THE ROLE OF LOCAL CULTURE IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES

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Abstract
This paper aims at finding out a model or a concrete picture of the role of local culture in intercultural communication teaching embedded in English speaking classes. Specifically, this paper studied the first-year-students' studying speaking in English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang and lecturers lecturing speaking lesson in the same university. The study design, method, and approach implemented in this study, respectively, were case study, qualitative, and interdisciplinary. In addition, data were collected through observation, interview, and documentation study, and were validated by using triangulation technique. The collected data were analyzed using interactive model, comprising data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Results showed that the knowledge of culture, both native and foreign one, was embedded in teaching speaking classes of first-year-students in Universitas Negeri Semarang. The local culture itself served as benchmark and departing point of teaching intercultural communication to students. By acting as a benchmark, local culture gave students a standard of what considered acceptable and not acceptable both in native and foreign culture. While as a departing point, local culture served as the initial knowledge of students before getting to understand the concept of international communication further. For teaching speaking in general, local culture which was used as a ground to introduce intercultural communication would be beneficial for teachers to teach polite oral English communication which was acceptable for speakers coming from various nations.

Keywords: intercultural communication, local culture, speaking

Introduction

English in modern era focuses its usage on the issue of English as a Lingua Franca (EFL) where English is seen as the international language for communication. Although England, the United States, or Australia are usually used as the benchmark of any English test or the development of English language in general, however, the goal of teaching English is now focusing on how to use the English politely, instead of using the proper English grammar or learning to apply the dialect. Seidlhofer (2011) mentioned that ELF is a communication tool used by people who are not using English as their native language, but more as the language to bridge communication between people who need to communicate or interact with other people with different cultures and languages. In a simpler definition, English

as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a term referred to a communication tool between people from various langauge background (Jenkins, 2003).

In its implementation, ELF turns out to be more than just how to use the language. It also means using the language with proper knowledge and culture mastery. Having a perfect ability in mastering the vocabulary and grammar in English without the support of the ability in interpreting and mediating culture gap between speakers will become a problem in intercultural communication (Neff & Rucynski Jr., 2013). Even, the msitakes in grammar or structure of English is considered understandable, while the mistakes in chhosing wrong topic or using inappropriate diction and topic of conversation can be considered as rude (Bardovi-Harlig, 1991; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004).

From this issue, therefore, the trend of English teaching in modern era tends to discuss about problems related to culture gap mediation in English intercultural communication. The culture mediation in English communication is known as Cross Cultural Communication or Intercultural Communication. Some experts differ the meaning of each term to cross-cultural which tends to be defined as cultural learning between nation where two or more different cultures are compared, while the intercultural underlines the interaction between people who have different cultural background (Baker, 2012; Koester & Lustig, 2015). The ambiguity between the definitions let some other researchers to treat the terms in simlar way (see Gu, Patkin, & Kirkpatrick, 2014; Neff & Rucynski Jr., 2013). For this research purposes, I will tread cross-cultural and intercultural communication in similar way, considering that both terms have the definition that communication happens as the result of an interation between speakers with different langauge and culture. Therefore, in this study, the interaction will be referred as Intercultural Communication (Nayono, 2013 & Rudianto, dkk., 2015).

Supporting the previous definition by experts was Hopson, et al. (2012) who stated that cross-cultural or intercultural communication has to be built simultaneously with mutual benefit, adaptive, understanding, interactive, dependable, and supported by all lecturers. Surely, to establish the ideal situation just like what is hoped by previous experts in the field of intercultural communication is not easy. In its relation to this, in teaching and learning English, initiative of the lecturers is needed in teaching the theory on how to mediate cultures in intercultural communication. Mediating the culture is a big challenge to the teacher, lecturer, or practitioner in English Language Teaching, specifically for the teachers who teach English in EFL country where English is taught as foreign language, like in Indonesia. The condition where the class is mostly occupied by local learners are the challenge for the lecturers since the source of information related to the culture of target language is considerably limited. Whereas, to support the teaching of intercultural communication needs material input both from local and target culture.

In addition to the intercultural communication which becomes the center if the present research, the term is actually understood as the transfer of language between different language and culture. The term Intercultural communication also refers to the communication between people from different ethnic, social, and culture, or in other words, it is the conversation berween the minority and dominant cultures

(Arent, 2009). Culture in English is distinguished between small 'c' and big 'C'. Capital C in culture means covers the general culture, like, music or literary works, while small 'c' means the discussion of communication norms between speakers (Gill dan Čaňková, 2002). In oral English speaking classes in Indonesia, the norms tend to learn about the native user of English culture's norm. Therefore, in this study, Intercultural communication means the learning of cultures as a result of the meeting of two different cultures or more during the conversation takes place.

In teaching and learning English the understanding of intercultural communication reflects an overview that a learner of English as a Foreign Language has to have the knowledge of the local culture as well as the native one (Kramsch, 1993). In other words, The learning of intercultural communication of a language is defined as a way to develop the ability of a learner to negotiate meanings behinf a language or culture to face the multicultural world (Ho, 2009). More specifically, the aim of learning that is containing and teaching the knowledge of intercultural communication is used to sharpen the knowledge and understanding of a learner towards the way of communicating and negotiating cultures between speakers from different cultures. This attempt is done by helping learners to be aware in understanding every forms, implementation, and limitations of culture in intercultural communication. The most important also is to teach the learners to bring the understanding to the real English communication between culture in a flexible and purposive way (Baker, 2012).

In addition to this is the local culture itself. From the previous definition, we can infer that the intercultural communication is the ability which is taught in order to develop the relationship between cultureswhich is reciprocal between the native and foreign user of English (Chi & Suthers, 2015). Therefore, local culture gives more contribution towards the knowledge of custom and norms as well as knowledge for the mediation of cultures in teaching the language (Lin, et al., 2002). Here, McKay (2002) also delivers that the teaching of local cultures to the English classroom teaching can improve the knowledge of learners which later will be useful in practising intercultural communication.

Canagarajah (2006) in Hopson, et al. (2012) in his research about norms in intercultural communication delivers that most of the research in English gives more emphasis on the implementation of the classroom teaching, i.e. the teaching of cultures, the materials, textbooks, as well as the teaching teachniques. There were quite little research explaining more about how to negotiate local cultures in English teaching (Canagarajah, 2006 in Hopson, et al., 2012). It means, the local culture influences the intercultural communication since the knowledge of local cultures will be useful in oral culture negotiation. This is supported by Barker (2012) which delivered that local culture is one of the important supporting component in the implementation of intercultural communication teaching in the classroom because, if it is used for communication, the knowledge of culture may reveal the differences between cultures and taboos in different cultures that may support the process of negotiation formation between two foreign speakers.

Generally, about the integration of culture in teaching English in ELT, Neff & Rucynski (2013) had previously learned that the role of culture in teaching English is crucial. Previous study had been done researching about Japanese student who

studies English in one of the university in Japan. It was found out that the communication misunderstanding between native speaker and the Japanese student happened because the ability of English had by the students is not supported by the mastery of culture had by the students. To overcome this, Neff & Rucynski had attempted to develop some detailed and completed teaching activities, with roleplay as the teaching technique. It was claimed that it was succesful to help students to master the culture contained in the language.

Another previous study by Zeff (2016) studied about the teaching strategy of intercultural teaching in speaking classes, which specifically learns about greetings. In this study, the researcher asked the students to create a journal which told about the cultural gap in greetings which the students got both directly and from television. He also further explained about contextual assignemnt he gave to the students which would give the opportunity for the students to do problem solving. Usually the assignment is given in role play, so the students can act as if they came from different countries and tried to have and bridge communication between cultures.

In Indonesia, the research about culture in teaching English had been done by Kirkpatrick (2015) by doing collaboration research with some researchers in Indonesia which specifically studied about English textbook used in some schools in Indonesia. Results show that English textbook in Indonesia focuses on showing and introducing Indonesia local cultures. However, how the local culture differs with the native cultures and how it is similar hasnot been discussed, let alone the way to bridge the cultural gap. A suggestion was derived from the Kirkpatrick's research telling that the factor of English lecturer or teacher is important. Teachers who have the spirit of pluralism and sensitively open with cultures are needed to teach culture in ELT specifically in oral English.

Eventhough, some previous study had already attempted to learn the teaching of cultures embedded in oral English teaching, however, the role of local cultures in the classrom itself had never been studied before. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to find out how the local culture take part in the teaching of speking skill in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Semarang. Specifically, what is the role of local culture teaching in teaching speaking in this university.

Method

The Research Approach

The research implements the interdisciplinary approach, combining the knowledge between the ability of using oral English and the knowedge of intercultural communication. Method used is qualitative which naturally observes people and link it to the environment where they live, the interaction between people, and the interpretation they have to the world (Nasution, 1996).

The Research Design

This study employs the case study as its research design. The aim of the case study is to gain the detailed result in its relation to a specific case and relates it to the theory that has been existed before and also the results cannot be generalized (Bryman, 2012). Here, we specifically employed the intrinsic case study. It is chosen since the researcher wants to understand the case deeper.

Location and Target of the Study

The research site in this study is in the English Department of Faculty of Langauges and Arts of Universitas Negeri Semarang. The target is specifically about knowledge of local culture and its role in teaching Intercultural communication in English Speaking Classes by using previous theories by McKay (2002) and Baker (2012).

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique uses in this study is observation, interview, adn documentation study. Observation was done during the classroom teaching was held. While, the interview was given to 6 key informants and 9 supported informants. The 6 key informants were 3 lecturers and 3 students decided by the reseracher based on the backround of each subject. The three lecturers have different teaching experience duration. Informant 1 has been teaching more than 10 years old, the second informant has been teaching for 5 to 10 years old, and the last has been teaching for less than 5 years. While the students also have different criteria. Student 1 is a freshman who never teach any English toany students. Student 2 is a freshman but has been having the teaching experience from private teaching, and student 4 who has been given the international communication teaching for almost a year. While, the supportive informants are selected randomly.

Data Validation Technique

The data validation technique implemented here is triangulation which was explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as a set of heuristic tool for researchers. The data triangulation comprises the source data trianguation based on previous claim from the researcher, researcher triangulation which learned from previous researchers, theory triangulation which studies the research result based on previous theory delivered by experts, and methodology triangulation which uses various method to study a single problem.

The Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique in this research implements the data analysis technique by Nasution (1996) by analyzing the natural learning phenomena. It is also in line with Miles and Huberman (1992) which uses the interactive model comprising data reduction, data presentation, and verification.

Findings and Discussion

From the observation and interview results, the study found that both the lecturers and students have already had the same views about the role of local cultures in English speaking classes in Universitas Negeri Semarang. Both of them agree that local cultures should exist to provide them with an understanding before they are asked to learn how to mediate cultures. Both agree that although the local culture teaching is significant, however, all lecturers do not teach the local culture exsplicitly but implisitly. The statement is also agreed by the students. The implicit teaching of local cultures is also affected by the availability of the textbook which mainly provides the students with the knowledge of target culture, i.e. formal and informal speech, expression, gesture, etc. While discussing about the target culture, then local culture teaching is given implicitly as the comparative variable, so the discussion can appear in the classroom.

The challenge of the local culture teaching in the classroom faced by the lecturer is more to the difficulties in defining whose local culture they need to teach in the classroom. Having different island and pleces, Indonesia also has different cultures with different norms attached to it. What is considered polite in one island or place in Indonesia is considered rude for someone else living outside the region, let alone the norms of culture in the world. This problem is then mediated by the decision of acknowledging the cultures or norms which are followed or obeyed by most of the students in the classroom.

Both lecturers and students hope that there will be more explicit teaching of local cultures, so the learning to mediate culture gap is clearer. Especially for students who have experienced teaching, the knowledge of how to mediate cultures is useful for them to teach communicative English for their students. It is because in explaining about the norms of using polite oral English, sometimes the students of theirs will also ask the similarity between local and foreign cultures and also explanation about how to be polite eventhough the cultures of the speakers are not the same. To underline this, both lecturers and students think that the textbook and materials given to teach the students give more focus on the culture of native speakers, while at some point, the students themselves actually do not really understand about their local culture.

The idea of teaching local cultures to the students is actually derived from the thought that the students need to understand their culture first before attempting to mediate their cultures with the foreign one.under the umbrella of realizing the aim of English to be used as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2012). Classroom teaching, usually in speaking classes often teach the students how to be polite in other country while neglecting whether what is considered polite in another country is also considered the same in the students' native country. Therefore, in this study, it formulates that the functions of local culture teaching are useful in two major reasons; local culture may serve as a benchmark and departing point of teaching intercultural communication. Thus, students will have had the standard of what is considered polite or impolite in their own countries, before learning other cultures and trying to mediate the gap between the two cultures.

The second use of teaching local culture to students is actually to realize the teaching of intercultural communication itself. The goal of oral communication in English is no different as to have the similar understanding between two speakers both in terms of the information delivered or the way it communicates in a polite way. Results of the study are in line with what had been delivered by McKay (2002) that the teaching of local cultures to the English classroom teaching can improve the knowledge of learners. It is later will be useful in practicing intercultural communication. Intercultural communication may exist when both speakers understand each other and attempt to respect to other cultures while also respect their own cultures. If the students keep being taught by using the foreign cultures, they will be consiedered as polite in other countries but sometimes neglect that their politeness is not acceptable in their own county, This way, intercultural communication hasnot achieved yet.

Conclusion

The study attempted to study the role of local culture in speaking classes. The data were collected by observing the class, interview, and documentation study. Results showed that the knowledge of culture, both native and foreign one, was embedded in teaching speaking classes of first-year-students in Universitas Negeri Semarang implicitly. The local culture itself served as benchmark and departing point of teaching intercultural communication to students. By acting as a benchmark, local culture gave students a standard of what considered acceptable and not acceptable both in native and foreign culture. While as a departing point, local culture served as the initial knowledge of students before getting to understand the concept of international communication further.

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