

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE SKILL CLASSES

Seful Bahri
seful.bahri.unnes@gmail.com
Semarang State University

ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning is foreign culture learning. It also means that the teaching of culture should become an integral part of the teaching of a language. Culture teaching should allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitude, and beliefs, and how these manifest in linguistics categories and forms. These things are the concerns of this article and will be elaborated in the explanations of the relationship between language and culture, the ways they are taught integratedly, and simple procedure in carrying out classroom activities.

Keywords: language learning, culture, language skill classes

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, there has been a new increase of interest in the study of language in relation to society (:culture) which has led to a shift of focus from behaviorism and positivism and critical theory (Benson & Voller. 1997). Language teaching is no longer (:not only) teaching merely about using the language correctly in terms of grammatical patterns but also that of using the language appropriately, which includes linguistics and cultural appropriateness.

Indeed, foreign language learning is comprised of several components including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or cultural competence. Cultural competence here includes the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country, which becomes an integral part of foreign language learning. Many experts have also

seen it as the goal to integrate the teaching of culture into foreign language curriculum.

Then, it is obvious that foreign language learning is foreign culture learning. What is debatable, though, is what it means by term 'culture' and how it is integrated into language and teaching. That is what this paper tries to discuss. The discussion will enclose the relationship between language and culture, the way they are taught integratedly (including teacher roles and some practical consideration), and simple procedure in carrying out classroom activities.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

There are many arguments and claims concerning the relationship between language and culture. One of the arguments stated by Saphir cited in Wardough (1986) says that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world. (Though recent study says that hypothesis is

unproven) Others say that the structure does not determine the world-view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of language toward adopting a particular world-view. Further, there is also another argument that the culture of a people finds a reflection in the language they employ.

These three arguments show us that language and culture are inseparable, or in other words they are intertwined each other. Language is also said as a product of a culture and the culture is a vehicle by which cultural customs and ways of life are expressed in a language.

One of examples proving that language and cultural developments influence each other is the emergence of new words or old-same words with new-given meanings which are derived from, for instance, social interaction and political interference (: which, of course, they belong to the culture). This happens to any language including our bahasa Indonesia and English. To mention some, English words like chick, gal, vegetable, and buck, are those which have new meanings through socio-cultural interference (:the first two words mean girls, dying patient, and money/dollar, orderly). In our bahasa Indonesia, words like *kuningisasi*, *pengantasan kemiskinan*, *gizi buruk*, and *rawan pangan*, are examples of new words (or we might call them 'new term') emerged through political interference.

To support argument concerning the relationship between language and culture, many studies have been done to show that language and culture are from the start are inseparably connected. Of all such studies, Buttjes cited in Marchal summarized the result of them (which are based on his study on First and Second Language Acquisition

in children) and proposed its relation to language teaching. He summarized them into five, they are : 1.) language acquisition does not follow a universal sequence, but differs across culture; 2.) the process of becoming a competent member of a society is realized through exchanges of language in particular social situations; 3.) every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects that form the function and the content of children's utterances; 4.) caregivers primary concern is not with grammatical input, but with the transmission of socio-cultural knowledge; 5.) the native learner, in addition to language proficiency, acquires also the paralinguistic patterns and the kinesics of his or her culture.

To restate the relationship between language and culture, Samovar et al cited in Abbaspur observes that:

"culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted.....Culture.. is the foundation of communication."

From all the above arguments, it is clear that language does not exist apart from culture. Then it can also be implied that the teaching of (second or foreign) language is also the teaching of (the target) culture. Indeed, language teaching not only gives the students ability on grammatical competence, mastery of vocabulary, and language proficiency, but also introduces cultural components of a target language to

students, so that they will be able to use the language appropriately.

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

A question may, then, come up about what kind of 'culture' should be taught and how to integrate language and culture in a language classroom. In other words, how to teach language skills, -speaking, reading, writing, or listening, integratedly with the teaching of culture, terms of the method, technique, and teacher, roles in the classroom.

To answer this question, I would like to give a definition of culture proposed by Duranti, (1997:24) who says that culture is 'something learned, transmitted, passed down from one generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form of face-to-face interaction, and, of course through linguistic communication'. It is quite obvious that language, as a subpart of culture, plays a vital role. A simple explanation about culture is given by Wardough (1986), he says that culture is a "know how" that a person that posses to get through the task of daily living; in relation to language and culture teaching, the lesson should be that of enabling students to properly 'survive' in a socio-cultural interaction.

Teacher Roles

There are many roles of a teacher should play in a classroom proposed by many scholars, such as a prompter, organizer, controller, assessor, supervisor, or even an active participant or partner to students. However, the writer prefers not to use such technical terms, instead, he will only give an idea or concept about what the teacher should do in a classroom when teaching

culture incorporated with the teaching of a language.

What the teachers should bear in mind when teaching culture is the need to raise their students awareness of their own culture, to provide them with some kind of metalanguage in order to talk about culture, and to foster understanding of the target culture so that the students can accurately interpret foreign culture behaviors. Technically, teachers are supposed to stimulate students' interest in the target culture, and to help establish the foreign language classroom as place where opportunities for learning of various kinds are provided through the interactions that take place between participant, and not merely as a place where the language is taught. (Ellis, 1997)

Some Practical Considerations

Here, I propose some considerations and ways of teaching language skills as well as culture integratedly. The general considerations that might be taken in language skills and culture teaching are that: a) culture teaching must be commensurate with the dynamic aspect of culture; b) teaching the culture in the systematic and structured way; c) evaluation of culture learning is a necessary component of the foreign language and culture teaching. Teachers of course will play very important role in this kind of teaching, but the main thing they should bear in mind is that they must raise their students' awareness of their own culture and target culture experience, provide some target-culture based material, and create a culture-setting of classroom (which it could be out side the classroom).

There are many methods and techniques in teaching language skills and culture proposed by many experts. One of

the best ways might be involving a native speaker in the classroom and ask him to be a target-culture-resource person. However, it seems very difficult to apply this way in our country for many considerations. Other possible ways worth to apply are as follows:

- 1) Giving the students opportunity to enjoy certain activities that are part of their tradition, for instance; song, traditional festival, sport, etc., then followed by setting up this kind of things of the target language (and culture). These activities will bring the students to experience the target culture, and not just hear the language uttered. In doing such activities, teachers can bring realia and even take the students outside the classroom to certain places.
- 2) Giving the students multiple choice questions (10 questions/meeting) about what the person in a target culture will mostly behave in a certain situation. For instance a question about:
What will an American mostly do when she is visiting her friend and offer a drink (:and she is thirsty?):
 - a. *She will say "No, thanks" while waiting for a second offer*
 - b. *She will directly accept and offer and say "Yes, please."*
 - c. *She will say "don't bother (:just to be polite) and wait for a second offer*
 - d. *She will say yes and go the kitchen with the host.*Then it is followed by discussion regarding the reasons about that answer.
- 3) A similar method is given by Henrichen in Marchal, who proposes *culture assimilators* which comprise short descriptions of various situations where persons of the target language interacts

with persons from the home culture. Then followed by four possible interpretations of the meaning of the behavior and speech of the interactants, especially those from the target culture. Once the students have read the description, they choose one of the four options they think is the correct interpretation of the situation, and then they discuss why it is correct or incorrect.

- 4) Inviting a guest speaker (a person of the first language community who happened to go to a target-language-and-culture country) to tell his language and cultural experience to students. Students are led to participate in giving questions and comment on what the guest explains.

The writer happened to do small research dealing with carrying out the above first-two activities in his speaking class. There are two classes of twenty students; one class (group A) is using the above first-two ways, and other (group B) is not.

The general procedures that the writer applied in teaching group A is as follows:

- 1) Pre-teaching: Students are divided into groups of five, and given multiple choice questions about what people in the target culture would behave and react in a certain situations.
- 2) Whilst-teaching:
 - In groups, students discuss the answer, try to find out why the answer is correct/incorrect, then compare the answer to other groups.
 - Students are asked to act out the situation (role play). This gives a chance the students to practice their

language skills and express their culture awareness.

- 3) Post teaching: Confirming the students answers, the teacher explains the basic value of (reason) such reaction/ behavior done by people in the target culture. Teacher, then, asks the students to compare such situation and people's reaction of the home culture.

After 16 meetings, it is found that students in group A show relatively better result than those in group B in their communicative skill and cultural awareness, and able to use the target language more appropriately. This technique can also be applied in other language skill classes such as writing, reading and listening.

CONCLUSION

The teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. Culture teaching should allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitude, and beliefs, and how these manifest themselves in linguistics categories and forms. More specifically, the teaching of culture should make learners aware of things culturally by providing them with the opportunity to act out being a member of the

target culture, so that they can communicate and behave appropriately in the target language and culture.

References

- Bryam, M., Morgan, C. Et al. 1994. *Teaching and Learning Language and Culture*. Great Britain: WBC
- Benson, P & Voller P. 1997. *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman
- Duranti, A. 1997. *Socialization and Literacy in a Foreign Language: Learning through interaction*. Columbus. The Ohio State University.
- Ellis, Rod. 1997. *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wardough, Ronald. 1986. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.
- Abbaspour, Ehsan. 2015. *How to integrate culture in second language education*. accessed from <http://www.academia.edu>. on April 9.
- Marchal, Michael. 2015. *The integration of culture into foreign language classrooms*. Accessed from <http://www.digitalcommons.brockport.edu>. on April 9.

