**CULTURAL AWARENESS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is how to enhance cultural awareness for English learners in Indonesia. Culturally, the learners have got accustomed to using Indonesian mind set or Indonesian expression style rather than native English style. The aim of teaching learning language is that learners should have communicative competence. The communicative competence model (Celce-Murcia et al) introduces that the main competence of communicative competence is discourse competence. The discourse competence can be achieved if the learners have socio-cultural competence, linguistic competence and actional competence. It means that teaching English involves not only knowledge of linguistic aspects and speech act or rhetoric aspects but also socio-cultural aspects, certain features and characteristics of the culture. In the teaching learning process, language and culture are considered interconnected. It can be stated that a language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of a language. Language cannot be taught without reference to cultural context. By understanding socio-cultural contexts, learners can encounter the factors of cultural differences. English teachers should acknowledge English expressions to the learners in English cultural contexts. In order to help teacher in assisting learners to overcome cultural problems, some activities recommended are role plays, simulation, games, readings, watching English films, inviting native speaker to attend a classroom, giving assignment to the learners to meet native speaker, and cross cultural gathering with expatriates. Thus, the English learners are expected to be able to use English as a means of communication in various spoken and written English contexts. Moreover, the development of the learners’ cultural awareness leads them to more critical thinking. The learners are more creative and have a sensitivity of culture in producing English utterances. In other words, the learners should have made efforts how to use English communicatively. Pedagogical implication for teaching English as a foreign language should consider English cultural elements integrated in English teaching-learning activities in order to gain communicative competence. Regardless of different point of views, the aim of this study provides necessary information of cultural awareness for the English teachers and learners and that of teaching learning activities incorporating the target language and its culture.*

*Keywords: cultural awareness, communicative competence, socio-cultural competence*

**INTRODUCTION**

When English learners in Indonesia decide to learn English, they do not only absorb the linguistic of the language but also everything deals with English, including the culture of English. Therefore, by speaking English, a learner automatically aligns oneself with the culture of English. To speak the language well, one has to be able to think in that language, the essence of the language.

However, culturally, the learners have got accustomed to using Indonesian mind set or Indonesian expression style rather than native English style. For example, Indonesian learners prefer saying “my legs are broken” to saying “I broke my legs”. Although the expression “my legs are broken” seems to be correct in Indonesian, it is incorrect translation in English expression. Then, this understanding makes the learners find difficulties in learning English as a foreign language. Another example, Indonesian does not have a plural form for nouns.  In English, we have what are called count nouns like *apple*.  *An apple* can be more than one apple, Apples.  We also have non-count nouns, like weather.  Weather can not be counted.  We do not have weathers (Sundmacher, 2009). Therefore, English learners in Indonesia are confused by the variety and number of count and non-count nouns.

Indeed, the aim of teaching learning language is that learners should have communicative competence. Or we can also say that in order to communicate in the target language, the learners should have more than just linguistic competence but also communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). The communicative competence as a goal of the communicative language teaching (Celce-Murcia et al) introduces that the main competence of communicative competence is discourse competence. The discourse competence can be achieved if the learners have socio-cultural competence, linguistic competence and actional competence. By this way, all competences are treated by which the theory produces the approach as we call it today as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

**THE CONCEPTS OF COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)**

There are basically five characteristics that make CLT different from other approaches like Audio-Lingual Method or traditional approaches like *Grammar-Translation Method.* According to Nunan (1991), they are as follows.

1. Taught in the target language;
2. Introduction of authentic text and materials in the lesson. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction with other students;
3. Opportunities for learners to focus, not only on the target language, but also on the learning process itself;
4. Learner's experiences are an important part of the classroom learning situation;
5. An attempt to link learning in the classroom to authentic usage outside the classroom.

 This approach refers to a student-centered teaching. It means that the learning and teaching process should focus more on the students. All learning and teaching activities should give chances to activate the students having learning experiences in target language. These activities should also allow them the opportunity to produce the target language in meaningful and authentic situations corresponding authentic usage outside the classroom.

 In looking at some of the basic principles, we can see that there is a marked focus on the needs of the learner and his/her ability to manage his/her own learning. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), some principles are as follows:

* 1. Students should have knowledge of linguistic forms, functions and meanings so they can communicate in the target language;
	2. Teacher facilitates communication so students can manage their own learning;
	3. Students interact with each other in a variety of configurations;
	4. Function over form;
	5. Students interact at discourse level utilizing all four skills;
	6. Emphasis on pair and group work;
	7. Everything is done with communicative intent;
	8. Language used in activities is authentic and meaningful;
	9. Errors as seen as part of the learning process and necessary as students manage their own learning;
	10. 10.By learning true communication students will be more motivated to learn and use the target language;
	11. Teacher evaluates students accuracy and fluency;
	12. Teacher can evaluate while facilitating and participating in activities with students.

 The teacher must keep these principles in mind when planning and teaching a lesson using the CLT method. There are many activities the teacher can use incorporating CLT. However, when choosing or creating an activity the teacher must keep three things in mind. The activity must:

1. use authentic language, materials and situations,
2. have a purpose that the teacher can state and be achievable, and
3. allow for freedom and unpredictability.

In using authentic language and materials, the teacher must consider what students will be using English for. The teacher must also incorporate activities using situations students might actually find themselves in after completing their English study.

The teaching English must be purposeful. Students must be in a situation in their learning and activities where they need to communicate each other in order to accomplish their task in the activity. This will also allow them to use each other as resources and learn from each other. Use will not be unlike what their situations could be in real life. In real life they will learn through practice in using the language in a purposeful way. They will also learn from their experience through interacting with other English speakers.

In having freedom and unpredictability, in the classroom students have the freedom to make their own choices in using the target language. Often, when traditional teachers do interactive activities they allow students to only to use specific answers, for example either affirmative or negative response to a specific statement or question. Allowing unpredictability, the activity becomes more interesting and challenging and much more like real life. The activities do not have to be acting out a real life situation but can also be light and fun like a game. There are many choices the teacher can make in selecting activities in the classroom. Some examples of communicative activities the teacher can use: role play, language games, or scrambled (jumbled) sentences.

Though these activities are not real life situations they do allow learning to be more interesting and fun for the students. This will help them to be more productive and spend more time using the target language. Usually, the lesson with different activities will make the classroom atmosphere much more conducive to teaching.

When using role play the teacher should structure the activity so that students know the speakers, location, topic and function. An example of a role play has students in a restaurant, one student would play the waiter/waitress and the other(s) would be patrons. The topic and function would be obvious. When using role play activities the teacher should make sure the role play activity is in the context of the material being taught. Once the students start the activity the teacher should either participate in or facilitate it. As long as the teacher structures it properly, the students can have a great opportunity to practice the target language as they would use it in a real-life situation. It can also allow for a certain amount of unpredictability and spontaneity as well.

Another example is using scrambled sentences which the lines of one or more dialogues are given out of order and students, in pairs or groups, have to put the sentences in the correct order with the correct dialogue to make a conversation. Students can then change or add to the dialogues and role play the conversation. These activities and other have been used by the author in his teaching experience. In using any of these activities or others the teacher must modify them to fit the context of his/her teaching situation.

**COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

Most of English learners in Indonesia are seemingly accustomed to using paradoxical English rather than regular English. It can be found when they are taught in speaking and writing. Consequently, the English teacher should give them much more contribution through nurturing and applying communicative competence.

A number of English teachers and researchers argue that only through active interaction with the teacher or other learners in the target language within meaningful contexts, learners can build up communicative competence and therefore they are able to use the language spontaneously and communicatively.

Perhaps the central characteristic of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is that almost everything that is done with communicative intent. There is no one commonly accepted authoritative model of CLT which is originated from communicative theory. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:120).

Such group activities provide each student opportunities to interact with each other through practicing meaningful and authentic language. In the process of communicative activities, it is desirable that authentic materials are introduced and learners are provided with a chance to develop strategies for understanding language culture.







Model of Communicative Competence (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995)

Communicative competence introduced by Celce-Murcia et al, 1995 places discourse competence as the main competence. Discourse competence can not be separated from linguistic competence, actional competence, and socio-cultural competence. Discourse competence will be achieved, if one has linguistic competence, actional competence, and socio-cultural competence. Apparently, it includes some functional aspects of communication as Brown (2000:247) states the following descriptions:

1. Grammatical competence is that aspect of communicative competence that encompasses “knowledge of lexical terms and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology.
2. Discourse competence is the complement of grammatical competence in which connects sentences in stretches of discourse and forms a meaningful whole out of series of utterances.
3. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of language and of discourse.
4. Strategic competence is the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variable or due to insufficient competence.

Those functional aspects of communication are applicable into the existence of teaching and learning process in the classroom. Classroom is considered to be full of different cultures. It can be seen from many students stay in the classroom. When a person meets people from other cultures, he can not see all the ways that their cultures have influenced them. This is because culture is like an iceberg. Most of the iceberg is deep within the ocean just as much of culture is deep within people. It is necessary to know how a culture is different from one’s own and how it has influenced people in ways that are not obvious.

Meanwhile, language and culture are considered interconnected. Levine (1987) states that a language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of a language. Students will be better when they say “I cut my little finger” rather than “My little finger is cut”. Although the expression “My little finger is cut” seems to be correct in Indonesian, it is incorrect translation in English expression. The other examples can be found in accordance with four aspects above.

Some linguists have argued strongly that language is viewed for many goals.

1. Language is for communication.
2. Linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and their meanings, is just one part of communicative competence.
3. Another aspect of communicative competence is knowledge of the functions language is used for.
4. A variety of forms can be used to accomplish a single function. Example: A speaker can make a prediction by saying, for example, ‘It may rain,’ or ‘Perhaps it will rain.’
5. The same form of the language can be used for a variety of functions. Example: ‘May,’ for instance, can be used to make a prediction or to give permission (‘You may sit in the back’).
6. Learners need knowledge of forms *and* meanings *and* functions.
7. They must also use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situation in order to convey their intended meaning appropriately. Example: A speaker can seek permission using ‘may’ (‘May I have a piece of fruit?’); however, if the speaker perceives the listener as being more of a social equal or the situation as being informal, he or she would more likely use ‘can’ to seek permission (‘Can I have a piece of fruit?’).

In the other interval, it is not only language defined as point of view, but also culture is also connected to the fundamental aspect of language. Chaer and Agustina (1995) states that culture can be viewed on everyday lifestyle of people who use the language. There are certain aspects of it that are especially important to communication, for example the use of nonverbal behavior which might receive greater attention in CLT.

Thus, the necessity of learning English does not only refer to the literal language, but also the cultural language. Some English learners must concern with that problem so that they will have a deep felt intention of cultural awareness.

**SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS CULTURAL AWARENESS**

Using language appropriately involves the social rules for speaking in a community. It means understanding the influence of social factors on speech behavior. Some sociolinguists give illustration for a different aspect of the many and varied types of knowledge which people in different communities acquire when they learn to use language appropriately in their own community so that the knowledge which underlies people’s ability to use language appropriately is known as their sociolinguistic competence. It can be identified in classroom when the English learners are in the teaching and learning process in which the English teacher uses the target language as the daily communication. For the ease, through English communication, the English learners are automatically attached to English culture in use.

Socio-cultural competence also involves knowing how to use language for different functions, such as getting things done in different contexts. Learning a foreign language, particularly English language in the classroom, often seems at first to be matter of learning the vocabulary and grammar from a book, and struggling to copy the pronunciation in class from a teacher. But, the concept of socio-cultural competence makes it clear that much more is involved than control of the linguistics structures.

In the side of interval, socio-cultural competence can be identified through the aspects of social factors and social dimensions (Holmes, 2001). Certain social factors have been relevant in accounting for the particular variety used. Some relate to the users of language (the participants) while others relate its uses (the social setting and function of interaction).

Not all factors are relevant in any particular context but they can be grouped in ways which are helpful. In any situation linguistic choices will generally reflect the influence of one or more of the following components:

1. The participants: who is speaking and who are they speaking to?
2. The setting or social context of the interaction: where are they speaking?
3. The topic: what is being talked about?
4. The function: why are they speaking?

In addition to those components, the social dimensions are also useful for accounting the analysis which relate to the four components above. These are:

1. A social distance scale concerned with participant relationships
2. A status scale concerned with the participant relationships
3. A formality scale relating to the setting or type of interaction
4. Two functional scales relating to the purposes or topic of interaction.

As stated above from the cultural understanding, some students are deeply drilled to know the English culture in the use of communication. What language is considered to be invisible, both English teacher and learners are so closed in getting involvement with the implementative English in order to avoid misunderstanding of many English functions. By that way, the essence of cultural understanding or awareness keeps on the existence.

**CONCLUSION**

Culture awareness is really important to the English learners in Indonesia because learning English is not only learning the knowledge of linguistic aspects and speech act or rhetoric aspects but also socio-cultural aspects, certain features and characteristics of the culture. In the teaching learning process, language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of a language.

In order to develop and improve his English skills, an English learner should have communicative competence, including socio-cultural competence. By understanding socio-cultural contexts, learners can encounter the factors of cultural differences.

English teachers should acknowledge English expressions to the learners in English cultural contexts. In order to help teacher in assisting learners to overcome cultural problems, some activities recommended are role plays, simulation, games, readings, watching English films, inviting native speaker to attend a classroom, giving assignment to the learners to meet native speaker, and cross cultural gathering with expatriates. Thus, the English learners are expected to be able to use English as a means of communication in various spoken and written English contexts.

Moreover, pedagogical implication for teaching English as a foreign language should consider English cultural elements integrated in English teaching-learning activities in order to gain communicative competence.

Through cultural awareness, English learners realize that learning English is also learning cultural differences. And there is no need to become more American or British in order to use English well.

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