. The complexity of language power bases in the classroom, with multiple forms of power at play, the impact of technology on student-lecturer relationships, and the various dynamics involved in power dynamics within the classroom setting.

Other ethnic characteristics implemented in teaching show a positive impact on the teaching and learning process. Contemporary Chinese school leaders who demonstrate success are shaped by the enduring impact of traditional Confucian values [9]. Next, in higher education in Massachusetts, students have varying paces of learning, diverse cultural backgrounds, and differing levels of skills and knowledge, such as creativity and proficiency in digital technologies. In Indonesia, cultural-based learning is also implemented and studied through research. Although Indonesian culture was incorporated into different subjects and learning activities, the teaching of soft diplomacy was not effectively integrated into the language-teaching content and methodology [10]. In the case of the Aceh tribe, the school's culture is centered on a firm commitment to peace, and the practices that foster the professional growth of teachers are evident in the school's management approach, learning facilitation, and teacher-to-teacher relationships. In the Minahasa tribe, the viewpoints of EFL teachers from Minahasa, Indonesia offer valuable perspectives for creating a foundational model for cultural instruction in junior high schools within Minahasa and other similar educational settings. This present study aims to investigate the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power that shape relationships in high context culture of Toraja.

The representation of power relates to how a person or group of people portrays, displays, or represents power (dominates, influences, and forces the activity of others) through something else and is done through a sign or symbol, in this case, it is the language [11]. In the classroom context, the lecturers' language power is represented through a directive, expressive, and assertive speech acts [12], [13]. The context of "a person" in this study is the lecturer. Power is interpreted as individuals' or groups' ability to restrict the wishes of other individuals/groups of society. Power is used to look at the so-called controls. One person or group controls another person or group through speech. Of course, in this case, the controls are not in physical form, but rather in mental and psychic forms [14]. Therefore, the representation of lecturers' language power is a form of lecturers' power embodiment raised through language as a delivery medium.

The problem in this situation raised from the power dynamics between the lecturer, who is typically older and considered an authority figure, and the learner, who is younger and in a subordinate role. The cultural value of paternalism, where authority figures are expected to be paternalistic and authoritative, leads to an unequal power dynamic in the lecturer-learner relationship. The lecturer adopted a top-down approach, expecting obedience and respect from the learner, while the learner felt obliged to show deference and not question the lecturer's authority. Furthermore, the cultural norm of respect for older individuals in Indonesian society impacted the dynamics of the lecturer-learner relationship in Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI) Toraja. The learner felt hesitant to challenge the lecturer's ideas or express dissent due to the cultural value of showing respect to older individuals. This hindered the learner's ability to freely express their opinions or engage in critical thinking, which are important aspects of the learning process. As a result, the implicit cultural norms related to power distance, paternalism, and respect for older individuals created challenges in the lecturer-learner relationship in UKI Toraja. Learners felt limited in expressing their thoughts and opinions, and the lecturer did not receive feedback or constructive criticism from learners, which hindered effective learning and critical thinking. It also contributed to an unbalanced power dynamic, where the lecturer's authority is unquestioned, and the learner's autonomy is compromised. Addressing and navigating these cultural dynamics is essential for fostering a healthy and effective lecturer-learner relationship in UKI Toraja.

The study of language and power in the organization, social, and political aspects have been widespread right now. However, the study about the relationship between language and power in education view is rare, especially in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms [15]. The phenomena of using power in the classroom cannot be avoided as long as there are interactions between lecturers and learners. The lecturers and learners negotiate power and exercise social influence together as they co-create meaning and communicate in ways that facilitate learning, yet the mechanisms through which such processes occur remain mostly uninvestigated [16], [17].

The proposed solution to the problems and claims described in this situation requires addressing the cultural dynamics that are impacting the lecturer-learner relationship in UKI Toraja. Here are some steps that could be taken: promote awareness and understanding of cultural norms, encourage open communication and

feedback, promote mutual respect and equality, create a safe space for learners, and Foster a student-centered approach [18]–[22]. By addressing and navigating the cultural dynamics at play, promoting open communication, fostering critical thinking, promoting mutual respect and equality, providing training and support for lecturers, creating a safe space for learners, and adopting a student-centered approach, it is possible to foster a healthy and effective lecturer-learner relationship in UKI Toraja that promotes effective learning and critical thinking skills among learners. Due to those problems and claims, this study aims to investigate the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power that shape relationships in high context culture of Toraja.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied a qualitative study method [23]. To solve the problem, the writer applied a case study design [24]. In a case study design, the researcher collects and analyzes data from various sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and artefacts to gain an in-depth understanding of the case being studied [25]. This study is a case study that is about the culture of lecturers. The setting is the campus of the Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, Indonesia. In choosing the subject, the writer applied purposive sampling [26]. The subjects of this study are three lecturers of the English Education Program Study of UKI Toraja. The subjects' origin is Toraja, and they consistently applied Torajan culture in teaching.

For this study, the data was collected and analyzed in the form of observation and interviews. Observation and interview are the processes of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing and interviewing people and places at a study site [27]. The writer observed and noticed: the types of lecturers' language power in EFL teaching and the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power that shape relationships in the high context culture of Toraja. Observation data through video recording and interviews were analyzed through transcription and coding. First, the writer transcribed all recording data of classroom talk, classroom activities, and interviews word for word. Then, the data was coded to identify recurring themes under each category. Furthermore, the data interpretations were referred back to the participants for the writer's perusal of the truthfulness, thus ensuring the internal validity of the present study [28].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the author provides a comprehensive overview of the language power bases held by EFL lecturers within the high-context culture of Toraja. This entails a detailed examination of the sources of linguistic influence and authority that these lecturers possess in a cultural context where communication relies heavily on contextual cues, non-verbal elements, and shared cultural knowledge. Furthermore, the author delves into a deeper analysis by elucidating the specific traits and attributes of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies. These characteristics are closely linked to the five distinct bases of power that play a pivotal role in shaping relationships within this cultural milieu. These bases of power are likely to act as overarching influences that interact with and impact the dynamics of communication and interaction in this context. The elucidation of these elements aims to provide a richer understanding of how power and language intersect within the intricate social fabric of Toraja's high-context culture.

3.1. Referent power: establishing a connection with the learners based on shared cultural norms

The way the lecturer in delivering learning materials in class has it is characteristics. The learning activities conducted by informant 1 when teaching study and methodology courses are so unique. One way by informant 1 is by elaborating on the habit of the Toraja people which is the culture of the cock-fighting. The habit is associated with the topic discussed; the sensitive issue that needs to be considered by learners when taking study data. The transcription of the lecturer's talk in class is:

> "*Sensitive For example, you want to know someone if he or she likes to go to wooden trees every Sunday or not. It is a sensitive issue, anyway? Well, if I want to know a man who often goes to bamboo trees every Sunday, then I say, "I went to your house at two o'clock, where are you? You are not at home. For example, He replied, "Oh yes, I am out of the streets. However, Mount Singki had activities all day, namely the activity of cockfighting.*" (Informant 1, lecturer)

In the context of the conversation in the class, informant 1 explains the lecture material, which avoids sensitive question issues in study interview instruments. To explain the topic, he took an example of one of the Toraja cultures of social practice, cockfighting. The activities of cockfighting in the Toraja community are prohibited if it is gambling, but if it is part of the Death party ritual (*rambu solo'* ritual), it is

not forbidden. Furthermore, informant 1 explained the existence of cockfighting (*Bulangan londong*) in Toraja culture.

> "*Culturally, as the results of an interview with Palilli, a Toraja cultural expert that the activity of cockfighting (Bulangan londong) was carried out in a ceremony of grief, only devoted to the nobility or leader. However, not all of the nobility were automatically aired.*" (Informant 1, interview)

From the explanation, informant 1 uses referent power in explaining the lecture material to his learners. He supposes the activities of cockfighting with sensitive question types in study interview activities. Referent power refers to the lecturer's speech in identifying everyday things or habits in explaining the material to the learners. The activity of their own is a common thing that is generally known to the Toraja community. By using terms of activities that learners generally know, they can easily understand the learning materials. Referent power is the foundation for the relationship between two people, in class culture, it is based between a teacher and a learner if a learner feels attracted to the strengths and advantages of a teacher, then the more durable referent power is owned by a teacher [7], [29].

3.2. Coercive power: using guilt to pressure learners who were unwilling to do a class presentation
The interaction between lecturer and learners in classroom learning is always colored with the dynamic of learning. The lecturer on the position of transferring aspects such as behavior, affective, and cognitive. In this context, informant 2 provides feedback on learners' attitudes that are not disciplined in preparing the class presentations in the seminar on ELT:

> "*How do we want to conduct the presentation, how do we want to correct if you don't present in front of the class? Is there anyone bringing it? I will give you a correction about the hard copy that you give me that I brought to my house last week. I want to crosscheck some of your written work and some of the mistakes you wrote in chapter one. I did not text you last night because I think you must know if there is an assignment.*" (Informant 2, transcription of lecturer talk)

In the context of the class conversations, there was a misunderstanding between the lecturer and the learners. Learners claim that there is no information related to the group presentation. Furthermore, the lecturer still maintains her opinion by saying how likely the learners are not getting the information while at the previous meeting, they have gathered the chapter one section of the background. Furthermore, the lecturer tried to defend herself by saying that she did not send messages by short message service (SMS) because she considered that the learners would already know the tone of the presentation of the group each meeting on the subject. Afterwards, the lecturer changed the learning activity by discussing the material on other topics. Then, informant 2 clarified it through the following interview:

> "*I slightly forced students to follow instructions from me to discipline them. The key to success is discipline.*" (Informant 2, interview)

Informant 2 means entirely blaming the learner when not doing the group presentation in the class is a form of coercive power. One characteristic of coercive power is when lecturers blame learners for the discipline of doing the task given. The form of self-justification lecturer bestows mistakes on the learners is one type of coercive power. Coercive power is a power based on learners' perception that lecturers will punish them if they do not do the will of the lecturer in the learning process [30]. Then, besides, the lecturers sometimes put learners on guilt trips if they hand in assignments late or not doing them.

3.3. Reward power: providing incentives to learners who complied with requests
In this classroom context, informant 3 describes a topic about choosing to sample from the population. When he was explaining, there was still some materials that he did not include in the presentation column. He immediately asks the learner to help him, as seen in the conversation excerpt:

> "*I can't make many of the columns, you guys can't? It can be that you guys are smarter than me. Can anyone help me add the column? .... you did it very well, thank you, Tato'.*" (Informant 3, transcription of lecturer talk)

In an interaction excerpt through the conversation, informant 3 appreciates learners who can help him in the learning process. Informant 3 began appreciating the learners by saying that he could not add a column to the presentation and said that the learners would know more. Thus, he asked one of the learners to

help him. When the learner manages to do so, informant 3 instantly compliments. The expression that informant 3 uses by praising learners is one of the types of reward power owned by informant 3. As he expressed in the following interview:

> "*Giving praise or rewards to students is important to motivate them. That way, they will study harder and improve their achievements. Of course, students will also enjoy learning and make the classroom a comfortable environment for learning.*" (Informant 3, interview)

The lecturer's reward power holds significant importance when it comes to enhancing the motivation of students in their learning process and making them feel valued and recognized within the classroom. Reward power is a form of influence that stems from the lecturer's ability to offer incentives or rewards to students in exchange for desired behaviors or outcomes. These rewards can take various forms, such as praise, recognition, grades, extra credit, or other tangible and intangible benefits. When a lecturer effectively utilizes their reward power, it can have several positive effects on students. By offering rewards for achieving academic goals or demonstrating positive behaviors, the lecturer can stimulate students' motivation to excel and actively participate in their learning journey. The prospect of receiving rewards can serve as a powerful incentive for students to put in their best effort. When students receive recognition and rewards for their efforts, they feel appreciated and valued by the lecturer. This acknowledgment fosters a positive classroom environment where students are more likely to engage, ask questions, and contribute to discussions. Reward power is a power that the lecturer owns by giving gifts or appreciation to learners as a form of appreciation for learners who have carried out the wishes and desires of lecturers in the learning process [31].

3.4. Legitimate power: maintaining strict control over the classroom

In this context, informant 2 as a lecturer who taught a study on ELT suggested that the learners prepare their study proposals. Informant 2 implored learners to proactively ask about the difficulty of the draft proposals they had written. The way informant 2 asked learners to ask was a bit pushy because she considered it so valuable opportunity at the time. As seen in the excerpt of the lecturer's (informant 2) talk:

> "*Anyone else wants to ask? Remember, at the time of the proposal seminar, there was no chance of asking, another year, the opportunity now you ask. Next semester it is the rest of the seminars, live seminars, so the one you choose now in that study on ELT course that you presented at the proposal seminar. If there is a correction per chapter, it is quickly corrected to be displayed upfront. If you want to seriously review it in a study later, try to make it well. There is no way I guide all this, right?*" (Informant 2, transcription of lecturer talk)

In the excerpt, informant 2 directs learners to continue selecting study proposals on the study on ELT courses that have been written to be forwarded to their thesis. Informant 2 is well-intentioned so that learners do not have difficulty determining the learner's topic of study. On the other hand, the lecturer seems to impose her own will without taking into account input and guidance from other guidance lecturers. In the protocol, the process of title selection and identification of problems in the preparation of the learner thesis is determined along with the supervisors. However, informant 2 argued; otherwise, she insisted on her opinion that learners do not replace the proposals that have been discussed in the courses she teaches. Informant 2 explains why she is so strict with her students in the learning process in the following interview excerpt:

> "*The role of lecturers in learning is mainly to direct students related to learning. Students need to be treated as such for the achievement of learning objectives. I see so far, they will not do tasks or projects if they are not directed in detail and a little coercion.*" (Informant 2, interview)

In these circumstances, informant 2 completely controlled the class she was taught. She accepts that what she has done is at her best, and learners should follow her will. If observed, the lecturer has a characteristic in applying the concept of power in learning. The concept of power seen through the use of language is legitimate power. Legitimate power belongs to lecturers because they are tasked with carrying out the role of a lecturer, so in carrying out the role, the lecturer has the right to make particular demands and requests associated with learning and teaching [32].

3.5. Expert power: sharing knowledge and expertise in addressing gaps in the study area

Informant 1 in this context is teaching learners how to compile a study gap. When addressing the topic of lecture material, he shared his experience in writing study gaps that he thought were not easy and took a long time to complete, it was seen in the following excerpt:

"You know I spent much time making the gap in my study, it is a tricky thing. As a kind of gossip, when people gossip, then there is a gossiped issue, there is a phenomenon. Other hands that gap is existing phenomena or issues that exist in your study or error recognition on the item in terms of the testers wanting to find an error in the sentence and find out and after that correct it."
(Informant 1, transcription of lecturer talk)

According to informant 1, that study gap is so essential in a study. According to him, the key to receiving or rejecting a study depends on the sharpness of the study gap created. Furthermore, according to Informant 1's experience, he took a considerable amount of time when writing the study. He thinks of study gap writing as a form of gossip. Gossip needs material to be talked about, as well as the study should there be a phenomenon. The following is a clarification through an interview in the form of an explanation from informant 1 regarding the use of contextual examples in learning.

"Students will certainly find it easy to understand the topic of learning if it is related to the real life they face every day. Life and social interaction become contextual in learning and have tremendous benefits. Lecturers should integrate this. When compared to continuous efforts to be guided by textbooks alone, students will be bored and slow in understanding the subject matter."
(Informant 1, interview)

Informant 1's way of explaining the material about the study gap by sharing his study writing experience indicates his expertise in the field. Thus, learners can gain knowledge by imitating how the lecturer is more thorough and meticulous in preparing the study. On the other hand, a lecturer can not only theorize but also prove a particular theory of them by giving examples from his own experience. From the elaboration of the context, it is clear that the lecturer applies expert power in the learning process. Expert power is a lecturer-owned power because of the competence and expertise owned by a lecturer [33].

The result of the present study shows that the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power-were observed in the high context culture of Toraja, a common cultural practice among the Toraja learners. Referent power was evident when the lecturer was able to establish a connection with the learners based on shared cultural norms. Coercive power was demonstrated when the lecturer used guilt to pressure learners who were unwilling to do a class presentation. Reward power was characterized by the lecturer providing incentives to learners who complied with requests. Legitimate power was observed when the lecturer maintained strict control over the classroom. Additionally, expert power was identified when the lecturer shared their knowledge and expertise in addressing gaps in the study area.

The results of this study are related to legitimate power consistent with the results of research that show that legitimate power used by lecturers implied threatening acts which may impose the students' esteem [5], the various forms of power that were at play within the classroom setting [6]. Meanwhile, related to the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power, the results of the study are different from the results of the study which showed that expert and referent power [34], It was found that the student's utilization of the internet has positively impacted their academic self-assurance, independence, and connection with their lecturers. However, it has also widened the gap in the student-lecturer relationship in terms of expert and referent power. While, related to contexts of inclusion and exclusion is framed by concepts of "general" and "concrete" selves, as well as classroom power dynamics that involve assigning ownership, creating alliances, and engaging in persuasion [35].

The results of this study related to Torajan culture indicate positive significance in learning. Culture becomes a contextual reference that can be a reference for teachers to achieve learning objectives. This is in line with research related to culture used in learning carried out by several researchers from abroad and within the country. The research results are consistent with the implementation of culture in learning, namely contemporary Chinese school leaders who demonstrate success are shaped by the enduring impact of traditional Confucian values [9]. Next, in higher education in Massachusetts, students have varying paces of learning, diverse cultural backgrounds, and differing levels of skills and knowledge, such as creativity and proficiency in digital technologies. Although Indonesian culture was incorporated into different subjects and learning activities, the teaching of soft diplomacy was not effectively integrated into the language-teaching content and methodology [10]. In the case of the Aceh tribe, the school's culture is centered on a firm commitment to peace, and the practices that foster the professional growth of teachers are evident in the school's management approach, learning facilitation, and teacher-to-teacher relationships. In the Minahasa tribe, the viewpoints of EFL teachers from Minahasa, Indonesia offer valuable perspectives for creating a foundational model for cultural instruction in junior high schools within Minahasa and other similar educational settings.

4.   CONCLUSION

Based on the result and finding previously, it can be concluded that the characteristics of lecturers' behaviors and communication strategies associated with the five bases of power-referent power, coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, and expert power-were observed in the high context culture of Toraja, a common cultural practice among the Toraja learners. Referent power was evident when the lecturer was able to establish a connection with the learners based on shared cultural norms. Coercive power was demonstrated when the lecturer used guilt to pressure learners who were unwilling to do a class presentation. Reward power was characterized by the lecturer providing incentives to learners who complied with requests. Legitimate power was observed when the lecturer maintained strict control over the classroom. Additionally, Expert power was identified when the lecturer shared their knowledge and expertise in addressing gaps in the study area. The research result aligns with previous studies on power bases in educational and cultural contexts, suggesting that EFL lecturers in the high context culture of Toraja may exert influence over students through a combination of referent, coercive, reward, legitimate, and expert power bases. Further research could explore the nuances and dynamics of these power bases in the specific cultural context of Toraja and their impact on language learning outcomes.

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