Cultural Learning in Teaching English

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Abstract

Learning a language is not only about learning its language aspects and four language skills but also about its culture. A new language cannot be achieved entirely unless the students have achieved the cultural context of that language. This articles discusses; relation of language and culture, culture in foreign language teaching, language teaching methods view on culture, applying culture in EFL/ESL classroom. Introducing culture is suggested to foreign language learners focusing more on communicative ability with the target language. Language and culture are closely related. Most of language teaching methods view that language and culture are inseparable. Introducing culture has an important role in EFL/ESL. It can reduce misunderstanding, culture shock, and stereotype. Cultural teaching must be integrated with four language skills in language learning. Cultural materials that are good in language learning are authentic text such as literature, newspapers, film, vlogging, table manner practice, proverbs, folklore and the native speakers

Keywords: culture, language, language teaching, ESL/EFL

Introduction

That English plays an important role in this global era is no longer doubtful. English is used as the international language in various fields such as economy, technology, health, and education. Notifying the importance of English, there are many nations that use English as their official language but it is still a foreign language in Indonesia. However, English has already been spoken in the class during teaching and learning process in some Indonesian schools having immersion program or school with international standard. Besides, nowadays English is already introduced earlier to the young learners such as to the students of an Elementary School even though it is just as a local content.

English language learning is emphasized on the mastery of four languages skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and language aspects (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling). Both of them are integrated taught to develop the learners' communicative ability. The ending of English language teaching is that the learners are able to communicate with English well.

An aspect that is sometimes just left behind in teaching a foreign language such as English is learning about the culture of the target language. It is necessary to introduce the culture in teaching and learning language. Soureshjani [1] p. 58 writes that to comprehend a language, language learners need to know not only knowledge of grammar or syntax, phonology, and vocabulary but also to know about its culture. Learning language is not only learning about aspects of language and its skills but also learning its culture because language and culture are closely related.

In communication process, grammatical errors can be understood and tolerated by the native speakers whom we are speaking with, but cultural misunderstanding will be fatal. An English native speaker may tolerate the learners when they make grammatical errors but the native speaker will not be able to tolerate the learners if they make some cultural errors. Even the native speakers will get offended when cultural misunderstanding takes place. For example, saying *"Who is your name"* instead of *"What is your name"*

to ask someone's will still be tolerable for the English native speakers.

On the other hand, the expression like *"How old are you?"* will be intolerable for an English native speaker. There is nothing wrong in the term of grammar in that expression, but such kind of question is considered to be impolite if it is addressed to the English native speakers that you meet at the first time. Asking age is something we need to avoid when we meet them for the first time. Age is something private for the English native speakers. Malihah [2] pp. 44 gives examples that questions dealing with age, marital status, and salary are not forbidden in the context of English culture unless those are asked in the job interview. However, those questions are allowed in Javanese culture specially to maintain the conversation. It happens due to the lack of cultural awareness on English.

Learning language is not about understanding grammar well, having many vocabularies, having native speaker-like pronunciation. The language learner is supposed to use the language in the same way the native speakers use it. It means that the language used by the learner must be authentic and acceptable in the society where the language is spoken. Indonesian learners perhaps say *"My finger is cut"* to say *"Jariku terkiris"*. There are no grammatical mistakes within the sentence but the expression is not spoken by the English native speakers. They prefer saying "I cut my finger". This expression is perhaps a bit confusing to the learners but that the way it says.

From the brief description it is clearly enough that the purpose of learning foreign language in this case is English, is not only mastering the language aspects and skills but also mastering the culture of the society where the language is spoken. Language and culture are inseparable so that's why it should be underlined that culture is an important element in language learning [3], pp. 522.

Culture actually has been introduced in learning English through some methods such as Grammar Translation Method, Audio lingual Method, Direct Method, etc. Those methods introduce culture in different perspectives. Grammar Translation Method introduces culture through literature texts. Audio Lingual Method and Direct Methods introduces culture through the introduction of countries where English is spoken, habits and the life style of the English native speakers.

In Indonesia, English learning has already been enclosed cultural aspects through spoken and written texts. However, it still practices less and is given less attention in learning process. Marmanto [4] mentions that curriculum of 2004 or known as competency based curriculum which emphasizes on Contextual Language Teaching (CLT), has already discussed about culture, especially local culture. The presentation of the material is still in the level of understanding knowledge so the evaluation is still in the level of language aspects. Still on [4] language learning will be better if it is on the stage of students' activity. The students are invited to compare the culture of the target language (English) and their own language (Indonesian). Hopefully, it will increase the students' awareness towards their own nation culture which is of course different from that of the language they are learning.

It is obviously known that understanding culture is quite important in learning a foreign language such as English. Besides, to overcome misunderstanding in communication process, it can become a media to improve the students' awareness of their own culture which is of course different from the culture of target language, to overcome culture shock. Finally, the difference which exists between two languages can build the tolerance of students to other cultures. So that is why, introducing culture in teaching foreign language such as English should be given attention.

To support this article, the writer includes the notion of language and culture, the relation of language and culture, culture in language teaching methods, the role of culture

in language teaching methods, bringing culture in EFL/ESL classrooms.

2 Discussion

2.1 The Notion of Language and Culture

There are many definitions of culture. Broadly speaking culture is way of life. Larson and Smalley in [5] pp. 122 describes culture as a master plan in a certain society that lead its members to behave and set in a family life. Culture means a rule or the scheme ruling the society members. Brown [5] pp. 122 adds culture is the environment where people live, think, mingle each other and bind them together. It means that culture is the circumstances where we can show our existence, explore our mind and express our feeling and relates its members. Culture is like glue that binds a group of people sharing the same culture Peck in [3] pp. 522 describes culture as way of behavior that has been acknowledged by a group of people in a certain society.

However, culture is not always about rule but it may include thoughts, traditions, habits, arts, that symbolize a group of people within certain time. Kuo and Lai [6] pp.2 explains that there are many different proportion of culture such as ideas, customs, skills, arts, as well as tools belong to a society in a particular period. In addition, Cheung in [7] pp.1 mentions that customs, values, laws, technology, artifacts and art in a certain time may defined as culture. In order to be able to survive culture is communicated from one generation to the next generation. To communicate it, there is a media called language.

Edward T Hall in [8] pp.109 states that *"kebudayaan adalah komunikasi dan komunikasi adalah kebudayaan".* It means that culture is language and language is culture. Culture is necessary to be communicated through generation to keep the culture alive. Human as the member of the society needs to interact with a media called a language. Language itself is a part of a 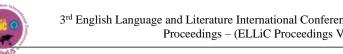culture. Language is a means of verbal communication belongs to human to interact in the society. Language also represents a different way of thinking. Kuo and Lai [6] pp. 3 explain that language as a system of communication in some way is reflection of how minds of the speakers work or think.

2.2 The relation of Culture and Language

Culture and language are closely related. Language is one of cultural elements and culture is shaped and communicated in the society through a language. From Linguistics, at least there are some linguists trying to explain the relation of language and culture for instance William von Humboldt, Ferdinand de Saussure, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf.

On von Humboldt's point of view, there is a close relation of society, culture, and language. Language can determine the individual way of thinking and determine the world view of its speakers. This is known as Linguistic determinism. Linguistic determinism is the idea that language and its structures limit and determine human knowledge or thought, as well as thought processes such as categorization, memory, and perception.

Ferdinand de Saussure views language relativity as the different lexemes or we can say words of a language. Linguistic relativism is the idea that the language a person speaks has an influence on this person's cognition. This same idea, but with the added requirement of adherence to the method of empirical validation, is often termed the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis'. For instance, American prefers saying fall to autumn which is preferred by English people. Lexemes or words are not the representation of the real object out there but the representation of perception and description of the language users that are determined by the language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis defines that language shapes the society's thinking, beliefs, and attitudes. Language influences how people think and see the world.

Tense or time is something important in English grammar. It influences the society's thinking on time. English society thinks time as a valuable thing so they respect the time much such as being on time when they have an appointment, no wasting tie for something useless. Another example is taken from a popular English proverbs saying Time flies like an arrow. On the other hand, Indonesian grammar has no tense like English does, so time is not so appreciated. There are two popular proverbs dealing with time in both Javanese *(Alon-alon waton kelakon* means slow but sure) and Indonesian *(Biar lambat asal selamat)* means it is fine to move slow as long as we save). From the two proverbs, it is clearly seen that time is not an important thing to reach the goal.

Another example can be found in vocabulary level. Language represent culture in the minds of the speakers. For example, in Indonesian language there are *padi, gabah, beras,* and *nasi* which are all known as *rice* in English vocabulary. On the other hands, English has many vocabularies for *snowing (hujan salju)* such as *blizzard* (a long severe snowstorm), *onding* (heavy fall of rain or snow), *skift* (a light fall of snow), *sleet* (frozen or partly frozen rain), while in Indonesian language it is only known as *snowing (turun salju)*. Those difference of vocabulary are influenced by the culture. The more vocabularies on rice because Indonesia is an agricultural country where the main staple food is *beras* (rice). On the other hand, English is a country with four season where snowing always happens in winter, so they have many vocabularies for snow and snowing.

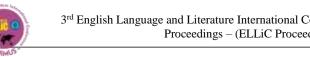## 2.3 Culture in Foreign Language Teaching Methods

Teaching Foreign Language has been known for centuries and always changes as time goes by. The change is due to the difference view on the notion of language and the language learning. This different view influences the goal of foreign language teaching. The goal of foreign language teaching is focused on developing the texts comprehension ability in the target language or on developing the communicative ability in the target language. There are many foreign language teaching methods such as Grammar Translation Methods (GTM), Direct Methods (DM), Audio Lingual Methods, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Desuggestopedia, Total Physical Response (TPR), Communicative Language Teaching, Task Based, Content Based, Genre Based Approach.

Foreign language teaching methods from the old to the newest ones have enclosed the culture aspects in the teaching and learning process. What makes them different from one to another is the way how they view the culture. GTM views culture from literature texts and arts [9] pp. 37. So the students are introduced to some literature texts and arts of the target language. Culture is not only about literature and arts but also about norms, habits, custom, ways of thinking so the information about culture is still limited within this method. DM starts to teach culture through the history of the native speakers, geographical area where the language is spoken and some information dealing with everyday life of the native speakers [9] pp. 53)

Language cannot be separated from culture in ALM [9], pp. 69. ALM is quite similar to DM which view culture from the attitude and life style of the native speakers of the target language. So the teacher must be able to provide information about the native speakers' culture. Similar with the previous method, Silent Way sees that culture is inseparable to language too [9], pp. 93. Every language has its own uniqueness describing the society and culture is the reflection of the society's way of thinking. Desuggestopedia suggests that the students learn culture in the form of daily life of the people speaking the language. In addition, the use of arts is still found in this methods since it is still considered important [9], pp.111.

Community Language Learning values culture as an integral in foreign language teaching [9], pp. 129. TPR also see the culture in the lifestyle of people speaking the language natively [9], pp.145.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) values culture as everyday lifestyle of people speaking the language. CLT also concerns on the use of nonverbal behavior [9], pp. 163. Content Based Instruction (CBI) views that culture is given in the content area being studied in the teaching and learning activity [9], pp. 182.

2.4 The Role of Culture in Language Teaching Methods

Teaching culture has been considered important in foreign language teaching for almost a century Soureshjani,[1] pp.58. Genc and Bada [10] pp.73 emphasize that the absence of the study of culture, second language teaching is neither accurate nor complete. To communicate with foreign language does not only involve the knowledge of how to arrange words into sentences but also involve the knowledge of its culture. National Standards for Foreign Language Education project (1996) as cited in Kuo and Lai [6] pp. 6 say that a new language cannot be achieved entirely unless the students have achieved the cultural context of that language. Foreign language learning nowadays is focused more to develop communicative skill with the target language. Genc and Bada [10] pp. 73 propose that the rising of the need for cultural understanding in ELT is due to the significant difficulty during the process of communication faced by most of the language learners with no sufficient expose to the target culture. Learning how to communicate with a new language means learning how to behave in a new culture too. Introducing culture is necessary in foreign language teaching methods focusing on communicative skill. It can be done for example by simple things such as introducing geographical area, tradition, life style, ways of thinking of the native speakers.

The introduction of culture is to avoid misunderstanding with the native speakers during the communication. In the international communication, understanding culture is important because grammatical errors can be understood and tolerated by the native speakers, on the other hand, cultural errors are a bit difficult to understand and intolerable. Such kind of misunderstanding can make the communication run unwell. For example, avoid to say "Where are you going?" to foreigners (American) because such question will make them uncomfortable. They do not like someone knows their business by asking such question. Such kind of misunderstanding can be avoided by introducing culture in teaching and learning foreign language.

Chahak and Basirizadeh [3], pp. 522 state that target culture understanding can become a thread for the students' own culture. However, knowing the culture of foreign language can make the learners realize that there is another culture outside their own culture. When we use foreign language to communicate, we must be aware of that there can be different cultural norms among the cultures, some can be the same but some can be totally different [3] pp. 522. It can prevent the learners from being selfish about their own culture. Knowing other culture is helpful for the students to appreciate and to respect the other culture. Understanding about other culture can broaden their knowledge and increase their own culture awareness. Cultural understanding may also help the learners not to be stereotype. We often make some generalization about culture such as concluding that all American are rich.

Introducing culture in learning foreign language can overcome culture shock. It will be seen well when the learners get opportunity to learn the foreign language in the country where it is spoken. Understanding about foreign language

culture at least can shorten the periods of culture shock happened to the language learners. If they do not have enough understanding about foreign language culture, they are probably get problems even though they can use the language fluently.

2.5 Bringing Culture in ESL/EFL Classroom

Perhaps, first of all, we have to define what English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) are. ESL is English taught to people whose main language is not English and they live in a country where English is an official or main language such as English in Singapore and India. On the other hand, EFL is English taught to people whose main language is not English and they live in a country where English is not the official or main language such as English in Indonesia. English is the main foreign language taught in Indonesia.

Cultural materials should be taught integrated in the teaching and learning process. Introducing culture can be done along with the teaching of four language skills and four aspects of language. Syairi [11] pp. 174 declares that cultural base learning is a strategy to create learning atmosphere and experience design that integrate the culture as a part of process of learning. The teachers should think carefully in choosing material dealing with cultural activities given in the class. They should be managed and incorporated into the second language lesson plans in order that it can give enrichment to the teaching context content.

The teachers must pay attention on the cultural materials they want to give. Idrees [7], pp.3 proposes some teacher's role before introducing culture in their class. The teachers should make survey on students' need on what they want to learn about culture (food, literature, games, customs, patterns of social interaction, beliefs, values). The teachers should refresh with the current cultural changes like politics, economic, sport, music, movies.

Still from [7] pp. 4, the students should be exposed to the authentic materials from the target language community. Authentic materials are those taken from real sources and designed for communicative purposes rather than for teaching and learning [12] pp.37. Authentic materials are not designed for teaching language. Authentic materials are for communication for native speakers and good to be used in EFL/ESL classroom because of its original forms and design. Authentic materials can be in the form of spoken or written ones. Written authentic materials are likes are newspapers, magazine, websites, menus, bills, tickets or even labels. The spoken materials can be TV programs, movies, announcement, radio talk, weather forecast, commercial breaks.

Moreover, Gebhard in [12], pp. 39 mentions that authentic materials can be classified into authentic listening/viewing materials (silent films, TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news, comedy shows, dramas, movies, soap operas, radio news, professional audio taped short stories/novels, radio ads, and documentaries), authentic visual materials (slides, photographs, paintings, drawing by children, stick-figure drawings, wordless street signs, calendar pictures, pictures from travel, news, popular magazines, postcard, stamps), authentic printed materials (newspaper articles, movie advertisements, astrology columns, sports reports, advice columns, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, street signs, travel magazines, cereal boxes, candy wrappers, tourist information brochures, university catalogs, telephone books, maps, greeting cards, grocery coupon, bus schedules)

Kuo and Lai [6], pp.7 suggest that the teachers needs to match the cultural material with the learners' age and competence. Idrees [7] pp. 2 writes that cultural teaching aims at increasing the learners' awareness on both their own and other's culture. So it is necessary also to provide material comparing both cultures. Comparative and contrastive are meaningful in cultural learning [13],

pp.57. The using of appropriate materials with cultural content, hopefully, can be helpful for the students to get involved in actual cultural experiences.
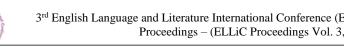
There are some useful sources that can be used in introducing culture in the classroom such as;

a. English newspapers and magazines
    Those includes as authentic materials. They can provide facts of everyday life in society. Those material offer us with advertisement, politic affairs, economy affairs, and local social affairs. They can support the learners to learn the target language in a natural way. We can benefit the offline or online newspaper and magazine. There are some examples of newspaper online websites such as; www.bbc.com/news, www.express.co.uk, www.thetimes.co.uk, www.abcnews.go.com, www.nytimes.com, www.m.huffpost.com. For the online magazines we can klick on www.newsweek.com, www.cbssport.com, www.ew.com. The teachers can expose the articles found in both English newspapers and magazines to explore the students' language skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and speaking as well as the students' grammar mastery.

b. English Video and English Film
    Video and film can be used to introduce culture. Though most of the movie is only a fiction but the story in the movie can describe about norms, habits, attitudes, behavior, and way of thinking of the society. Nowadays, vlogging is very popular around the world. Vlogging is an activity in which people record their opinions, thoughts and experiences than publishing it in the internet so that it is wide world seen. Vlogging materials can be about culinary, daily activities, tour travel, review or unboxing products, make up tutorial, fashions, education video, etc. There are many vlogs made by English speaking vloggers in You Tube that can be used as an authentic material source. On the other hand, Idrees [7] pp. 4 says film consists of observable behaviors of society within the texts. There are now many sources in the internet to find films and videos such as www.youtube.com. But teachers should be very wise and be careful to choose the movie. They have to choose the appropriate movies for the students' age. Both video and film are good to explore the students' language skills for instance listening comprehension, speaking, writing, translation as well as interpreting.

c. Proverbs
    Proverbs are short, simple and famous sayings that usually consists of advice based on practical experience. These can be used as cultural materials in the class because they have close relation with language and cultures. Contrasting common proverbs in the target and learners' native language can help them to observe the difference and similarity of the common proverbs and in addition this concept can give insights of the target culture [7], pp.4. There are actually many proverbs having the same meaning around the world. For example, in Indonesia we have *Ada udang dibalik batu* (There is a shrimp behind the stone) but in English proverb we know There is a snake in the grass. Both proverbs have the same meaning but they use different symbols. The other examples of the similar proverbs *are Nasi sudah menjadi bubur* (Crying over spilt milk), *Sekali merengkuh dayung dua tiga pulau terlampaui* (Killing two

birds with one stone), Tong kosong nyaring bunyinya (Actions speak louder than words), *Kehidupan berjalan seperti roda, kadang di atas kadang di bawah* (Life is like a roller coaster, sometimes up sometimes down). The use of proverbs is good to develop the students' writing skill, speaking skill, and critical thinking.

d. Literature

Literary works such as short stories, novels, dramas, poems, folklores are full of cultural information. They tell the behavior, values, norms implicitly and explicitly within the texts. The teachers should be able to select the literary works so that it can help the students to learn the target culture. The example of novel consisting cultural elements is Little House in the Big Wood. The cultural elements found in the novel such as geographical situation, tradition (eating, clothing, hunting, sugar snow, needle work), folklore, religion, social value [14], pp.119. Those cultural elements can be used to teach English like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, as well as its language skills [15], pp.50. The example of applying literary work is the use of folklores. Like proverbs, folklore is universal. It means there is a folklore having the same story around the world. In Indonesia we know *Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih*, while in English we find the story of Cinderella which is a bit similar. By contrasting the folklore, the learners are hopefully able to get insight into the target culture and it can be used to explore the students' critical thinking. The use of literary work can be used to teach writing skill, and speaking skill. It can also be used to increase the students' vocabulary size.

e. Table Manner

Another interesting way to introduce culture is by having table manner course in a hotel or a restaurant. By doing this, the students can learn the way how to eat and etiquette of eating in foreign culture. Besides, they may also learn about the food, the eating utensils. After doing table manner, the students are hoped to be able to compare their own and the other country's table manner. It can help the students to think critically. They may also discuss about the different food and eating utensils they have with those of other countries. Table manner is able to explore the students' skill on writing, speaking, and vocabulary especially that of dealing with food beverage, cooking and eating utensils.

f. Native Speakers

English native speakers are the best way to study about culture because they get involved in the real society directly so that they know more about the culture there. They can be the real culture source to introduce the language learners the culture of the target language. It would be very good if the school can invite native speakers' volunteer to help the students deal with the target culture. Students can learn many things from them because they are the real doers.

Conclusion

In the proses of communication with foreign language, grammatical errors are still tolerable, in the other hands; cultural errors are not. Understanding culture plays a significant role in teaching and learning foreign language such as English. It can help the learners to avoid misunderstanding when they use the language to communicate with the native speakers in the real world. In addition, it is useful to overcome the culture shock.

The communication will run well if there is no barrier between the participants

caused by culture. To anticipate, it is necessary to introduce the culture in teaching and learning foreign language such as English. Second language learning teaching is neither accurate nor complete due to the absence of the study of its culture. Actually culture has been introduced in teaching and learning foreign language through some foreign language teaching methods. However, culture taught is still limited to the literary work, history of native speakers, geographical areas or daily habits of native speakers. In addition, it is not integrated in four language skills.

Introducing culture in EFL/ESL classroom can be done along with the teaching of four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and speaking) and four aspects of language (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar). The teachers must pay attention on the cultural materials given in the class. They can use spoken authentic materials (movies, TV programs, announcement, vlogging, radio talk, and commercial break, etc) and written materials (newspaper, magazine, websites, menus, bills, tickets).

There are some sources that can be used to introduce culture in EFL/ESL students. English newspaper and magazines can be used to teach reading skill, writing skill, speaking skill, and grammar. Video and film are good to expose the students' language skills such as listening comprehension, speaking, writing, translation, and interpreting. The use of proverb can develop the students' writing skill, speaking skill, and critical thinking. The use of literary works can be used to teach critical reading, writing skill, speaking skill and to increase the students' vocabulary size. Table manner is good to explore the students' skill on writing, speaking, and vocabulary dealing with food, beverage, cooking, and eating utensils. The last but not least is using native speaker as the real model of target language culture.

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