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The Different Uses of the Pronoun ‘We’ by EFL Teachers in Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

The pronoun ‘we’ is understood only to refer to the first-person plural. In fact, the pronoun ‘we’ can also refer to other references. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the different uses of the pronoun ‘we’ by EFL teachers in classroom interaction. This study employed a qualitative approach by using three instruments: observation, audio-recorder, and interview in collecting the data. The subjects of this research are two English teachers and the second-grade students at a vocational high school in Makassar. The data were analyzed by formulating Miles et al.’s method of analysis. The result of this study shows that, in classroom interaction, the pronoun ‘we’ can refer to six distinct references: (1) ‘we’ that refers to speaker and more than one addressee, (2) ‘we’ that refers to speaker and more than one-third party, (3) ‘we’ that refers to speaker and indefinite group, (4) ‘we’ that indicates ‘you’, (5) ‘we’ that indicates ‘I’, and (6) ‘we’ that indicates “they”. From the interviews, the researchers found that both teachers have different reasons for using the pronoun ‘we’ in classroom interaction. The first teacher intends to use the pronoun to help him create an enjoyable learning environment and establish better

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relationships with the students. In contrast, the other teacher uses the pronoun 'we' to show politeness to the students. Despite the differences, they both seem to have the same intention of creating a positive learning environment.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, EFL teachers, pronoun 'we', learning environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Using personal pronouns in interaction to refer to the speaker, listener, or both can reflect a particular relationship and understanding between all parties involved. Even though the pronouns are simple words phonetically, their reference and meaning are much more involved (Quirk et al., 1985). Personal reference, using personal pronouns, is essential in face-to-face interaction because they imply the interpersonal relationships between the people in the interaction (Kuo, 1999). When choosing which pronoun to use in a conversation, a speaker somehow makes a crucial decision about how he/she will express his/her place in the relationship.

One type of pronoun that is interesting to be discussed is the first-person plural pronoun. In English, the main function of the first-person plural pronoun, known as 'we', is as subject of a verb. The reference of first-person plural pronouns in writing is commonly easier to identify than in conversation. Pavlidou (2014) suggests that in conversation or an interview, the collective referent of 'we' can only be retrieved based on the speaker's and listener's shared knowledge, as well as the utterance and discourse context. In other words, when a speaker uses the pronoun 'we' in conversation, he/she has to consider that the listener(s) understand the context of his/her utterance to identify the exact referent of the pronoun.

The studies on the analysis of the pronoun 'we' have been conducted in different domains. For instance, Packard et al. (2018) researched the pronoun choices used by marketing agents. The finding shows that marketing agents tend to use the pronoun 'I' rather than 'we' because it can increase customers' positive perception of satisfaction and purchase intention. In addition, another research was carried out on the use of the pronoun 'we' in the 2016 US presidential debates. The result confirmed that the presidential candidates preferred using the pronoun 'we' more often than the pronoun 'I' when referring to himself. The main reason is that it implies that the candidates shared similar roles, problems, and responsibilities as the audience (Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018).

Even though there have been various studies on the use of the pronoun 'we', very few published studies can be found about the use of the pronoun 'we' in classroom interaction. Roepcke (1998) researched the use of the pronoun 'we' by Teaching Assistants (TAs) to identify the pattern of participant structure, social groups, and social identities constructed in the classroom talk of four Chinese International TAs and four American TAs. The result showed that the first-person plural pronoun 'we' was used inclusively to refer to the teacher and students. In this case, the learning activities of the teacher and students serve in a sequence with varying roles and responsibility levels for teachers and students. Other inclusive 'we' includes the teacher and students, but they are larger entities. The only common exclusive 'we' is

the group of experts in the field, whose membership is in flux; students are considered members as they are associated with the institution. However, the participants used more 'you' (second-person pronoun) during the talk than other pronouns. The single difference between the groups is the significantly higher frequency of second-person plural pronouns used by the Chinese TAs. This may reflect the cultural distance between the Chinese TAs and American TAs.

Another study was conducted by [Reynolds-Case \(2012\)](#) on the various ways in which Spanish teachers use the pronoun 'we' in the classroom. Data were taken from two intermediate-level classes in a university with two different teachers from different backgrounds through observation, audio-recording, and transcription. The results revealed that the teacher used the pronoun 'we' to refer to three distinct references: (1) 'we' that indicated 'you' in the purpose of softening the directives and achieving positive politeness, (2) an inclusive 'we' referring to the instructor and the students, and (3) an exclusive 'we' referring to the instructor and an outside group of people. The more familiar or connected the instructor was with the students, the more likely the inclusive 'we' was used.

[Helmbrecht \(2002\)](#) states that there are several reasons why speakers use the pronoun 'we' in interaction. The first is to fulfill the communicative intentions when they are talking to others. In this case, the speakers might want to avoid referring to themselves directly and explicitly because it is considered impolite to set oneself too apparent as the talk's focus. The second is to minimize the risk of face loss from the hearer. The use of the pronoun 'we' can minimize the social distance between the speaker and the listener by including both in the activity. The third is to express care and solidarity. It can be found in the interaction between doctor and patient. The doctor uses the pronoun 'we' to encourage patients to participate in the medical treatment procedure.

In a classroom setting, the pronoun 'we' frequently exists in the teacher-student interaction. Teachers frequently employ pronouns 'we' and 'you' to their students, and the referents of these pronouns might reflect symbolic values and political representations ([Uzum et al., 2018](#)). When teaching a subject, teachers find themselves addressing students repeatedly. Whether calling on a student to respond to a question, discussing with a student about a question/answer, or simply checking for comprehension, teachers usually use the pronoun of singular and plural 'you' and also the pronoun 'we'. This pronoun use has often created ambiguity in the classroom. Usually, when a teacher uses the pronoun 'we' in conversation, he/she refers to more than one person, including him/herself.

Since there is limited published research about using the pronoun 'we' in classroom interaction, this study intends to provide current insights by exploring and analyzing the different uses of the pronoun 'we' by teachers in the EFL classroom interaction. In EFL classes, a teacher becomes a center of instruction. Therefore, the teacher mostly dominates the classroom interaction by giving explanations and lectures, encouraging language practice, asking questions, and correcting students' answers ([Julana, 2018](#)). In particular, the research questions for this study are:

1. What are the different uses of the pronoun 'we' used by EFL teachers in classroom interaction?
2. Why do the EFL teachers use the pronoun 'we' when interacting with students in the classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Clusivity of Pronoun 'We'

In the field of discourse, the pronoun 'we' can be distinguished into inclusive and exclusive use. The terms 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' are commonly used to indicate whether an addressee (or addressees) is included in or excluded from the set of referents that also involves the speaker (Filiminova, 2005). In addition, Cysouw (2005) states that an inclusive pronoun necessarily includes reference to the addressee, for example: 'we' that refers to 'I' and 'you', while an exclusive pronoun, and excludes the addressee from the reference, resulting in meaning like 'I and some others, but not you'.

The category of inclusive and exclusive pronoun is differentiated into 'dual' and 'plural': the inclusive dual refers to the speaker and one addressee (I + you-singular), the inclusive plural includes the speaker and more than one addressee (I + you-plural), and the exclusive forms refer to the speaker and others who are not directly included in—one other person in the case of the dual I + she/he/it) and more than one for the plural (I + they) (Helmbrecht, 2002; Scheibman, 2004).

More specifically, Pavlidou (2014) lists the referential range of pronoun 'we' as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Referential range of pronoun 'we'.

Group indexical (including the speaker)			
No.	Referential values	Plurality	Clusivity
1.	Speaker and other speakers	dual/plural	exclusive
2.	Speaker and addressee	dual	inclusive
3.	Speaker and a third party	dual	exclusive
4.	Speaker and more than one addressee	plural	inclusive
5.	Speaker and more than one third party	plural	exclusive
6.	Speaker and addressee and a third party	plural	inclusive
7.	Speaker and more addressees and a third party	plural	inclusive
8.	Speaker and more addressees and more third parties	plural	inclusive
9.	Speaker and indefinite group (humankind)	plural	inclusive
We for non- 'we'			
No.	Referential values	Common designations	
10.	The speaker alone: 'we' for 'I'	Royal 'we', <i>pluralis majestatis</i>	
11.	The addressee alone: 'we' for 'you'	Directive 'we', nursery 'we', recipes 'we'	
12.	Third-party: 'we' for 'they'	Integrative 'we'	

Based on Table 1, the referential range of the pronoun 'we' is quite extensive. The different references of the pronoun 'we' may create ambiguity in interpreting the meaning of the pronoun. It is essential to understand the referential values one by one to avoid ambiguity. The details of each referential value are described as follows:

1. Speaker and other speakers (multiple speakers)

Speaker is the party talking (the first person). This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the exclusive group of multiple speakers in an interaction. Generally, only one person can speak. However, if two or more persons are speaking the same utterance simultaneously, it is a collection of single individuals, each of which is one speaker.

2. **Speaker and addressee**
Addressee is the party being addressed or spoken to (the second person). This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker and one addressee (I and you-singular).
3. **Speaker and a third party**
A third party is a party being considered or mentioned (third person). This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the exclusive group of one speaker and one-third person (I and he/she). The third-party can be either present or absent in the interaction. If the third party is present in the interaction, the role of 'listener' is shared between the addressee and the third party.
4. **Speaker and more than one addressee**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker and multiple addressees in an interaction (I and you-plural).
5. **Speaker and more than one third party**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the exclusive group of one speaker and multiple third persons in an interaction (I and they).
6. **Speaker and addressee and a third party**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker, one addressee, and one-third person. Therefore, the reference is a collective group of three persons (I, you, and he/she).
7. **Speaker and more addressees and a third party**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker, multiple addressees, and one-third person in an interaction (I, you-plural, and he/she).
8. **Speaker and more addressees and more third parties**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker, multiple addressees, and multiple third persons in an interaction (I, you-plural, and they).
9. **Speaker and indefinite group (humankind)**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to the inclusive group of one speaker and all humankind, including male and female (I and everyone).
10. **The speaker alone: 'we' for 'I'**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' refers to oneself (the speaker only). The common designation of this value is usually called royal 'we' or *pluralis majestatis*. It means that the speaker has power or influence and a higher position than the addressee.
11. **The addressee only: 'we' for 'you'**
This referential value occurs when the pronoun 'we' only refers to the second person(s). The common designation of this value includes directive 'we', nursery 'we', and recipe 'we'. The directive 'we' is used when the speaker wants the hearer to act in the speaker's interest. The nursery 'we' refers to a single addressee implying a caring relationship between speaker and hearer. While the recipe 'we' is used when the speaker wants to tell the addressee(s) about a specific instruction for producing something.
12. **'we' indicating "they"**
This referential value occurs when the speaker integrates herself and the addressee into the same group, even though, in fact, they are not members of the group.

2.2 Interaction in the EFL Classroom

Through all the teaching and learning activities, the classroom interaction between teacher and students is essential to achieve specific goals (Julana, 2018). For EFL teachers, interaction is significant. In the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is the essential component of communication, and everything now is about communication (Brown, 1994). Classroom interaction is one of the platforms on which any reality concerning classroom phenomena can be formed and observed simultaneously. Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined classroom interaction as the verbal and nonverbal communication patterns in classrooms and the sorts of social connections that occur there. Teacher and student talk are two aspects to consider during the interaction. Teacher talk is described as any words or sentences produced by the teacher during the teaching and learning process, such as when the teacher provides explanations, feedback, or asks questions (Nurpahmi, 2017).

More specifically, Malamah-Thomas (1987) suggests that there are seven types of classroom interaction in a productive class hour: (1) teacher speaking to the whole class, (2) teacher speaking to an individual student with the rest of the class as the listeners, (3) teacher speaking to a group of students, (4) student speaking to the teacher, (5) student speaking to the student, (6) student speaking to group members, and (7) student speaking to the whole class. Of all the types of classroom interaction, the interaction between the teacher and students is essential in a language learning environment. The teacher controls the topic of conversation, turn-taking, and the whole interaction process to facilitate learning (Walsh, 2006).

In EFL classes, a teacher becomes a center of instruction. Therefore, the teacher mostly dominates the classroom interaction by giving explanations and lectures, encouraging language practice, asking questions, and correcting students' answers (Julana, 2018). The teacher is mostly responsible for initiating classroom interaction through verbal communication. The teacher delivers directions, presents information, asks questions, presents grammatical content, and corrects students' faults using a combination of the first and target languages. This is referred to as verbal interaction practice (Yuliani, 2021).

The use of pronouns usually occurs in the interaction between the teacher and the students. When presenting the materials, teachers usually address the students continuously. Typically, teachers repeatedly use the pronoun 'you' in such activities as asking the students to answer a question, discussing a question/answer with the students, or checking the students' comprehension. However, many teachers also use the pronoun 'we' when interacting with students. The goal is to create a cooperative and solid interactional atmosphere in the teaching and learning process, in which teachers and students collaborate to achieve a common goal (Rounds, 1987). Moje (1995) suggests that teachers' language choice, including pronoun choice, makes students feel part of the learning group. Moreover, Beltrán (2000, in Sánchez et al., 2013) states that if the teacher is being communicative, it shows a good attitude and can create a secure environment. As a result, the students may feel comfortable and motivated when learning a foreign language.

3. METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used to gain insights about a particular phenomenon by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting narrative and visual data (Gay et al., 2016). This research focused on finding out and analyzing the different references of the pronoun 'we' uttered by EFL teachers in classroom interaction. Therefore, spoken discourse, particularly the teacher's actual utterances in classroom interaction, is the focus of the analysis.

The data were collected at a vocational high school in Makassar. Since the school had only two English teachers, the researcher took both teachers as the research subject. The researcher used three instruments to collect the data, namely observation, audio recorder, and interview. While observing the class, the researcher also recorded the classroom interaction of the second grade four times, two meetings for each teacher, using a handphone audio recording tool. The audio recording was transcribed into written form. The transcript covers the patterns and sequences of the actual talks. The teacher's utterances were analyzed interactively using the three discourse analysis procedures suggested by Miles et al. (2014): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. After the data in the transcript was sorted out, the data extraction was put in the text box to make it easier for the readers to locate the data, and then the conclusions were developed. After that, the researchers conducted a structured interview by giving eight open-ended questions to both teachers. The questions were to confirm the teachers' intentions of using the pronoun 'we' and the teachers' connection with the students.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Distinct Uses of the Pronoun 'We' by EFL Teachers

After transcribing the data recording, the researcher found that the EFL teachers used the pronoun 'we' that referred to six distinct references. The detailed analysis is explained as follows.

4.1.1 *Speaker and more than one addressee*

Among the referential range of the pronoun 'we', the pronoun that inclusively refers to himself and the students was the most frequently used by the teachers in the classroom interaction. This can be seen in Extract 1.

Extract 1 (Teacher 1)

- T : If I am not mistaken, in our last meeting, I gave you an assignment that you have to introduce yourself by making a video and you need to send it to my email. Last night I check my email, but only some of you already sent your assignment to my email. Well, it's up to you.
- Ss : (talking to their classmates about the assignment)
- T : Okay. The first video comes from Adi, please look at here!
 (playing the video)
 The next video is from Nurilmi
 (playing the video)

Okay, please clap your hand! And then I will show you how Western people or foreigners introduce himself or herself to others. We can see in the video that I am going to play. Please listen carefully! Because later I will ask you some questions related to the video.

In Extract 1, the pronoun 'we' refers to both the teacher and the students studying in the classroom. From the statement 'we can see in the video that I am going to play', the teacher tried to establish solidarity with his students by giving an impression to the students that he would come along with the students watching the video. On the other hand, the pronoun 'I' intended to notify the students that the teacher was the one who would play the video, not the students. Thus, the use of different pronouns in the statement represented a simultaneous demonstration of solidarity and power by the teacher.

Extract 2 (Teacher 1)

T : And also, we have to be careful in pronouncing 'ty' and 'teen' in numbers. Repeat after me! Ty.

Ss : Ty.

T : Teen.

Ss : Teen.

T : It's slightly different in pronunciation, but they have totally different meanings. For example, if you say you are 'seventy years old', you are too old. So, it's not seventy, but seventeen. Be careful in pronouncing 'ty' and 'teen'.

Extract 2 shows the inclusive pronoun 'we' that refers to both himself and the students. The statement warned the students to pay attention to the different pronunciations of 'ty' and 'teen' in numbers. In this case, the teacher used the pronoun 'we' to soften the warning and appeal to common group membership by making the students feel like he might also incorrectly pronounce these words. Therefore, it might be able to put them at ease.

Extract 3 (Teacher 2)

T : Okay. Well. Today we are going to learn about some expressions. But before that, I want to review what you have learned yesterday. What's your name?

S : Abdul Yasar

T : Abdul Yasar, I have given you an assignment. It's about a story in Indonesia. What's the title of your story?

In Extract 3, the pronoun 'we' was used by the teacher to assure the students that he was an active participant in the learning process. The teacher wanted the students to think that they were not alone in doing learning activities. In addition, the teacher confirmed that he wanted the students to think that they would learn together about the topic in the classroom and that he would help them understand the materials. Generally, this typical use of the pronoun 'we' is often used to establish solidarity between the teacher and students, motivate the students, and create a positive connection in the classroom.

Extract 4 (Teacher 2)

T : Because this is our third meeting, I want to make specific rules. The first one is 'do not put your cell phone on the chair!' Do not use your cell phone when we are learning! If you have difficulty understanding some words, please bring your own dictionary! Do not use your cell phone! Okay?

Ss : Okay Sir.

T : And then, the second one is 'if you don't do your assignment or your homework, you are not allowed to come to my class'. Are we clear?

Ss : Yes, Sir.

In Extract 4, the pronoun ‘we’ was used in two different contexts. In the first statement, ‘Do not use your cell phone when we are learning!’ the teacher used the pronoun to emphasize that he and the students were equally involved in the learning activities. On the other hand, the question ‘are we clear?’ was used to ascertain students’ agreement to follow the rules politely. This question was also used to signal the students that the teacher could assert the rules. Furthermore, because of the unequal power status between the teacher and students, rejection from the addressees (students) was inappropriate. Finally, the pronoun ‘we’ was used to reduce the possibility of face-threatening.

4.1.2 *Speaker and more than one third party*

This type of referential value is commonly used to indicate that the listeners are excluded from the group. However, in the interaction, the teacher rarely used this type of pronoun ‘we’, indeed it was used only once by Teacher 1. This particular ‘we’ is more likely to appear when the teacher does not share the students’ knowledge and experience, as seen in the following extraction:

Extract 5 (Teacher 1)

T : Did you ever listen about PO before?

Ss : (silent)

T : PO is Post Office. Sometimes people who work in a company use PO Box. It’s like this, ya. When I worked in a private company, when we opened a job vacancy, we don’t need every applicant to come to the office to bring their application letter. We provide PO Box for the applicants, so they can just send it through the post office. What about this? Do you know what is it?

S : Kode pos [Post code]

From Extract 5, in the statement ‘When I worked in a private company when we opened a job vacancy, we don’t need every applicant to come to the office to bring their application letter’, the reference and the meaning of the pronoun ‘we’ may be ambiguous for the students. In this case, the pronoun ‘we’ referred to the teacher, his former colleagues, and the company as a whole. Also, it is implied that the teacher set himself apart from the students to represent his experience about the topic discussed in the classroom. This typical pronoun ‘we’ is usually used to show the power and prestige of the speaker to the addressees (Pavlidou, 2014).

4.1.3 *Speaker and indefinite group (humankind)*

The pronoun ‘we’ can also refer to general people (humankind). The entities of this ‘we’ extend beyond the group of speakers and listeners. This type of ‘we’ was used only by Teacher 1. The data extraction involving this value can be seen in Extract 6.

Extract 6 (Teacher 1)

T : Okay the first one, if we want to introduce ourselves, the first one we have to say or we have to tell is our name. But please remember in English there are many types of names. The first one is full...?

Ss : Full name

T : Good! What does the full name mean?

Ss : *Nama lengkap* [full name]

From Extract 6, in the statement 'if we want to introduce ourselves, the first one we have to say, or we have to tell is our name', the pronoun 'we' referred to everyone who introduces himself/herself to others. The teacher wanted to let the students understand that whoever introduces himself/herself must firstly tell his/her name. Therefore, the teacher's explanation was based on what commonly happens in real life when teaching the topic.

Extract 7 (Teacher 2)

T : What is the difference between email and post office?

S : *Lama mengirimnya* [It takes a long time for letters to arrive]

T : What about email?

Ss : *Lebih cepat* [faster]

T : Okay. What about the address?

S : *Kalo kirim lewat kantor pos pake alamat kantor* [If we send it through the post office, we use the address of the office].

T : Alright, with email we can do it quickly without a courier, while with the post office, we have to come to the post office, and then we have to pay and have to wait for at least one day.

In Extract 7, the teacher explained the difference between email and post by using the inclusive pronoun 'we', which referred to the inclusive group of the teacher, the students, and people outside the classroom. The teacher clarified that he used such pronoun 'we' when explaining things that generally happen to all people so that the students could relate to their own experiences. This kind of inclusive pronoun is usually used when the interactions relate to the habit or culture of common people.

4.1.4 'We' indicating 'I'

Another referential value of 'we' is to refer to a single speaker. The pronoun 'we' that indicates 'I' occurred only once in the classroom interaction. The data extraction can be seen in Extract 8.

Extract 8 (Teacher 1)

T : If I am not mistaken, from our last meeting, last week, you have homework

Ss : Yes.

T : Okay. When I count, one two three, you have to submit your homework on my desk ya... one...two...

Ss : <XwordX>

T : Okay...Okay...finish! I have informed to you before in our English class, we have made rules, ya. The first one is 'homework is not schoolwork'. The second is 'if you don't have homework, you have to wait outside'. It means you can't join my class. So, who did not do the homework?

Ss : (raise hands)

T : Okay, please wait outside!

Based on Extract 8, the pronoun 'we' in the statement 'we have made rules' refers to a single speaker that is the teacher. The teacher confirmed that the pronoun 'we' strictly referred to himself as the one who made the rules in his class. Therefore, it can be interpreted that the rules about homework were only for the students because only students did the homework, not the teacher. The teacher was in charge of establishing rules, while the students were responsible for following the rules. In this case, the pronoun 'we' was employed as an expression of power within the classroom.

4.1.5 'We' indicating 'you'

In the interaction between the teacher and the students, this referential value only appeared once. Pavlidou (2014) proposed that this type of 'we' is commonly used for directive statements, nursery, condescending, and recipes. However, this referential value was used by the teacher only for the directive purpose. It can be seen in Extract 9.

Extract 9 (Teacher 1)

T : Okay. Seven minutes more, ya. This is your assignment. I will give you back your assignment, but you still have another task related to the paper that we have done. Deal?

Ss : Deal.

T : Because you already have a business letter. The first one you have to identify the standard format of your business letter. *Jadi* [so], I will give you back your paper and identify where is the heading, body, signature, opening, *dan lain-lain* [etc.]. Deal?

Ss : Deal.

In Extract 9, the pronoun 'we' was used to refer to the students only. It can be seen in the statement, 'I will give you back your assignment, but you still have another task related to the paper that we have done'. The teacher implied that the students were the ones who did the paper. The teacher did not participate in doing the assignment, but he was responsible for checking whether the assignment was correct or incorrect. In the interview, the teacher indicated that he used the pronoun to achieve positive politeness and maintain students' positive attitudes towards the teacher.

Extract 10 (Teacher 2)

T : Okay now, we will practice using this one. So, I have some papers here, I will divide you into some groups. How many students are in this class?

S : Thirty-six.

In Extract 10, the pronoun 'we' was used to refer strictly to the students in the classroom. From the statement 'we will practice using this one', the teacher told the students to be ready for an exercise. The teacher was excluded as a referent of the pronoun because he asked the students to get in groups to do the exercise. The students were the participants, while the teacher was the facilitator. In the interview session, the teacher confirmed that he used the pronoun 'we' to deliver requests politely.

4.1.6 'We' indicating "they"

The final referential value that also appeared in the classroom interaction was the pronoun 'we', which refers solely to a third party. It is considered an exclusive form of 'we' because the speaker and the listener(s) are not included in the reference. It can be seen as follows:

Extract 11 (Teacher 1)

T : Now, I will tell the story in English. One day, three students got a scholarship to study in Australia. One student is from America, one is from Japan, and one is from Indonesia. The student from America, his name is John. The student from Japan, his name is Yamada. And the student from Indonesia, his name is Baso, because he comes from Makassar. Before entering the university, *mereka diberi kesempatan untuk jalan-jalan keliling kota* [they are given a chance to go around the city]. *Siapa yang mau ke Australia juga* [Who also wants to go to Australia?]

Ss : Saya [me].

T : You should apply for a scholarship, so you can also go abroad. I will continue the story. So, when they go around the city, they are provided with only one motorcycle. They think, how can they ride in one motorcycle? Motorcycle *hanya untuk dua orang* [can only fit two persons]. And the problem is, who can ride the motorcycle? Yamada says to John "you must be able to ride the motorcycle because America and Australia are the same, they both speak English". But John says "I can't, I don't have an international license". Then, they discuss it again and ask Yamada "because this motorcycle is made in Japan, you must be able to ride the motorcycle". Yamada refuses, "I can't, Japan and Australia are so different. In Japan, there are so many mountains, while in Australia, the area is flatter. Also, in Japan, we use *huruf kanji* [kanji letters], while in Australia, we speak English. My English is not good". After that, they discuss it again and say, "Baso, how about you? Can you ride a motorcycle?" Baso says, "I have learned to ride a motorcycle before coming here, so let's go!" Are you still listening?

Ss : Yes.

In Extract 11, the teacher used the pronoun when he told a story about three students from Indonesia, Japan, and America who got a scholarship to study in Australia. The first 'we' refers to the people who live in Japan, while the second 'we' in the statement refers to those in Australia. The teacher used the pronoun 'we' to position himself as Yamada in the story. Therefore, although the teacher was the one using the pronoun, 'we,' 'he' and 'the students' were excluded from the reference.

4.2 Teachers' Reasons for Using the Pronoun 'We'

The researchers held interview sessions with both teachers to investigate why they used the pronoun 'we' in classroom interaction. The interview was conducted in different places and times for each teacher. Based on the gained data, both teachers have different reasons for using the pronoun 'we'.

According to the first teacher, he regularly used the pronoun 'we', especially the inclusive form, in the classroom interaction for two main reasons. Firstly, he thought that using more pronouns 'we' in the classroom can establish better relationships with the students. The teacher expected the students to feel free to interact and communicate with the teacher and not feel afraid of asking questions when they have problems understanding the lesson. Secondly, the teacher wanted the students to enjoy the English learning process. He tried to make the class fun and enjoyable for the students. Using the pronoun 'we' seemed to help him establish solidarity and connection with his students. The inclusive 'we' conveyed a sense of commonality between the speaker and their listeners. This approach establishes a positive connection by involving the listeners in what is being said and addressing them as peers rather than apprentices (di Carlo, 2018).

On the other hand, the second teacher seldom used the pronoun 'we' when interacting with the students in the classroom. In the interview session, the teacher explained that he used the pronoun to show politeness to the students. He compared the use of 'we' in Buginese culture with Western culture. He claimed that in Buginese culture, the pronoun 'we' can show politeness and respect to the addressee(s). The teacher tried to bring that value of the Buginese culture into the classroom. According to Nashruddin et al. (2020), the pronoun 'we' in Buginese culture is an honorific vocabulary of linguistic politeness that is normally used to address the second-person singular/plural.

The different reasons between the first and second teachers might be influenced by their teaching experience and the relationship they were trying to build with their

students. The first teacher has been teaching English for more than ten years. It implied that he has dealt with many different students in terms of attitude, knowledge, and culture. According to the transcription analysis, the teacher understood how, when, and why he should use the pronoun 'we' in the classroom. The intention was clear to help him establish close but appropriate relationships with the students.

On the other hand, the second teacher had only been teaching English for less than two years. He admitted that teaching English at the school was his first experience. It indicated that the teacher was relatively inexperienced in dealing with different students and classrooms. Based on the analysis of the transcription, the teacher seldom used the pronoun 'we' when interacting with his students. Instead, he tended to use the pronoun 'we' that refers to the speaker and more than one addressee, which referred strictly to the students. In addition, the relationship that he was trying to build with the students was an appropriate relationship that gave priority to show respect and politeness to each other.

However, despite the different uses of the pronoun 'we', both teachers employed it to motivate and encourage their students to create a more welcoming learning environment. In this case, when the teachers gave either warning or command to the students, they preferred using the pronoun 'we' instead of 'you'. Again, they wanted the students to feel comfortable and motivated when learning a foreign language.

5. DISCUSSION

All of the eleven extracts above demonstrated the different uses of the pronoun 'we' by EFL teachers in classroom interaction. Of the thirteen different referential range of pronoun 'we' proposed by [Pavlidou \(2014\)](#), the teachers only used the pronoun 'we' that referred to six different references: (1) 'we' that refers to speaker and more than one addressee, (2) 'we' that refers to speaker and more than one-third party, (3) 'we' that refers to speaker and indefinite group, (4) 'we' that indicates 'you', (5) 'we' that indicates 'I', and (6) 'we' that indicates "they".

Based on the findings, the teachers most frequently used the pronoun 'we' that referred to the inclusive group of himself and the students. By doing so, the teachers attempted to develop certain relationships with the students. This type of pronoun reference is used for different purposes. Firstly, the pronoun is used for establishing solidarity between the teacher and the students. According to [Brown and Gilman \(1960\)](#), solidarity is a symmetrical and reciprocal relationship that considers each person has equal power and right. In this case, the solidarity between teacher and students was built by making the students feel that they were not alone in the learning process. Secondly, this type of inclusive pronoun is also used for indicating cooperation between the teacher and students in the classroom. In this case, the teacher wanted the students to think that he would help them understand the lesson and guide them in doing tasks. Thirdly, the pronoun 'we' can be used to soften the speech act of warning. This finding is in line with [Johnson and Picciuolo's \(2021\)](#) study, which found that lecturers who taught using English as a medium of instruction tended to use more inclusive 'we' to encourage students' active engagement in class, increasing their sense of belonging to a group.

Another important finding is the use of the pronoun 'we' to imply power and prestige. Power and prestige were implied when the pronoun 'we' referred to the

teacher along with another group outside the classroom and the one that indicates himself as a single referent. Both referential values belonged to the exclusive form of 'we', which means that the students were excluded from the referent. In this case, instead of using the pronoun 'I' to imply somebody's power, the pronoun 'we' could help minimize the threat and gap between the superior and the inferior. This is in accordance with a critical discourse analysis conducted by [Dahnilsyah \(2017\)](#), who interpreted that using the pronoun 'we' is part of the strategy to use power to gain a positive image and reduce tension and pressure.

The teachers also used the pronoun 'we' to refer strictly to the students only in the interaction. This referential value usually emerged when the teachers gave specific directions to the students and assigned tasks for the students. In this case, the pronoun 'we' that signified 'you' was used to soften directive speech, indicate politeness in request, and lessen the demanding speech act of order, as also found by [Reynolds-Case \(2012\)](#) in her study. As [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) suggest, using the pronoun 'we' is actually using linguistic indirectness as a strategy to achieve positive politeness from the listeners.

The findings also show that the teachers used the pronoun 'we' to represent themselves with indefinite humankind and indicated by 'they'. The teachers referred to general people, especially when talking about the activities that every person generally does. According to [Roepcke \(1998\)](#), this type of pronoun 'we' represents the broadest (most impersonal) construction of 'we', and therefore it has to include the students as the local reference. The purpose is to relate to the students' experience and understanding. On the other hand, the pronoun 'we' that indicated 'they' appeared only once in the interaction. This referential value is unique because the teacher excluded himself and the students in the reference. Although the teacher excluded himself in the reference, he tried to integrate himself with the referents. As mentioned before, that the common designation of this referential value is for integrative use. According to [Lichtenberk \(2005\)](#), integrative means the speaker integrates himself/herself and the addressees into one group even though objectively they are not members of the group. The integration is not the same as inclusion. Since there is a clear distinction between the speaker, the addressee, and the referent, the pronoun 'we' is used only to position themselves into one group they do not belong to.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and the discussion, it was found that the pronoun 'we' was used by the teachers with six specific references: 'we' that refers to speaker and more than one addressee, 'we' that refers to the speaker, and more than one-third party, 'we' that refers to speaker and indefinite group, 'we' that indicates 'you', 'we' that indicates 'I', and 'we' that indicates they. Moreover, both teachers had different ways of using the pronoun 'we' and different reasons for using the pronoun in classroom interaction. The first teacher used the pronoun 'we' to establish a close relationship with his students and make the students enjoy the learning process, while the second teacher used the pronoun 'we' to show politeness. However, despite the differences, they both seemed to have the same intention of creating a positive learning environment.

This study provides understandings, findings, and insights of both literature and linguistics to extend knowledge about the use of the pronoun 'we' in classroom

discourse. This study also shows the connection that can be built between teachers and students in the classroom by using the pronoun ‘we’. Although it has answered the research questions, there are some limitations to this study. The respondents in this study are limited to two EFL teachers with their students. More observations of classroom interaction from various teachers can strengthen the arguments and present different phenomena. Moreover, this study can further research the correlation between the use of the pronoun ‘we’ and the teacher-student relationship.

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