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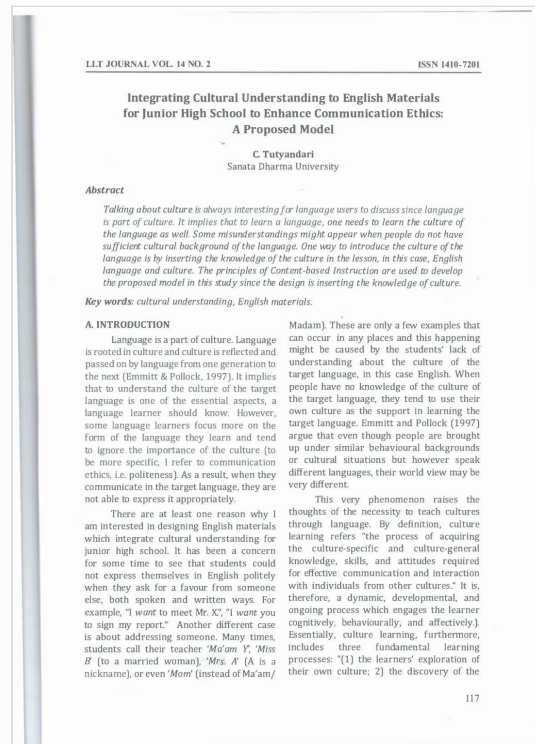
Integrating Cultural Understanding to English Materials for Junior High School to Enhance Communication Ethics A Proposed Model

by Tutyandari Caecilia

Integrating Cultural Understanding to English Materials
for Junior High School to Enhance Communication Ethics:
A Proposed Model

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Abstract

Talking about culture is always interesting for language users to discuss since language is part of culture. It implies that to learn a language, one needs to learn the culture of the language as well. Some misunderstandings might appear when people do not have sufficient cultural background of the language. One way to introduce the culture of the language is by inserting the knowledge of the culture in the lesson, in this case, English language and culture. The principles of Content-based Instruction are used to develop the proposed model in this study since the design is inserting the knowledge of culture.

Key words: cultural understanding, English materials.

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is a part of culture. Language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock, 1997). It implies that to understand the culture of the target language is one of the essential aspects, a language learner should know. However, some language learners focus more on the form of the language they learn and tend to ignore the importance of the culture (to be more specific, I refer to communication ethics, i.e. politeness). As a result, when they communicate in the target language, they are not able to express it appropriately.

There are at least one reason why I am interested in designing English materials which integrate cultural understanding for junior high school. It has been a concern for some time to see that students could not express themselves in English politely when they ask for a favour from someone else, both spoken and written ways. For example, "I *want* to meet Mr. X.", "I *want* you to sign my report." Another different case is about addressing someone. Many times, students call their teacher '*Ma'am Y*', '*Miss B*' (to a married woman), '*Mrs. A*' (A is a nickname), or even '*Mom*' (instead of Ma'am/

Madam). These are only a few examples that can occur in any places and this happening might be caused by the students' lack of understanding about the culture of the target language, in this case English. When people have no knowledge of the culture of the target language, they tend to use their own culture as the support in learning the target language. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) argue that even though people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different.

This very phenomenon raises the thoughts of the necessity to teach cultures through language. By definition, culture learning refers "the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures." It is, therefore, a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviourally, and affectively.). Essentially, culture learning, furthermore, includes three fundamental learning processes: "(1) the learners' exploration of their own culture; 2) the discovery of the

relationship between language and culture, and 3) the learning of the heuristics for analyzing and comparing cultures" (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2000). More briefly explaining, Donald K. Jarvis (1988) in Valverde (2005) states that the objectives for learning about culture should emphasize three categories: cognitive (knowing facts), skill (doing), and affective (feeling).

Seeing the significance of culture in language learning, the problem of this research is formulated as follows "How is the presentation of the proposed model of English materials which integrate cultural understanding for junior high school?"

B. THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. Culture

Regarding culture teaching through language class, furthermore, Allwright & Bailey (1991) state that one can see that learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture. It goes in line with Pulverness (2003) & McDevitt (2004) in Genc & Bada (2005) idea saying that human nature is not independent of culture; studying an L2, therefore, is trying to know the nature of other peoples, especially that who speak the language being learned. Besides, it has been emphasized that "without the study of culture, teaching L2 is inaccurate and incomplete" (Genc & Bada, 2005). Cultural content, furthermore, is considered a key for effective teaching and learning in which students cannot master the language if they have not mastered "the cultural contexts in which the language occurs" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, p.27 in Idrees, 2007))

In addition, helping students with their understanding of the target culture results in positive outcome (Itakura, 2004; Jogan, Heredia, & Aguilera, 2001; Torii-Williams 2004 in Kabata & Edasawa, 2011). "Cultural

competence enhances and enriches communicative competence; and it can lead to understanding and appreciating different cultures as well" (Idrees, 2007. In line with those ideas, more specifically asserting, Kitao (2000) in Genc & Bada (2005) state some benefits of teaching culture through language. Some of them can be noted as follows.

a. Studying culture gives students a reason to study the target language as well as eliciting the meaningfulness of L2 learning (Stainer, 1971).

b. Culture classes do have a great role because learners like culturally based activities such as singing, dancing, role playing, doing research on countries and peoples, etc. Therefore, such classes can elicit intrinsic motivation (McKay, 2000 in Idrees, 2007)

c. Studying culture gives learner a liking for the native speakers of the target language. Studying culture also plays a useful role in general education; studying culture, in which students can learn about the geography, history, etc. of the target culture (Cooke, 1970).

Realizing the tremendous significance of culture learning, teachers of a language, consequently, are also to be teachers of culture (Byram 1989), having the ability to experience and analyse both the home and target cultures (Byram & Morgan, 1994 in Thanasoulas, 2001). Language teachers have a very important role to introduce culture to their students. Language teachers should be able to show to their students the culture in which the target language operates. It will help to learn the language better and to know how to use the language appropriately. As Englebert (2004) describes, "...to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture, and it is important to be sensitive to the fact that our students,

our colleges, our administrators, and, if we live abroad, our neighbours, do not share all of our cultural paradigms." Teacher competence on the culture of the target language becomes very important too (Singh & Richards, 2006). Dealing with this case, according to Thanasoulas (2001), language teachers do not necessarily "nip prejudice in the bud", meaning to say, "Cultural bias can still plague the very aspects of the target culture which teachers choose to indict or advocate" (Cormeraie, 1997 in Thanasoulas, 2001).

In teaching culture through language, therefore, Finnochiaro and Bonorno (1993) in Valverde (2005) highlight three important aspects for teachers to consider. First, all human beings share a number of the same traits. Therefore, teachers should dwell with both cultural similarities and differences so that students become aware of the universality of culture, instead of judging other cultures as inferior. Secondly, "cultural aspects should be chosen in a way that they allow the students to explore their native culture and, at the same time, get insights into the target culture." It highlights the importance of teaching the native culture through language along with the culture of the target language, which means learning certain target language does not mean to lose the identity. Critical thinking of comparing one culture and another to seek universality is promoted (Teaching Culture in the Language Classroom: Pathways to Understanding, 1998 & Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999 & Coleman, 1997, in Teaching and Learning Languages Other Than English (LOTE) in Victorian Schools, 2008). Lastly, cultural aspects should be taught as early as possible. During this process, Finnochiaro and Bonorno (1993) in Valverde (2005) say, it is very crucial to include within the list aspects considered as taboo topics in the target

society. "By doing this way students are going to become aware of the things they may be able to talk about freely and those they cannot."

2. Content-based Instruction

To accommodate cultural learning through language classes, material design based on Content-Based Instruction is needed. Content-Based Instruction is described as a new paradigm in language education, centred on fostering student competence in a second or foreign language while advancing in the knowledge of a subject matter, culture, in this study. According to Dueñas (2002), relying on this principle, the teaching learning process on cultural contents should be accommodated in such a way that it can:

a. Expose a considerable amount of language while learning culture. This incidental language should be comprehensible. Teachers and students explore interesting cultural content through language accommodated through relevant, purposeful, and meaningful context and activities. Therefore, the activities are to be student-centred ones.

b. "Enable students to use useful language that is embedded within relevant discourse contexts rather than as isolated language fragments."

c. "Allow students to call on their own prior knowledge to learn additional language and content material." Doing that, students are exposed to complex information and are involved in demanding activities which can lead to intrinsic motivation as well as reflections and critical thinking on prior knowledge or native culture (Teaching Culture in the Language Classroom:

Pathways to Understanding, 1998). This very stage will lead to students' acceptance on target language's cultures as well as the realization of the similarities and differences between the target language culture and the native culture as something good in their own way (Idrees, 2007).

Based on Saluveer (2004) teaching culture in language class can be done through some concrete forms of culture as ceremonies, festivals, clothes, foods, drinks, good manners, and body language during conversation. He goes on to say that the concept of ways of life, humour (reffering to what is considered funny), citizens' preferences, common known histories, politics, etc are also included in culture learning through language. It is the teachers' duty to select which materials to convey based on learners' level.

Finally, the writer intends to design a proposed English material for junior high school. It is because English subject in Indonesia, formally, starts from Junior High School. In other words, Junior High School is the first place for students to put English as one of their main subjects to learn and to obtain strong foundation of English to prepare them for further study. Therefore, it is appropriate to introduce some of the English cultures to the students to be their basis to communicate in English well.

C. METHODOLOGY

In developing this proposed teaching material, the writer has adapted some steps of Research and Development (R & D) by Borg and Gall (2003):

a. Research and Information Collecting

In the beginning, the writer made some observations toward the books and worksheets used in SMP N 2 Yogyakarta. The learning materials in those books and worksheets provided very general English, limited space for culture introduction.

b. Planning

This stage covered the choice of how to develop the materials and for what level the materials were for.

c. Developing a Preliminary Product

After reviewing the relevant theories, the writer decided to adapt Content-based Instruction since the design was intended to introduce about culture of the target language.

D. THE PROPOSED MODEL

The following is the proposed model of integrating cultural understanding to the English material. It is targeted for students of grade VII and aims at introducing culture diversity to the students. The English material is developed by basing on the 2006 curriculum of grade VII semester 1. Following is one of the compentence standards and basic competences of speaking:

Competence Standard:
3. To express very simple transactional and interpersonal conversations in order to interact with the surroundings.

Standard competence:
3.1. to interact with the surroundings involving the following speech acts: greeting people they know and foreigners, introducing oneself, and giving instructions/prohibiting.

Hello...
What do you think these men are doing?

Let's read.

Greetings

Our planet is divided into many different countries which have many different races of people, different customs, and different manners. Each country has its own way of greeting people.

In the **USA** it is normal for men to shake hands when they meet but it is unusual for men to kiss when they greet each other.

The **British** often do no more than say "hello" when they see friends. Even adults usually shake hands only when they meet for the first time.

French people, including school-children, shake hands with their friends, or kiss them on both cheeks, each time they meet and they leave. That's why French people think the British are unfriendly and impolite.

In **Japan** it is polite and normal for men and women to bow when they greet someone.

In **Polynesia** you take your friend's hands and use them to stroke your face.

The **Inuit**, who live in Canada, rub noses.

In **Tibet** it is very polite to stick your tongue out at someone. It shows you have no evil thoughts.

Taken from http://amolife.com/customs-and-traditions/a-question-of-culture-greeting-people-in-different-coun.html

Look at these pictures.

Based on the text, where are these people from?

_____

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Every country has the same way of greeting.   ____
2. In America, it is not common to kiss other people when greeting.   ____
3. When the British meet their friends, they only say 'hello'.   ____
4. French people think that the British are friendly.   ____
5. In Tibet, sticking your tongue out is impolite   ____

Find the meanings of these words.

1. races (n)		a. not happen very often
2. customs (n)		b. the way to do something
3. manners (n)		c. unkind
4. unusual (adj)		d. groups of people
5. cheeks (adj)		e. to extend away
6. unfriendly (adj)		f. to move your hand gently over someone
7. impolite (adj)		g. to move your hands and press firmly
8. to stroke (v)		h. traditional activities
9. to rub (v)		i. rude
10. to stick out (v)		j. the sides of your face below your eyes

Everyone Has a Culture – Everyone Is Different

Respond to each question, then share it to your friend(s).

1. What languages do you speak?
2. What music do you listen to? What dances do you know?
3. What foods do you eat at home?
4. In your family, what is considered polite and what is considered rude? What manners have you been taught? (Think about such things as table manners, behaviour toward guests in your home, what to say when answering the telephone, how to say thanks for a meal.)
5. What holidays and ceremonies are important in your family?
6. Describe something very important to you. It could be a value, such as respect or honesty. It could be a person such as a parent, brother, sister, or a friend. It could be a hobby.

E. CONCLUSION

Understanding culture supports the mastery of language learning. Content-based instruction is one method that can be employed as the foundation to develop English learning materials, especially when someone intends to introduce a particular culture through language learning.

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