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Teacher and students' translanguaging practices in a Malaysian preschool

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ABSTRACT

The preliminary study examined teacher and students' translanguaging practices in a preschool in Sarawak, Malaysia. Analysis of audio-recorded interactions of 15 students with their teachers in two preschool classrooms (1 English, 1 Malay) found 291 instances of teacher talk functions (English, 87; Malay, 204) and 222 instances of student talk functions (English, 71; Malay, 151). As the teachers were teaching English and Malay languages, the communicative function dominated, followed by management and academic functions. The teacher provided participation cues, affirmed students' responses and assessed their knowledge. However, in the Malay lesson where students were not limited by their language proficiency, the teacher also asked students to give clarification, and provided new information to expand students' schema. A large percentage of student talk functions in the English and Malay lessons were representational, followed by repetitions. Almost all (92.72%) student talk functions were performed in the medium of instruction in the Malay lesson, compared to 56.34% in the English lesson. The study shows the importance of translanguaging to provide the language support for the preschool students' less developed language.

KEYWORDS

- Teacher talk
- student talk
- preschool
- multilingualism
- translanguaging
- code-switching

Introduction

This study examined teacher and students' translanguaging practices in a preschool in Sarawak, Malaysia, focussing on the functions of the teacher and student talk. The preschool children came from homes where Malay, Chinese, Bidayuh and Iban were spoken. Malay is the national and official language as well as the medium of instruction in Malaysian schools. However, Malay children usually speak the regional Malay dialect at home. The home languages of the Chinese children are Mandarin (standard Chinese) or Chinese dialects. The Iban and Bidayuh children speak their respective indigenous languages. The children may be exposed to Malay and English through national television programmes and their social network. In the preschool timetable, 60 min (2 lessons) are