

Language, Culture, and Power: An Anthropological Analysis of Lecturer–Student Interaction in Multicultural Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: In multicultural classroom settings, verbal interaction is not merely a process of transmitting information, but a social practice that reveals the interconnection of language, culture, and power. Learners from varied cultural backgrounds enter the classroom with distinctive norms of speaking, turn-taking patterns, politeness strategies, and interactional expectations rooted in their sociocultural values. At the same time, lecturers occupy positions of institutional authority that allow them to initiate topics, allocate speaking turns, evaluate responses, and legitimize particular forms of knowledge. Guided by an anthropological framework, this study views language as embedded in cultural meanings and social relations rather than as a pedagogical tool. Therefore, the study aims to examine lecturer–student verbal interaction by analyzing how cultural differences influence participation patterns and how classroom language operates as both an instructional medium and an ideological mechanism that shapes students’ academic identities.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative design using discourse ethnography. Data were gathered over one semester through classroom observation, audio-video recordings of interactions, and interviews with 30 students in the Indonesian Language Education program at a state university. Field notes and transcripts were thematically analyzed with a focus on turn-taking, topic control, register, and code-switching. Triangulation of observation, recording, and interview data ensured validity and reliability.

Main Results: The analysis reveals that verbal interaction in multicultural classrooms tends to be asymmetrical. Lecturers dominate classroom discourse by controlling the distribution of speaking turns, determining topics of discussion, and acting as the primary arbiter of truth. Students’ responses are uneven and strongly influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Those from expressive cultural traditions actively participate, ask questions, and challenge ideas, while students from cultures that

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emphasize politeness and deference prefer to remain silent or provide brief, minimal responses. The lecturers' language choices, particularly the use of formal registers, assertive intonation, and strategic code-mixing convey authority and reinforce hierarchical power relations. However, code-switching between Indonesian and local languages can create inclusion for students who share the same background but may simultaneously exclude those from different linguistic communities.

Discussion: These findings demonstrate that classroom discourse is not a neutral space, but one shaped by the interplay of cultural norms, institutional hierarchies, and linguistic practices. The asymmetrical interaction patterns illustrate how lecturers' speech acts as a mechanism of control, legitimizing certain voices while marginalizing others. Students' silence should not be interpreted simply as passivity but rather as a culturally informed communication strategy rooted in respect, politeness, or avoidance of confrontation. The study underscores the importance of viewing language as both a pedagogical instrument that facilitates learning and an ideological tool that shapes students' sense of belonging, linguistic security, and participation in academic life.

Conclusions: The study concludes that verbal interaction in multicultural classrooms reflects cultural diversity and power relations. Lecturers' language use not only delivers knowledge but also shapes identities and roles in academic contexts. To create equitable learning environments, educators should adopt culturally responsive strategies, promote inclusive participation, and reflect critically on power in discourse.

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Introduction

In the increasingly diverse landscape of higher education, the classroom is no longer a homogeneous space; rather, it is a multicultural arena where individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds meet and interact. This is where language plays a central role not only as a means of communication but also as a cultural symbol and instrument of power. The verbal interaction that occurs between lecturers and students is never socioculturally neutral; it always carries values, norms, and even power relations that implicitly and explicitly affect class dynamics (Goziyah et al., 2022). In the context of the Indonesian Language Education Department, this phenomenon is becoming increasingly interesting to study because the students themselves are prospective language educators who will later reproduce language practices in educational institutions.

Empirically, various studies have shown that the classroom is an arena in which language practice can reinforce or challenge certain social hierarchies (Aditiawarman et al., 2025). In the educational interaction space, lecturers not only convey material but also symbolically hold discourse authority that allows them to define situations, set language norms, and regulate their speaking turns (Bajwa et al., 2025; Patimah, 2023). Meanwhile, students, depending on their cultural background and linguistic confidence, tend to fit in, negotiate positions, or even become passive in class conversations. Multicultural classes, in this case, open up the possibility of inequality in linguistic representation; for example, lecturers may respond more often to students with the dominant dialect or give more space to students from certain cultures. This phenomenon often occurs without being noticed, but it has a significant impact on the fairness of communication in education. Many previous studies have focused on lecturer-student communication from pragmatic, sociolinguistic, or interactional perspectives (Bajwa et al., 2025; Enworo, 2023; Tausya & Lubis, 2023). However, there are still limited studies that use specific anthropolinguistic approaches to uncover how language in classroom interactions reflects cultural values and power relations in broader social spaces. Anthropolinguistic studies view language as not only represents meaning, but also creates social reality through discursive practices tied to cultural contexts (Putra & Wijayanti, 2022). In this context, the multicultural classroom is not only a place of learning but also a social space where cultural identities are negotiated and power relations are maintained or challenged through language.

This gap becomes even more evident when looking at the lack of research that specifically examines verbal interaction in multicultural classrooms in the realm of Indonesian language education, which notably has become the center of national language and cultural studies. Most of the previous research was primarily descriptive, and did not examine in depth how discursive structures and power relations are formed in class conversations. In fact, understanding the anthropolinguistic dimension in learning interactions can open up new perspectives in the development of pedagogy that is more inclusive and sensitive to diversity (Manar, 2024). Theoretically, this study is based on Fairclough work on critical discourse analysis which emphasizes that language is a social practice that is shaped by ideology, cited in (Fairclough, 1989, as cited in Halimatussakdiah et al., 2020). In the classroom context, who speaks, how they speak, to whom, and in what context, everything is inseparable from the power relations that have been formed. This perspective is enriched by an anthropolinguistic approach that sees language as a product as well as a cultural agent (Mu'in et al., 2021). Through this combination of theories, verbal interaction in the classroom is understood as a complex phenomenon that cannot be separated from the speaker's cultural background and the social context in which the communication takes place.

The urgency of this research also arises from the fact that in the era of globalization and educational transformation, higher education institutions in Indonesia are increasingly accepting students from various cultural and social backgrounds. However, this diversity is not always followed by a pedagogical strategy that is linguistically and culturally inclusive. Lecturers, as the main facilitators in the classroom, often lack a critical awareness of how their language practices create spaces for participation or, conversely, exclude some students from active engagement (Liando et al., 2022). In the context of Indonesian language teaching, this awareness becomes much more important because lecturers and students play a role as preservers and developers of the national language, which ideally functions as a unifier, not as a tool of cultural domination.

Thus, this research is intended to explore in greater depth how language practice in classroom interactions not only reflects but also shapes cultural dynamics and power. This study aims to describe the patterns of verbal interaction that occurs between lecturers and students in multicultural classrooms, identify the role of culture in the construction of meaning in classroom interactions, and analyze power relations reflected in verbal communication practices in classrooms. Significantly, from a theoretical point of view, this research enriches anthropolinguistic studies in the realm of education, which is still relatively rarely carried out in the Indonesian context. Meanwhile, practically, the results of this research can be a reference for lecturers and educational institutions in designing learning communication strategies that are more equitable, inclusive, and sensitive to the cultural-linguistic diversity of students. Through this study, the authors aim to address several research questions:

1. How are patterns of verbal interaction between lecturers and students constructed in multicultural classroom settings?
2. How does culture influence the construction of meaning in classroom verbal interactions?
3. How are power relations reflected and negotiated through verbal communication practices in classroom interactions?

Literature Review

This literature review is organized into three interrelated strands that collectively provide the theoretical foundation for examining classroom interaction in multicultural educational settings. First, it reviews key perspectives in anthropolinguistics to conceptualize language as a social practice embedded in cultural values, identity construction, and power relations, particularly in educational contexts. Second, it discusses scholarship on language, culture, and power in educational interactions, highlighting how classroom discourse functions as an ideological space where authority, dominance, and meaning are negotiated between lecturers and students. Finally, it examines studies on multicultural interaction in the classroom, focusing on how cultural and linguistic diversity shapes communication patterns, student participation, and identity positioning.

Anthropolinguistics

Anthropolinguistics is a branch of interdisciplinary research that bridges linguistics and anthropology to understand language as a social and cultural phenomenon. More than just a system of signs or grammatical structure, language from an anthropolinguistic perspective is seen as a social practice that contains cultural values, group identity, and power structures and relations that exist in society (Hauck, 2023). This approach offers a broader view of language: not just as a means of communication, but as an integral part of a culture that continues to evolve in a given social context. Silitonga et al. (2020) emphasize that anthropolinguistics does not only examine linguistic forms, but rather how language is used by members of certain communities in the context of social interaction, including how individuals interpret speech acts, symbols, and cultural implications of speech. In other words, the main focus of anthropolinguistics is on the performative dimension of language, in which speech not only conveys information, but also performs certain social actions. In the context of education, Dema and Tërshalla (2022) noted

that anthropolinguistics allows us to understand how the linguistic practices of lecturers and students in the classroom are not neutral activities, but are shaped by the cultural background, social relations, and value systems that surround them. Lecturers, in this case, are not only material presenters, but also cultural agents who bring certain values in their language practice. Similarly, students, who respond and shape their identities based on their cultural experiences and the way they speak. Therefore, anthropolinguistic approaches are particularly relevant for uncovering the dynamics of language in culturally heterogeneous classrooms.

Language, Culture, and Power in Educational Interactions

In the study of critical linguistics, language is not only seen as a means of communication, but also as an ideological medium that can strengthen or challenge existing power structures. In the context of the classroom, this means that who speaks, when, in what form, and to whom, are social actions that reflect the power relations inherent in educational institutions. Liu (2021) explained that in verbal interactions between lecturers and students, there are discursive practices that reflect dominance, resistance, and negotiation of meaning. The lecturer, with their position as an authoritative figure, has control over the course of the discourse, determining the topic, giving or withholding turns, and assessing the correctness of students' speeches. This practice reflects an imbalance of power that can indirectly affect the level of student participation, especially for those who come from minority cultural backgrounds or whose communication style does not conform to the dominant norm. It is important to note that power in this context is not only repressive, but also productive. This means that language in education not only curbs but also shapes students' identities, norms, and thinking structures (Hauck, 2023). In this sense, language becomes a space of ideological contestation in which cultural values and social practices are produced and reproduced (Mutonga, 2023). For example, the use of formal language that is too standard or exclusive by lecturers can create psychological and cultural distance from students, which ultimately affects the effectiveness of learning-related communication. This approach provides an important framework for examining how language practice in the classroom becomes a means of social identity formation, the maintenance of authority, and even a tool of exclusion against certain groups.

Multicultural Interaction in the Classroom

Multicultural classes, as social spaces inhabited by individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, are complex arenas in terms of communication. This diversity creates meaningful interaction dynamics: on the one hand, it enriches learning perspectives, but on the other hand, it can cause communication gaps if not managed sensitively (Mena-Orduña et al., 2025). Zhang et al. (2022) state that effective education in a multicultural context must depart from the understanding that each student brings a distinctive communication style, interaction norms, and construction of meaning based on their culture of origin. In practice, lecturers are often the main controllers of discourse that unconsciously reproduce dominant cultural values through the language of instruction, the choice of topics, and the way students respond. For example, the direct communication style that lecturers from a particular culture tend to use may be perceived as aggressive by students from cultures that prefer indirect communication. Such differences, if not addressed thoughtfully, if not understood reflectively, can create communicative tension and decrease student participation in learning. The concept of linguistic identity is also very important in the context of multicultural classrooms. Pelenkahu et al., (2024)

explain that students' identities in language learning are greatly influenced by how they are positioned by language practices in the educational environment. When the language used by lecturers does not provide space for students' cultural expression, their identity tends to be marginalized. This has an impact on motivation, engagement, and even learning achievement.

Method

Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive descriptive design, as it aims to reveal the phenomenon of verbal interaction in multicultural classrooms through an anthropolinguistic perspective. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the subjective meaning of social actions manifested in language practice, as well as explore the relationship between speech, cultural values, and power relations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Through this approach, data are collected naturalistically in the classroom, which means that phenomena are studied in their context without variable manipulation. Thus, the results of the study are expected to capture the complexity of lecturer-student interaction in a holistic and reflective manner, including cultural symbols, linguistic norms, and forms of dominance or resistance that arise in verbal practice.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from a compulsory course in the Indonesian Language Education Study Program at a state university in North Sulawesi. The course was offered to second-year undergraduate students in the 2025/2026 academic year and focused on language use, classroom communication, and text-based learning practices. The class consisted of 30 students with intermediate to upper-intermediate Indonesian language proficiency, as they had completed foundational language and pedagogy courses prior to enrollment. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they were information-rich and relevant to the study's qualitative focus on culturally situated language practices and power relations (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Student inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) active enrollment in the selected course, (2) participation in the class for at least one academic semester to ensure sufficient exposure to classroom interaction patterns, (3) representation of diverse ethnic backgrounds (including Minahasa, Bugis, Javanese, and Batak), and (4) active engagement in classroom interaction. In this study, "active" participation was operationally defined as students who regularly contributed to verbal discussions, responded to lecturer prompts, initiated questions or comments, and demonstrated consistent communicative involvement during classroom activities. In contrast, "passive" students were identified as those who were present but rarely contributed verbally, showed limited responsiveness, and tended to engage minimally in interactive discourse. Students who demonstrated irregular attendance, predominantly passive participation patterns, or unwillingness to provide informed consent were excluded, as their limited engagement would not yield sufficient data for analyzing verbal interaction dynamics. One course lecturer was also included based on their primary responsibility for the course and sustained involvement in facilitating classroom discourse. This purposive sampling approach was appropriate given the study's aim to explore interactional practices and power relations in

depth, prioritizing participants who could provide rich, meaningful insights rather than statistical representativeness.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using classroom observation, interviews, and document analysis within a qualitative ethnographic framework. The ethnographic observation sheets were systematically developed based on key constructs derived from anthropolinguistic and critical discourse literature, such as patterns of verbal interaction, turn-taking organization, cultural markers in speech, pragmatic strategies, and manifestations of power relations in classroom discourse. These categories were operationalized into observable indicators and refined through a pilot observation to ensure clarity and relevance before formal data collection. Classroom observations were conducted over four meetings, with the researcher acting as a non-participant observer, supported by audio–video recordings to ensure data completeness and accuracy. Interview questions were developed in alignment with the observation categories and research objectives, allowing for methodological coherence and triangulation. A semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore participants’ perceptions of classroom communication, cultural positioning, and power dynamics, while still allowing flexibility for emergent themes. Interviews were conducted with one lecturer and five purposively selected students from different cultural backgrounds (coded W/01–W/05); the interviews recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim with contextual annotations. In addition, document analysis was conducted on classroom interaction transcripts, lesson plans, and instructional materials to reconstruct the instructional context and to validate findings from observations and interviews through data triangulation.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was guided by a theoretically informed qualitative framework that integrated the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014) with anthropolinguistic theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Their model functioned as the procedural structure of analysis, while anthropolinguistics and CDA provided the analytical lenses for interpreting meaning, culture, and power in classroom discourse. During the data reduction stage, verbatim transcripts from classroom observations, interviews, and documents were coded deductively based on predefined theoretical categories (e.g., verbal interaction patterns, cultural markers, pragmatic strategies, and power positioning) and coded inductively to capture emergent themes from the data. In the data display stage, coded data were organized into thematic matrices, narrative accounts, and representative excerpts to systematically illustrate interactional patterns and discursive practices. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, interpretations were developed by linking empirical patterns to anthropolinguistic concepts of language as social practice and CDA principles concerning dominance, authority, and ideological positioning in educational discourse. Ethnographic analysis was employed to contextualize linguistic practices within participants’ cultural backgrounds and classroom norms, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how meaning is negotiated in situ. To ensure analytical rigor, data triangulation was conducted across observations, interviews, and documents, complemented by member checking to validate interpretive accuracy and peer debriefing with experts in linguistics and multicultural education to minimize researcher bias. While the findings are context-specific and not intended for statistical generalization, this analytic framework enables

an in-depth and theoretically grounded understanding of language, culture, and power relations in a multicultural classroom setting.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings aligned with the study's three guiding research questions. Themes are organized into two overarching categories: (1) environmental influences in shaping intercultural readiness and (2) prior intercultural experiences contributing to readiness for english as a medium of education (EME). Each theme integrates theoretical lenses from bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and byram's intercultural communicative competence, highlighting shared and divergent trends across participants.

The results of field observations show that verbal interaction in multicultural classes takes place in an asymmetrical pattern, with lecturers playing a dominant role as as the primary controller of the discussion. This pattern is evident from the distribution of the turn-taking in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Distribution of Speaking Turns between Lecturers and Students

Participant Categories	Number of Speeches	Percentage (%)
Lecturer	210	71%
Active Students	65	22%
Passive Students	20	7%
Total	295	100%

These results show that lecturers dominate class interaction with a contribution of 71% of the speaking turns, while active students only account for 22%, and passive students who tend to be silent are only 7%. This dominance marks the existence of a top-down communication pattern, where lecturers determine the allocation of speaking turns, control discussion topics, and validate the truth of students' contributions. In line with the findings of Aditiawarman et al. (2025), this pattern reflects a typical "recitation script" in classroom interactions: the lecturer asks → the student answers → the lecturer evaluates. Although theoretically lecturers' questions can open up a space for dialogue, the observed practice actually shows the limitations on student participation. In one of the observations, when a lecturer asked an open-ended question related to the asnalysis of literary texts, a student tried to develop a critical argument. However, the lecturer immediately took over the conversation by providing a long clarification. As a result, other students who seemed to want to respond did not get a chance to speak.

This phenomenon shows discursive dominance, in which students rarely develop arguments independently. For students from minority cultural backgrounds, this condition further limits their participation because in addition to having to adapt their communication style to the dominant norms brought by lecturers, they also face limited linguistic space to express their views. In other words, the power structure in verbal interaction becomes a barrier to equal dialog. In addition, the passive student category (7%) indicates the presence of a group that is almost never involved in verbal interaction. Based on the results of the interviews, most of these passive students mentioned two main reasons: first, hesitation or fear of being wrong that is

rooted in their cultural norms of politeness; second, the perception that lecturers prioritize "correct" answers over students' thinking processes. Thus, their reluctance to speak is not solely due to a lack of understanding, but also to a combination of cultural factors and power patterns in the classroom.

When viewed from an anthropolinguistic perspective, these results confirm that verbal interaction in the classroom is not a neutral communication process. The language of the lecturer functions as a tool of symbolic power (Tausya & Lubis, 2023) that regulates who can speak, when, and in what form. This not only creates an unequal distribution of roles, but also shapes the identity of students as "recipients of knowledge" rather than "dialogical partners". Thus, the formulation of the first problem is clearly answered: the form of verbal interaction between lecturers and students in the multicultural classroom is dominant-asymmetrical, in which the lecturer controls the majority of speaking turns and the direction of the discussion, while student participation is limited, with most of the passive role due to cultural factors and power structures inherent in classroom language practice.

The Role of Culture in Shaping Language Use in Multicultural Classrooms

The findings of the study show that students' cultural backgrounds play a significant role in shaping the way they participate and use language in the classroom. In the context of the multicultural classroom that is the focus of this study, differences in communication norms, norms of politeness, and interaction styles brought from each ethnic background form a diverse pattern of participation, even affecting students' confidence in expressing opinions. Students from cultural backgrounds who have a tradition of direct, expressive, and assertive communication, such as the Batak and Bugis ethnic groups tend to show more active participation in class discussions. They admitted that they did not hesitate to ask questions, give long arguments, or respond to statements from lecturers and peers. This is very clearly explained in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Cultural Factors Affecting Student Participation

Cultural Aspects Observed	Students Feel Motivated (%)	Students Become Passive (%)
Cultural similarities with lecturers	75%	25%
Cultural differences with lecturers	40%	60%
Norms of decency (fear of being wrong)	35%	65%

Interpretation

- Students who share cultural backgrounds with lecturers are more actively participating.
- Norms of politeness (for example, fear of being presumptuous) are the main cause of low participation among some students.

The table above summarizes participatory classroom observations and shows that the similarity and difference in cultural background between students and lecturers significantly affect the level of verbal participation of students. The data in Table 2 indicates that students who share a cultural background with lecturers show a much higher rate of active participation (75%) than those with a different cultural background (40%). This can be explained through the concept

of in-group solidarity (Liando et al., 2023), in which cultural similarities create a sense of social closeness, trust, and linguistic security that encourages students to be more confident in expressing their opinions. On the other hand, cultural differences between students and lecturers tend to result in social distance that triggers hesitation to be actively involved, as seen in the high percentage of passive students (60%) in this group.

In addition, norms of politeness rooted in certain cultures, especially those that emphasize deference and avoidance of confrontation, have proven to be significant factors that decrease participation. As many as 65% of students admitted that they refrained from speaking because they were afraid of being wrong, worried that they would be considered rude, or that they would be considered too presumptuous by a multicultural audience. This phenomenon is in line with the face-saving theory (Patimah, 2023), in which individuals choose to keep their positive and negative faces by reducing the risk of potentially face-threatening interactions that threaten their self-image. In the context of a multicultural classroom, such norms of politeness affect not only the content of the message conveyed but also the decision to speak up or remain silent. These findings confirm that managing cultural dynamics in the classroom is crucial to ensure equal participation opportunities for all students, regardless of their cultural background. However, students' communication style is often perceived differently by students from other cultural backgrounds. A Batak student (W/02) stated:

"If I answer that it is indeed straight to the point, the tone is harsh. It's not anger; it's just a style of speech. But a friend once said, 'It's like being angry'... So now I'm a bit slow."

This recognition shows the process of adapting cross-cultural communication styles in the classroom. Students who were previously accustomed to expressive intensity should adjust the tone and speed of speech to avoid negative impressions from peers who come from a culture oriented toward linguistic politeness. On the other hand, students from cultures that emphasize the principles of manners and linguistic prudence, such as Javanese and Minahasa tend to speak in low tones, use concise sentences, or even choose to remain silent to avoid potential confrontation. A Javanese student (W/04) said:

"I often want to answer, but if I'm not 100% sure, it's better to be silent. I'm afraid that if I make a mistake, I'll even make you embarrassed in front of my friends."

This phenomenon shows the existence of cultural restraint which has direct implications for the frequency of participation. It is not only academic competence that affects their contribution to discussions, but also cultural mechanisms to maintain social harmony and avoid face-threatening acts (Basri et al., 2025). In an interview, a Minahasa student (W/01) revealed a similar experience, with a stronger emotional dimension: "I often understand the answer, but I am afraid of making a mistake in front of the class. If it is wrong, it will be considered impolite." This statement suggests that in some cultures, academic error is not only seen as a *learning opportunity*, but also as a failure to maintain a social image. As a result, the student prefers to secure their position in the social hierarchy of the class by reducing verbal participation.

In addition to individual communication styles, this study also found that the practice of code mixing (mixing Indonesian with regional languages) used by lecturers affects the dynamics of linguistic inclusion and exclusion. Students who understand the regional language used by the lecturer admitted that they feel closer emotionally and socially to the lecturer because the humor or idiomatic expressions conveyed feel more personal. However, for students of different ethnicities, this situation actually creates social and linguistic distance. A Bugis student (W/03) said:

"If he speaks mixed with his regional language, I don't understand. Sometimes my friends laugh because there is humor, but I just keep quiet. It feels like it's not part of that communication circle."

This phenomenon reinforces the view of Makhanova et al., (2025) that the multicultural classroom is an arena for negotiating linguistic identity. Verbal participation is not only driven by academic ability, but also by a sense of linguistic belonging to the language community that operates in classroom interactions. Students who feel they are "outside" the dominant language community will experience limited access to the developed discourse. Interestingly, these findings also reveal the existence of a cross-cultural adaptation strategy that is bidirectional. Students from expressive cultures tend to lower the intensity of their communication to accommodate the sensitivities of other cultures, while students from more restrained cultures try to "increase the courage" to speak when in small groups or when asked directly by a lecturer. This adaptation strategy shows that classroom interaction is not only influenced by cultural norms of origin, but also by social learning processes within the academic community. However, despite these adaptation efforts, the data show that differences in communication styles still result in inequality in participation. Students with cultural backgrounds that emphasize verbal courage tend to be identified more often by lecturers as active contributors, thus getting more opportunities to speak. In contrast, students with a tendency to speak minimally are often invisible in class conversations, so their contribution to academic discussions is potentially overlooked.

From an anthropolinguistic perspective, this situation shows that language functions as a marker of identity and an instrument of power (Strukowska & Chruszczewski, 2022). The use of language in the classroom is not neutral, but loaded with social meanings that distinguish who has the authority to speak and who is the listener. In the context of multicultural classes, this distribution of power is often intertwined with the cultural background and communication habits of each ethnic group. Thematically, these findings can be grouped into three main categories where there are culture-based communication style differences (direct vs indirect; expressive vs restrained) that affect the frequency and length of participation. In addition, linguistic access and sense of belonging, driven by students' understanding of the language used (including regional languages and cultural humor), shape students' sense of inclusion or exclusion in interaction. Most importantly, in the case of Identity negotiation and social adaptation, students adapt their communication styles to conform to the dominant cultural expectations in the classroom, although this does not completely eliminate participation inequality.

Thus, the second research question which asks about the role of culture in shaping the use of language in multicultural classrooms is answered by this finding: culture plays a role not

only as a passive background, but also as an active factor that determines communication strategies, access to conversations, and students' social positions in academic interactions. Culture influences who speak, how they speak, when they speak, and the extent to which they feel safe to speak. These findings have direct implications for pedagogical design in multicultural classrooms. Without awareness of this cultural dimension, the learning strategies used risk perpetuating inequality in participation, where certain groups of students systematically gain more academic space and recognition than other groups.

Language as a Representation of Power Relations in the Classroom

Analysis of observation data and interview transcripts revealed that the language used by lecturers in classroom interactions consistently reflected the hierarchical power relationship between lecturers as knowledge authorities and students as recipients of knowledge. This relationship is not only formed through the content conveyed, but also through the way language is used, ranging from topic control and truth validation to intonation strategies and language register selection. From the four observation sessions, it can be seen that lecturers are almost always the one who determines the direction of the discussion. Students who try to expand on a topic or relate it to personal experience are often redirected back to a pre-established learning framework. For example, in the third session, a Bugis student tried to relate the analysis of literary texts to social phenomena in his hometown. However, the lecturer's interruption soon shifted the focus to the narrative structure of the text, as recorded in the following transcript: W/03: "... In my village, stories like this are often used to"..... then the lecturer (with a firm intonation, interrupting): "Yes, let's focus on the storyline first, then we can discuss the social context at the end."

Although these interventions may be intended to maintain the relevance of the material, the repetitive pattern of controlling this topic suggests that lecturers' discursive power limits student agency in determining the direction of academic conversations. This is in line with the findings of Putra and Wijayanti (2022) regarding the recitation script, where the flow of the conversation is controlled by the educator, so students are more often respondents than initiators of ideas. In addition, lecturers' language also functions as a gatekeeping mechanism for academic truth. Student speech is rarely left to stand alone without confirmation, correction, or elaboration from lecturers. This process of validation, although pedagogically important, symbolically affirms that legitimate knowledge is only knowledge recognized by the class authority. In an interview, a Javanese student (W/04) described his feelings: *"Sometimes when I answer, it is immediately straightened out. It feels like my answer is not considered correct even though it is similar. So sometimes it's lazy to try."*

This phenomenon shows the psychological impact of the highly centralized validation mechanism on lecturers. Instead of being a collaborative process, validation tends to strengthen the lecturer's position as the final arbiter of knowledge, which in turn can reduce students' initiative to actively participate. The use of intonation in class interactions is also an important marker of power relations. Observations showed that lecturers used firm intonation and a higher tone of voice when reprimanding passive students or straightening out answers that were considered wrong. On the other hand, when building motivation or creating humor, the lecturer's intonation becomes warmer and more relaxed. In another observation session, when a Minahasa student answered a question in a quiet and unsure voice, the lecturer responded to "Lecturer" (emphasized, in a high tone): *"Try to be clearer! If you answer, don't hesitate, let your friends also*

understand." Although it is intended to encourage clarity, the use of this high pitch can be interpreted as a form of pressure that emphasizes the power distance. For students from cultures that emphasize decency and avoid direct confrontation, this kind of response can be intimidating and demoralizing for students speaking in front of the class.

Another consistent finding is the tendency of lecturers to use standard Indonesian when discussing core material. The selection of this formal register serves as a marker of the authoritative role of the lecturer, distinguishing between "serious" and "non-serious" situations in the classroom. When explaining literary theory, for example, lecturers always use complete sentences, perfect grammatical structure, and academic vocabulary. In an interview, a Batak student (W/02) observed: *"If he has used the standard language, it is a sign that he is serious. We automatically shut up and listen."* The formal register here serves as a boundary marker that marks the transition to a more structured mode of learning. However, this symbolic boundary also reinforces the hierarchy of roles, where lecturers become the center of discursive authority and students are in the position of passive recipients.

Interestingly, the power of language used by lecturers is not always oppressive. In some moments, language is used productively to build motivation, create humor, and insert local cultural values that strengthen social bonds in the classroom. For example, lecturers often use regional expressions or local sayings to emphasize certain points, which makes some students feel more emotionally connected. A Bugis student (W/03) said: *"If he uses my local language, it feels very close. So, it's more enthusiastic to participate in the discussion."* However, the productivity of this power is selective. Students who do not understand the language or cultural references used tend to feel symbolically marginalized. A Javanese student (W/04) admitted: *"If I joke using other regional languages, I just smile. Sometimes I don't understand, so I feel like I'm not part of it."* This situation reinforces Mu'in et al.'s (2021) view that language is not a neutral medium, but an ideological tool that can reinforce certain social norms and structures. In this case, the lecturer's language not only conveys knowledge but also creates a map of social relations that determines who is at the center of the conversation and who is on the periphery.

Thus, it can be said that the power relationship in this classroom interaction can be mapped into three major themes. The first of which is centralized discursive control, where the lecturer has almost complete control over the flow of the conversation, the direction of the topic, and the definition of academic truth. Second, there is a symbolic hierarchy through language; this is emphasized by the use of formal registers, firm intonation, and validation mechanisms to strengthen the hierarchical structure of roles in the classroom. And the last one is, productive but unequal power, where language is also used to build closeness and motivation, but the benefits are not felt equally by all students. These findings directly answer Research Question 3: *How does language represent power relations in the multicultural classroom?* The answer is that language in this context serves a dual function: (1) a pedagogical means of conveying material and (2) an ideological instrument that regulates the distribution of roles, speech rights, and a sense of belonging in academic interactions. The power relations that are realized are complex in nature, containing elements of control, limitation, and empowerment, but still based on a hierarchical structure that places lecturers as the center of discursive authority.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the dynamics of classroom interaction in the context of multicultural higher education in Indonesia cannot be understood only as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a social process loaded with power relations, cultural identity, and linguistic strategies. The three main dimensions that emerge are asymmetrical interaction patterns, the role of culture in the use of language, and language as a representation of power relations. Together, these dimensions form a complex picture of how language regulates, limits, and at the same time creates opportunities for participation in the classroom.

Asymmetric Interaction Patterns and Recitation Scripts

The first findings indicate that the pattern of interaction in the classroom is dominated by lecturers, with an uneven distribution of turns (71% for lecturers, 29% for all students). This pattern corresponds to the concept of recitation scripts (Tausya & Lubis, 2023), where the structure of information exchange follows the initiation–response–evaluation (IRE) format. In this format, the lecturer initiates the question, the student gives a short answer, and the lecturer then evaluates or improves the answer. The lecturer's full control over turn-taking in conversation and the direction of the topic of discussion results in limited opportunities for students to develop arguments independently.

This finding is in line with the results of Nugraha, A. S. and Nugraha, D. S. (2025), which shows that in academic interactions, lecturers often act as gatekeepers of discourse, controlling both the content and the direction of discussion. However, in contrast to the context of Western studies that tend to promote student-centered learning, the Indonesian context still shows the strong lecturer-centered tradition that is rooted in cultural norms that respect the authority of lecturers (Silitonga et al., 2020). The dominance of lecturers in the allocation of turns, although effective in maintaining the focus of learning, can hinder the development of students' critical thinking skills. This indicates the need for a more dialogical pedagogical strategy, as recommended by (Putra & Wijayanti, 2022). through the concept of dialogic teaching, where the turn-taking in speech is distributed more evenly and students are given space to elaborate ideas without quick interruptions from the lecturer.

The Role of Culture as a Determinant of Linguistic Strategy

The second finding shows that students' cultural backgrounds significantly affect how they participate. Students from cultures with direct and expressive communication orientations (such as Batak and Bugis) were more likely to take turns, while students from cultures that emphasized linguistic politeness and prudence (such as Javanese and Minahasa) preferred to remain silent or respond briefly. This phenomenon is in line with the findings of Makhanova et al. (2025), about the differences between high-context and low-context cultures, where communication strategies are shaped by cultural norms that govern self-expression and the management of social harmony. Interestingly, these differences not only affect the frequency of participation, but also the students' sense of linguistic security. As stated by Sinaga and Lubis (2025), language in the multicultural classroom is an arena for identity negotiation, where each student positions themselves according to the cultural norms they bring. The fear of being mispronounced or seen as rude makes some students hold back, which ultimately affects their involvement in discussions. The use of mixed codes by lecturers, although intended as an

inclusive strategy to build closeness, turns out to have a double effect. Students who understand the regional language feel more connected, while those who do not understand it feel marginalized. This reinforces Patimah's (2023) view of linguistic capital: mastery of a particular code provides a symbolic advantage within a discursive community. In other words, language becomes an instrument that not only connects, but can also separate.

Language as a Representation of Power Relations

The third finding confirms that language functions as a representation of power relations in the classroom, consistent with Fairclough view that language is a social practice that is shaped by ideology, Fairclough (1989) as cited in Liando et al. (2022, 2023) and Liando and Tatipang (2022). Topic control, truth validation mechanisms, intonation strategies, and the use of formal registers all reflect a hierarchy that places lecturers in a dominant position. Topic control by lecturers, for example, limits student agency in formulating discussion agendas. This is similar to the findings of Liando et al. (2023) and Dema and Tërshalla (2022), who state that in traditional classroom discourse structures, the role of students is often limited to expected responses, rather than as a guide to discussion. The mechanism of truth validation strengthens the role of lecturers as the sole authority of knowledge, which although important to maintain academic accuracy, can cause epistemic inequality (Nugraha, A. S., & Nugraha, D. S., 2025), namely, inequality in the recognition of knowledge contributions from other parties.

The use of firm intonation when correcting students' mistakes, as well as formal registers when discussing the core material, serves as a boundary markers Liando et al. (2025) that separate the authoritative role of the lecturer from the receptive role of the student. However, language is also used productively, for example, to build motivation or create humor. Unfortunately, this productivity is not always felt evenly due to cultural insider bias, which is the tendency of linguistic strategies to only be effective for students who have the same cultural background as lecturers.

The three findings above, when viewed together, show that language in the multicultural classroom serves a dual function: first as a pedagogical instrument for conveying material, and second, as a social mechanism for regulating the distribution of roles, speech rights, and a sense of belonging. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis theory (Bajwa et al., 2025), language here is not only a mirror of reality but also shapes social reality through the reinforcement of norms, hierarchies, and symbolic boundaries. Power relations formed through language are ambivalent. Meanwhile, language facilitates the learning process, builds closeness, and motivates students, as noted by Liando et al. (2025). On the other hand, language can also limit participation, create social distance, and reinforce inequality. This condition shows the need for a more sensitive pedagogical approach to cultural diversity and the distribution of power in the classroom.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of class interactions in multicultural contexts by asserting that the distribution of turns, linguistic strategies, and language registers are important indicators of power relations. These findings support the view that critical discourse analysis needs to consider the cultural factors and sociolinguistic backgrounds of the participants, rather than just the formal linguistic structure. Practically, these results suggest the need for training for lecturers to adopt culturally responsive pedagogy strategies (Mu'in et al., 2021; Sibarani & Liando, 2020), which not only recognize cultural differences, but also actively adapt teaching strategies to accommodate the variation in students' communication styles. For

example, the use of open-ended questions without quick interruptions can provide room for students who need time to build answers, while humor and mixed-code management need to consider audience inclusivity. While this study provides an in-depth overview, there are limitations to note. First, data were collected from a limited number of classes and lecturers, so the generalization of results should be approached carefully. Second, this study focuses on verbal interactions, while non-verbal dimensions such as body language and facial expressions have not been systematically analyzed. Further research can expand the focus to multimodal discourse analysis to understand power relations more comprehensively.

Conclusion

This study reveals that verbal interaction in multicultural classrooms in higher education in Indonesia takes place in an asymmetrical pattern, where lecturers where lecturers hold control over turn-taking, the direction of discussion, and the validation of truth. This dominance creates limited space for student participation; therefore, the potential for students to develop critical argumentation has not been fully facilitated. Cultural background has proven to play a significant role in determining students' communication strategies. Students from expressive cultures are more willing to take speaking turns, while students from cultures that prioritize politeness tend to choose silence to maintain harmony. The use of mixed codes by lecturers serves a dual function: it enhances rapport for some students but symbolically marginalizes those who do not understand. The lecturer's language represents a hierarchical power relationship that is manifested through topic control, correction mechanisms, choice of formal registers, and intonation strategies. This ambivalent power can motivate, but also reinforce social distance. Overall, the findings show that language in the multicultural classroom functions as a pedagogical tool as well as a social instrument that shapes the distribution of roles, linguistic security, and academic identity of students. Thus, cultural sensitivity and power awareness are key in designing inclusive and equitable teaching strategies. Lecturers need to adopt teaching strategies that are dialogical and responsive to cultural diversity, including a more equitable distribution of turns, open-ended questions without quick interruptions, and inclusive humor and code-mixing. Cultural awareness-based pedagogical training and critical discourse analysis can be a strategic intervention to increase participation and reduce power inequality in the classroom.

Author Contributions

SI: Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review and Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project Administration, and Funding Acquisition.

MIA: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review and Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project Administration, and Funding Acquisition.

DPT: Project administration

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to translate and check the language errors. Also, the tool was used solely to improve clarity, grammar, and overall

readability. The authors reviewed and revised the output as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics

This study received ethical approval from Universitas Negeri Manado. All procedures followed relevant ethical guidelines, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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