

LOCAL AND TARGET CULTURE MATERIALS: INSIGHT INTO TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

In this contemporary world, English is used to link the communication among people internationally for different universal purposes (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2010; and Kirkpatrick, 2011), for instance, educational advancement, career development, technology, and international relation. It is obvious that the function of English during this period of time has made some countries generate policies to include English as one of the compulsory subjects being taught at schools. However, the materials which are used in school practices are likely to focus on the target culture materials. Due to this reason, it seems that the role of local and target cultures in teaching the language should be taken into consideration. Related to the status of English to the importance of culture in language learning, this research aims at investigating English teachers' perspectives on the appropriateness of materials in English Language Teaching. In order to get broader pictures, questionnaires and interview were conducted to two English teachers in Samarinda. The results were interesting as both teachers preferred to expand the materials rather than used the readily materials provided by the school and/or the institution. This created them to become material developers and creators. Other results showed that the teachers were aware of the importance of the cultural content in the materials, thus culture functioned as 'a filter and a connecting bridge' in ELT.

Keywords: Local and target culture materials, ELT

Introduction

The current situation, English language plays a crucial role in Indonesia because of the advancement in many field areas. For example, the growing numbers of multinational companies, the advancement of technology, the global economics progression and political situation. In a similar vein, Lauder (2008) states that English is a means which is to be created and used by Indonesians to carry 'selectively specific information, knowledge, and technology that would accelerate development'. To meet the demands of global changes, the Indonesian government has promoted new schemes in educational system, including curriculum development, teaching and learning facilities, materials, and teacher's specific qualification during the enhancement of English language teaching in Indonesia.

To begin with, in 1955, English was firstly mentioned formally as “the first foreign language” in Indonesia at the conference of teacher trainers by Mr. Wachendorff, the first head of the *Central Inspectorate of English Language Instruction* in the Ministry of Education (Komaria, 1998: p. 24). Later in 1989, Law 2 of 1989 on The National Education System (UU No. 2, 1989 *Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*) yielded the overall purposes of educational system in Indonesia. As a result, the 1989 Law allows English to be one of the compulsory subjects to be taught at the secondary level, but it should be taught from the Primary. During this period of time, the main purpose of teaching English was to enhance students’ ability in reading skill. However, the major transformation happened afterwards, in 1994, the overall priorities of order cover four language skills shifted from reading, listening, writing, and speaking to reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Komaria, 1998).

Furthermore, the government of Indonesia is concerned by the importance of the cultural content in teaching English language. The necessity of cultural awareness in English language teaching in Indonesia is supported by the 2004 Curriculum which states that the objectives of English instruction in junior and senior high schools are as followed (translated from *Bahasa Indonesia* in *Depdiknas*, 2004):

1. Developing communicative competence in spoken and written English which comprises listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
2. Raising awareness regarding the nature and importance of English as a foreign language and as a major means for learning.
3. Developing understanding of the interrelation of language and culture as well as cross cultural understanding.

However, the concern from the government of the importance of cultural awareness in teaching English is not complemented with the teaching materials of the significance use of English nowadays. English language teaching materials in Indonesia are likely to focus more on the target culture without paying attention to the local culture. Furthermore, native-centered perspective is still considered as the most appropriate model implemented in Indonesia.

Taking the aforesaid consideration, there are two questions which need to contemplate; how are the perspectives of English teachers about the appropriateness of target and local culture in ELT? And, is it true that we can teach the language without having to teach the culture? To answer the previous questions, a case study was conducted to two English teachers in Samarinda-East Kalimantan.

Literature Review

The appropriateness of local culture and target culture materials in language teaching in Indonesia.

The previous arguments about the importance of cultural content in English language teaching in Indonesia seem to be beneficial for the teachers and the students. However, there are some constraints that hinder the significance of the inclusion of cultural content. Prodromou (1988) exclaims that one of the factors which affected students are not motivated in culture learning is the way culture is presented in many

ELT books. He argues that globally designed textbooks have continued to be persistently Anglo-centric.

‘Appealing to a world markets as they do, they cannot by definition draw on local varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognizing English as an international language either. What were they about? They were mostly about situations which were not only imaginary, as Cook says, but vacuous, empty of life.’ (Prodromou, 1988: 76)

Furthermore, a survey conducted by Budhiyana (2005) revealed that more than 70% of the textbooks sold in bookstores in Semarang (Central Java) are written by foreign ELT writers. Because of students’ values, norms, and beliefs are different to the language which they learn, the learners find it difficult to make the relevancy to their own culture. In a similar vein, Alptekin (1993) states that most of the textbook writers are native speakers, therefore they are spontaneously transfer the views, values, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of their own English speaking society, whether it is American English or British English. Due to these reasons, it is reasonable if the students are not interested in involving in the classroom. The students feel alienated, because they do not have any ideas to express their thoughts.

According to Islam and Mares (2003), one of the crucial factors for the teachers to adapt the classroom materials is when the cultural content is inappropriate for the learners. In this instance, the teachers can make comparison between target and local culture without having to undermine that one’s culture is better than the others or vice versa. In a similar vein, McKay (2011) exclaims that ‘it is extremely important to recognize the great diversity that exists within any culture (p. 94).’ By doing this, the learners will implicitly learn that there are various cultures existing in the world and expand their knowledge from their experience in classroom practices.

In addition, Cortazzi and Jin (1999, cited in McKay 2011) classify three types of cultural information that can be employed in language textbooks and materials:

1. Source culture materials that draw on the learners’ own culture as content.
2. Target culture materials’ that use the culture of a country where English is spoken as a first language.
3. International target culture materials’ that use a great variety of cultures in English and non-English speaking countries around the world. (p. 88).

Allied to this, Byram (2003) says that it is important for the learners of the language to be familiar with the differences of one culture – to others. By doing so, language learners cultivate an understanding of the varieties of their own language and another language. Moreover, language learners widen their knowledge of the differences between their own culture and another culture.

The role of culture in English language teaching in Indonesia (Considering the current status of English as an International Language)

Based on the data from the Indonesian embassy, there are about 500 different ethnic groups inhabit Indonesian islands, spread from Sabang (the northernmost tip of Sumatra) to Merauke in Papua. In addition, there are about 150 to 200 written and spoken languages with different dialects exist in Indonesia. Due to the fact that Indonesia is both multicultural and multilingual, this section explores the role of culture in ELT in Indonesia in which focuses on the cultural content of teaching materials.

In order to get clearer delineation, Norton's and Lave and Wenger's terminologies of 'non-participant' and 'newcomers' are employed to portray English language learners in Indonesia. It can be assumed that English language learners in Indonesia can be classified into two perceptions:

1. Non-participant: in this sense, the learners are not exposed directly to the English language environment. English usage is limited by time and place; it is only used for a specific time and in academic life, such as school practices.
2. Newcomers: the learners' language background is different to the language they learn. The differences are not only in linguistic norms (grammatical, syntactic, and phonology) but also the use of the language in social life.

McKay (2011) states that the application of cultural content in EIL is challenging, she argues that first, regarding to the current status of English as an international language, the use of English is no longer related to the culture of inner circle countries (English speaking countries, such as America and British). Second, one of the main functions of English is to facilitate the speakers to share their ideas and cultures. Allied to these arguments, she also emphasizes that 'culture learning is a social process and that, in reference to the prominence of EIL, understanding one's own culture in relation to that of others is paramount' (p. 81). Because of the previous reasons, foreign language teaching materials in Indonesia which portray the culture of the target language should be adjusted with the condition of the language learners, as non-participants and newcomers. Furthermore, the present status of EIL may also be taken into consideration as well.

In the Indonesian context, the teachers and learners face a big burden. From the teachers' perspective, for example, they have to teach the students with the materials which are usually readily available and based on the syllabus in the curriculum. Moreover, Indonesian teachers are usually lack of awareness of the present status of English nowadays, they still teach English based on native-centered model and the purpose of teaching the target language is to make the students pass the national examination. While, from the students' perspective the materials are sometimes difficult to be understood. For example, when the students learn the vocabulary in the Halloween celebration, even though there are colourful pictures, or interesting videos which tell the euphoria of a Halloween party, the essence and the meaning of Halloween itself are ambivalent for Indonesian students. When they see a pumpkin picture, the students may think about *kolak*, it is an Indonesian dessert which made from the coconut milk, palm sugar, pandan leaves, and pumpkin is one of the

additions. Therefore, the students may relate the picture to the holy month of Ramadhan (fasting month), because usually *kolak* is served during Ramadhan.

Widdowson (1990, cited in Alptekin, 1993) says that in communicating and translating the meanings in a given language, there are two categories of knowledge. The first knowledge is connected to social practices or 'schematic knowledge'. The second knowledge is 'syntactic knowledge'; it is related to the linguistic norms of the language. In addition, Widdowson says that in native language learning, the child's schematic and syntactic knowledge develop concurrently. They do not have to open the dictionary when they find difficult words and they do not have to know each word in their language in order to understand the communication. They have already been familiar with the schematic knowledge which is connected to their mother tongue and they experience into their culture in every process in language learning. In addition, Richards and Schmidt (2010) exclaim that native speakers always have infinite understanding of what is considered grammatical or ungrammatical in the language. This means that native speakers are spontaneous and unconscious language learners.

However, the case is different for the foreign language learners, because they have to enter to a totally different world in terms of language and culture. Alptekin (1993) says that culture is a socially acquired knowledge. Moreover, language is used by the people to communicate in their social practices. Barfield and Uzarski (2009) say that language is one of the most crucial components in culture. According to their opinion, language is not only a means to communicate, but also a means to express their values, beliefs and world views. When students learn the language it means that they also learn about the culture because language and culture are closely related. English language teaching materials in Indonesia, for example, there is always a common conversation of showing politeness between two people asking their condition when they meet. It is always started by questioning 'Hi, how are you?', and the second person will answer 'Good, thank you. And you?', however, in Indonesia the questions are different and they are based on their ethnical backgrounds. For instance, Javanese people, they tend to ask 'Where are you going?' and for Batakese, they will say 'Have you had your breakfast/lunch/dinner?'. Students' schematic and syntactic knowledge in Indonesia in understanding the language has been different, because in English language, the answer will always be the same. They cannot say that they have toothache or even neck pain that day because it is just the way people show their good manners when they meet people.

Considering the current situation, English has become the language to link the communication between nations, due to this reason the English language materials which include cultural content should be able to cover the global needs and the students' prerequisite in learning the language. By integrating culture and language in ELT, this is found to be both 'pedagogically and educationally sensible, as it is said to offer a multidimensional perspective or experience for the learners' Alptekin (2002, cited in Porto, 1996).

Teaching students cultural differences is essential, because cultural knowledge is needed outside the classroom. Hence, it is the real interaction between people that the students may explicitly apply their understanding within the society they live with. For this reason, classroom, as the place where students acquire the theoretical knowledge should be able to encourage the learners to adjust with the different conditions in their social practices. Kramsch (1993, cited in McKay 2011) states the relevance of teaching culture in language learning, there are two goals which are proposed:

1. Creating a 'sphere of interculturality': this idea encourages the thought that the learning of culture is more than just the transfer of information between cultures. This means that it requires individual's sympathy towards other cultures. In this instance, the process of learning about another culture involves a reflection on one's own culture as well as the target culture.
2. Teaching culture as difference: this idea of culture highlights the fact that national identities are not monolithic. Within each culture, there are differences of national characteristics that are related to age, gender, regional origin, and social class.

Therefore, the notions above strengthen the importance the teaching of cultural content in English language teaching in Indonesia. There are two reasons why these goals are beneficial; 1). Indonesia is a multicultural and multilingual country, by including cultural content in the teaching and learning process will enable the learners to express their own ideas of their values and beliefs, on the other hand, they are able to appreciate the differences of others. 2). Regarding to the current status of English as an international language, the learners are encouraged to communicate their opinions through their interaction with people within and from different countries (inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle countries).

Research Method

This current study was designed as a qualitative case study. Mesec (1998) in Starman (2013) defines case study as a comprehensive description of an individual case and its analysis; i.e., the characterization of the case and the events, as well as a description of the discovery process of these features that is the process of research itself.

Furthermore, the data collected for this research were analysed by using narrative analysis in order to explain or normalize what has occurred. According to Bamberg (2010), narrative can be said to provide a portal into two realms: (i) the realm of experience, where speakers lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences; and (ii) the realm of narrative means (or devices) that are put to use in order to make (this) sense. The analysis explored the perspectives of two young English teachers towards the appropriateness of local and target materials in English Language Teaching (ELT).

In this study, two participants were conveniently selected and then invited to be interviewed and filled the questionnaire. The instruments used in this research were interview with open ended questions and questionnaire. All questions were asked to both of the interviewees.

Participants

1. Neo

Neo is a 23 years old English teacher in UPT. Bahasa Mulawarman University and also a volunteer English teacher for Edu Runner Program. She has been teaching for 1 year and 6 months, both in informal and formal institution. Besides teaching, Neo actively participates in in-campus activities.

2. Ismi

Ismi is a 24 years old English teacher in one of the junior high schools in Samarinda. Besides teaching at school, she also teaches in an English course. Ismi has been teaching for more than 2 years up to now.

Findings and Discussion

From the data collection process, it was revealed that that the appropriateness of local and target culture materials in ELT had led the participants to be material developers and creators and to possess the cultural awareness in adapting the materials to be taught to the students. What is more, based on the participants' viewpoint, culture is considered to have a key role as "a filler and a connecting bridge" in language learning.

Material Developers and Creators

As the opinions, perspectives and experiences shared among these English teachers, there were some interesting facts about the appropriateness of local and target culture materials in ELT:

1. Neo

From Neo's perspectives, she described that one of the most important factors in selecting the materials for the students was when the materials succeeded to motivate and develop their curiosity. Moreover, she added that the materials should be interesting and the language was easy to understand. In the interview, she asserted that children would more likely to choose books/materials that contained more colourful and interesting pictures.

Neo : "Based on my experiences, when I am teaching those children, both in Edu Runner and in UPT. Bahasa, hmm (fillers), the materials that I provide for them must be colourful and interesting. (Fillers) And also the language should be easy to be understood by the children."

Further she added;

Neo: "For instance, there was one day when the material was about weather. In Indonesia, there is no snow, so I showed them the video from my hand phone about snow, and then I asked my students to touch ice cube and told them that snow is as cold as the ice. (...) They were so interested to my explanations; even they started asking me questions about snow."

From Neo's viewpoint, it showed that she seemed to have the capability to develop and adapt the materials. Further, she was also able to take up a key role to build

students' curiosity. By considering the use of age-appropriate and feasible materials, she successfully maintained students' interest in the teaching and learning activities.

2. Ismi

In the same vein, Ismi delineated similar idea about materials selection based on her perspectives.

Ismi: "Well, the school where I teach does not provide readily materials for the teachers. Yet, syllabus is distributed to the teachers per semester, thus the teachers have to prepare the materials by themselves. (...) It gives more freedom and flexibility to the teachers. (...) For me personally, I prefer to find the materials from the internet, and I alter some of the contents to be adjusted to the Indonesian contexts in order to make my students understand."

From Ismi's perspectives, it could be inferred that culture had an important role in creating the 'sphere of interculturality' as the students were also given a chance to reflect on both cultures (local and target culture) (Kramsch, 1993, cited in McKay 2011).

From the participants' perspectives, regarding to the appropriateness of the materials, it could be concluded that both of them were able "to recognize the great diversity that exists within any culture" (McKay, 2011: 94), which then led them to become material developers and creators.

Culture Functions as a 'Filler' and a 'Connecting Bridge'

Apart from adjusting the materials, Neo also mentioned that culture played a significant role as a filler.

Neo: "For me, when I teach the language, I consider that culture becomes a filler. In a way that it can engage students more in the learning activities and they become very active participants, therefore, the class is alive because of this.(...) Moreover, by teaching students about the culture, they can get new information about things that they never knew before. (...) My students like it because usually they share my story to their parents as well."

Neo saw that culture brought beneficial impact to her class. She affirmed that by giving examples through videos and pictures and by comparing and contrasting between Indonesian culture and target language culture, her students became interested to involve in the language learning activities. In line with this, Byram (2003) confirms that language learners are required to know the cultural differences. Thus, language learners indirectly promote an understanding and broaden their knowledge about culture.

In line with Neo's affirmation, Ismi viewed culture as a connecting bridge, functioned as a link to attach students' understanding.

Ismi: "The main function of culture here according to my opinion is as a connection (...). For example when I taught them about personal letter, as we know that it is uncommon for the Indonesian to congratulate one's achievement by using card, so I compared and contrasted with what Indonesian people usually do to congratulate others (...)."

In this instance, culture becomes a repository for the students to acquire social and world knowledge (Alptekin, 1993). This idea is in accordance with Barfield and Uzarski's viewpoint (2009); they confirmed that language has become one of the most crucial parts in culture. Language is not only used to communicate, but also has a function to express values, beliefs and world views.

Based on the previous statements from both participants, that by combining language and culture in ELT, it is evidenced to be 'pedagogically and educationally sensible, as it is said to offer a multidimensional perspective or experience for the learners' Alptekin (2002, cited in Porto, 1996).

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that based on both teachers' perspectives it can be concluded that culture plays a significant role in ELT. By adjusting the materials, the teachers prove to have the capability in transferring their knowledge to the students which then leads them to be material developers. Further, culture is hugely required in ELT as it functions as a 'filler and a connecting bridge' to link students' cultural understanding of one culture-to others.

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