

TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract. *It is commonly believed that learning language is also understood as learning culture. This means that when somebody learns a new language, say for example, English, he or she will automatically also learn English culture. In some cases, this belief may be true. In other cases, however, the direction of learning language and culture is not always linear. A sentence produced by a language learner may linguistically and culturally be correct for the other learners of the same language background, but when it is spoken to someone else of different language background it might cause misunderstanding. This misunderstanding occurs not because of the words used in the sentence are weird or the grammar applied is violating the rule of English language system, but it is because of the utterance is not culturally accepted. It is this difference of culture that causes such kind of misunderstanding. To this phenomenon the teaching of literature is assumed to be able to minimize this misunderstanding.*

Keywords: *language, culture, literature, and linguistic*

Abstrak. *menjadi sesuatu hal umum bahwa mempelajari bahasa juga dipahami sebagai mempelajari budaya. Ini berarti bahwa ketika seseorang mempelajari bahasa baru, sebut saja bahasa Inggris, ia akan secara otomatis juga belajar budaya Inggris. Dalam beberapa kasus, keyakinan ini mungkin benar. Dalam sejumlah kasus lain, bagaimanapun, arah bahasa belajar dan budaya tidak selalu linear. Sebuah kalimat yang dihasilkan oleh pembelajar bahasa mungkin secara linguistik dan budaya adalah benar untuk pelajar lain dari latar belakang bahasa yang sama, tetapi ketika berbicara dengan orang lain dari latar belakang bahasa yang berbeda, hal semacam ini mungkin menyebabkan kesalahpahaman. Kesalahpahaman ini terjadi bukan karena kata-kata yang digunakan dalam kalimat yang aneh atau tata bahasa yang diterapkan melanggar aturan sistem bahasa Inggris, namun itu terjadi karena ucapan itu tidak diterima secara budaya. Ini merupakan sebuah hasil perbedaan budaya yang kemudian melahirkan kesalahpahaman. Atas dasar fenomena semacam ini, pengajaran sastra kemudian harus diasumsikan dapat meminimalkan kesalahpahaman ini.*

Kata kunci: *bahasa, budaya, sastra, dan linguistik*

INTRODUCTION

The main function of language is as a means of communication. As a means of communication, language can be used to fulfill different kinds of communication purposes. According to Finocchiaro (1989), the functions of language in communication may be intended to fulfill one of the following purposes: (1) personal, (2) interpersonal, (3)

directive, (4) referential, (5) meta-linguistic, and (6) imaginative purposes.

When a language is used to express one's opinion, needs, thoughts, desires, attitudes, etc. it fulfills the purpose of *personal* communicative function (e.g. *For the improvement of my thesis, I need more advice from my advisors*). When the language is used to maintain good social relations with the individuals and groups such as the expression

of praise, (e.g. *You look gorgeous in your blue shirt*), sympathy, (e.g. *I'm sorry to hear your dad passed away*), joy at other's success, (e.g. *Congratulation for your promotion to be the general manager in your office*), inquires about health, etc., (e.g. *How are your parents*), it is used for the purpose of *interpersonal* function. When it is used to control the behavior of others through advice, (e.g. *You'd better go to the doctor*), warnings, (e.g. *Watch your step*), requests, (e.g. *Will you help me carry this box for mer?*), persuasion, (e.g. *If I were you I would invest my money in this business*), etc. this function is called *directive*. When it is used to talk about objects or events in the immediate setting or environment or in the culture, (e.g. *What's this?*; *What will you do tomorrow?*) it is called *referential*. Finally, when it is used to talk about language, (e.g. *What does culture mean?*) it is called *metalinguistic* function.

DISCUSSION

Communicative Competence

So that one can accomplish his or her communication tasks properly, he or she should have competence in communication. Communicative competence, in accordance with Savignon (2001) may be developed through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts and events. For this purpose, communicative competence necessitates the communicators to have: (1) grammatical competence, (2) discourse competence, (3) sociocultural competence, and (4) strategic competence. Further, Savignon (2001) elaborates the four competences as the following.

Grammatical competence

Grammatical competence refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological feature of a language and to make use of these features to interpret and form words and sentences

Discourse competence

Discourse competence is concerned not with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterance, written words, and/or phrases to form a text a meaningful whole. Included in this competence are coherence and cohesion. Coherence is something to do with the relation of all sentences or utterances in a text to a single global proposition. Cohesion, is local connections or structural links between individual sentences, called by Halliday and Hasan (1976 in Celce-Murcia, 2001) as cohesive devices.

Sociocultural competence

Socio-cultural competence extends well beyond linguistic forms and is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use. Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of participants, the information they share, and the function of interaction.

Strategic competence

Strategic competence is related to the strategies used in an unfamiliar contexts, with constraints due to imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors in their application.

Cultural Misunderstanding

Misunderstanding in communication may arise any time. This may be experienced not only by the interlocutors who do not have the same language background but it may also occur among the interlocutors of the same language. The possibility of misunderstanding to occur is greater when one communicates in a new language. Among the four communicative competences that is crucial is something to do with sociocultural competence. This is because it is related to the use of language in relation to the culture within one society.

As stated earlier that the growth of language goes along with the growth of the

culture by which the language is used as means of communication. Tang (1999) argues that by speaking the language, therefore, one automatically (to a greater or lesser extent) aligns oneself with the culture of the language. Tang then argues that language itself is already culture. The question is “how can this culture be integrated in language, and how can the language used reflect the elements of culture of the community?”.

In accordance with Balwin et al. (in Levy, 2007) there are more than 300 definitions about culture. However, for the purpose of our discussion, only some are quoted here. For instance, Hobby (2004) defines culture as what it is *agreed* to be *right* and what is agreed to be *true*. In quite similar definition, Kaikkonen (1997) defines culture as a *common agreement* between the members of community on the *values, norms, rules, role expectations and meanings* which *guide the behaviour and communication* of the members. For Levy (2007) culture is defined as everything *believed* and everything *done* that enables someone to *identify* with people who are like him and that *distinguishes* him from people who differ from him. Hinkel (2001:443) on the other hand, writes, “... Culture may find its manifestations in *body language, gestures, concepts of time, hospitality customs, and even expressions of friendliness*”.

From the above definitions, some important points can be highlighted here. First, the term culture implies that there must be a *common agreement* among the members. Second, there are some norms, values, and rules of conduct considered as true and right. Third, culture becomes guidance for all the members of community in conducting behavior and in the way they communicate. Lastly, culture is manifested in various manifestations and expressions.

Common agreement does not develop in a day and becomes part of one's life. Levy (2007) claims that our cultural orientation begins at birth. This means that, as in the

process of acquiring L1, the process of reaching common agreement must go through long process and through continuous practices, too. Only through these processes and practices, common agreement is finally reached by each and among individuals in the community. Once the common agreement is reached, it becomes norms, values, rules, role expectations and meanings of the community. Consequently, every member of the community should respect this common agreement and should abide to it. If not, the member of the community violating this common agreement may be categorized as against his or her culture. This is because when one becomes a member of the culture he or she is not only by notionally agreeing to its practices, or simply by participating in them, but by being accepted by the membership (Levy, 2007).

What norms, values, rules, role expectations and meaning that are applied and tight all the members of the community?”. They are applied in almost all aspects of life. For example, it is a common agreement for Indonesian people that talking to older persons such as parents or teachers must be different from the way they talk to their peers of the same age. Talking to older people should be polite both in term of the manner and in term of the word choice. Whereas talking to the peer of the same age does not necessitate the two conditions.

Concept of time, for instance, is developed through long processes and continuous practices before it becomes culture. The words indicating times such as the following: “nanti (later), and ‘besok’ (tomorrow), etc are two examples which indicate our common agreement that in term of time, we are flexible, not as rigid as it may be applied by and in other cultures. ‘Nanti’ (later) is a concept of time that ranges from a few seconds after this time until unlimited range of time in the future. The word ‘besok’ (tomorrow), though it is more specific than

'nanti', it still has uncertainty because it may mean in the morning, it may also mean in the afternoon, and it still may mean in the evening.

When someone drops by to his or her neighbour and coincidentally the family he visits are having lunch, for instance, it is a common agreement in the culture for the hosts family to offer him to have the meal together with them. They are not expected to say "let us finish our meal first, and I'll meet you after that". If they do this, the family may be said as not being hostiled to their neighbour. For the neighbour, there is also a common agreement among the community to refuse the first offer, though he is really hungry and the food served teases his appetite. Only after the third offer he is expected to accept the offer. Otherwise, if he accepts the offer in the first time, he may be categorized as impolite. Additionally, visiting neighbour without telling him or her in advance is a common practice in our culture. On the contrary, if someone tries to get permission in advance by saying, for example, "May I come to your house at 4 o'clock this afternoon?", this request seems weird and strange for most of the members of the community. This is because of their common agreement that such kind of request is usually extended for certain occasion only such as when a family of a boy wants to propose a girl in the other family for their son. In general, the neighbour visited may not feel disturbed either.

Asking someone known or unknown with this question "Mau ke mana, pak/bu?" ("Where are you going, sir/mam?") for some people in western culture may be understood as interfering his or her personal business. In Indonesian context, however, it indicates the opposite. Asking this question either the known person or the unknown one shows that he is friendly to others. In contrast, if he does not do this, he may be labelled as unfriendly. So, actually he does not really care where the person is going to. The question he raises is actually not a real question that needs answer.

It is just a piece of cultural expression to show that he is friendly. Nothing to do with the interference of someone's business.

Communication across cultures

Misunderstanding sometimes may occur among the communicators though they are coming from the same cultural background, let alone if they are coming from different cultural background. Indonesian students who were born and most of their life time is spent in Indonesia and learn English in Indonesia, for instance, may have the biggest chance to cause misunderstanding for the native speakers of English. The same misunderstanding may also be caused by English people with English cultural background learning Indonesian language. It is inevitable then that misunderstanding may occur if two people coming from different cultural background communicate each other.

Since language and culture develop simultaneously it is assumed that the best way to acquire English and its culture is by living in the English speaking countries for quite long time. Al Tamimi (2012) argues that when it comes to learning a new language there can be no substitute for actually living in a country where this language is spoken. By living in the countries, the learners are not only exposed to English language, but at the same time they are also exposed to English culture. Garcia (2008) argues that learning culture implies constant preparation and disposition, seen as needs, to solve individual collective vital situations. Novak (2008) claims that a strong culture is a system whereby members of an organization are aware of the informal rules of how they are to act most of the time. It is assumed that the longer time they stay there the more aspects of language and culture they will be exposed to. With this, the learners can develop not only their English proficiency but also English culture. It is in this respect that the teaching of literature may play its role in

bridging the gap between the acquisition of language and the acquisition of culture.

The Role of Literature

Literature, in a general sense, is understood as all books, articles, etc on a particular subject; it may also be defined as any printed information produced by people who want to sell something or tell about something, or it can also be meant as any books, plays, etc that people think are important and good (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2010). In a more specific term Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary (2009) defines literature as writing that has lasting value as art.

Why is literature suggested to be used to bridge the gap between the acquisition of language and the acquisition of culture? There are some claims about this. For instance, Duff and Maley (in Al Tamimi, 2012) pointed out that literature offers universal themes which are relevant to students' own experience. Other claim expressed by Lazar (in Al Tamimi, 2012) who states that literature stimulates the imagination of students and develops their critical abilities. Collie and Slater (in Hişmanoğlu, 2005) claim that exposure to literary works helps students expand their language awareness and develop their language competence. It provides them with specific examples of how language is used. Collie and Slater (in Hişmanoğlu, 2005) mention some advantages of teaching literature in relation to the teaching of language and culture. They are valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal enrichment. Further, the four reasons are elaborated as the following.

Valuable Authentic Material

Literature is authentic material. This is because of the fact that most literary works are not created mainly for the purpose of teaching a language. Its authenticity may be compared to the other samples of authentic materials

such as travel timetables, city plans, forms, pamphlets, cartoons, advertisements, newspapers or magazine articles. As they read literary texts, the students become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings provided for native speakers.

Cultural Enrichment

Though the ideal mode of increasing their understanding the culture of which the target language learned is living in the country, the possibility to realize this is quite small, literary works, such as novels, plays, short stories, etc can facilitate understanding how communication takes place in that country. A literary works reader can discover the way the characters in such literary works see the world outside, i.e. their thoughts, feelings, customs, traditions, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave in different settings. In short, literature is believed to be the best complement to other materials that are used to develop the foreign learners' understanding into the country whose language is being learned.

Language Enrichment

Through literature, a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items are provided. Many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, are familiarized for the students. The syntax and the discourse functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas which develop and enrich their own writing skills are learned. As the result, students will become more productive and adventurous when they begin to perceive the richness and diversity of the language they are trying to learn and begin to make use of some of those potentials themselves.

Personal Involvement

Literature may also be advantageous in involving students' individual involvement in what they are reading. Once the students read a literary text, they begin to inhabit the text.

They are drawn into the text. This is because of the insight that understanding meanings of lexical items or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The enthusiastic spirit of the students to find out what happens as events unfold via the climax, the feeling of being close to certain characters and the sharing of emotional responses may become the crucial factors that make students feel to be involved in the story.

In addition to the four main reasons discussed above, Hişmanoğlu also quotes what Maley (in Hişmanoğlu, 2005) stated. Literature is a potent resource in the language classroom because it has the following characteristics: (1) universality, (2) non-triviality, (3) personal relevance, (4) variety, (5) interest, (6) economy and suggestive power, and (7) ambiguity.

Hişmanoğlu (2005) claims that one of the main functions of literature is its sociolinguistic richness. The use of language changes from one social group to another. Likewise, it changes from one geographical location to another. A person speaks differently in different social contexts like school, hospital, police station and theatre, i.e. formal, informal, casual, frozen, intimate styles). The language used changes from one profession to another (i.e. doctors, engineers, economists). Universality is the themes literature deals with are common to all human beings in different cultures despite their different way of treatment, such as death, love, separation, belief, and nature.

To wrap up our discussion of why literature is suggested to be used as a means of teaching language and culture, Hill (2007) claims that literature has the power (1) to make us more human, to help us see the world from inside the skin of persons very different from ourselves; to live more lives than the one we have; to try on various roles, (2) to develop compassion and insight into behavior of ourselves and others, (3) to show us the past in a way that helps us understand the present, (4)

to move us in ways that facts, statistics, and history texts can never do (or rarely do), (5) to develop imagination; to help us entertain ideas we never could have had; to interpret and translate our experiences, to shape our world, and to enlarge our imagination, and (6) to take us out of ourselves and return us to ourselves as a changed self; to enlarge our thinking while educating our hearts.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, learning language means learning culture too at the same time. This means that when one is learning English, he or she is simultaneously learning English culture too. However, since Indonesian learners are mostly not born in English speaking countries, the development of students' culture in English does not completely go along with the development of their English. Some nuances of local language and local culture embed in English language they produce which may not represent English culture. The teaching of literature is believed to be able to bridge between the two realms. Through literature students are expected to be able to acquire target language proficiency and to nurture target culture competence with equal quality.

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