

INCORPORATING CULTURE INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

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Abstract: Language is a part of culture. Therefore, it is important to incorporate culture into language teaching in general and into foreign language teaching in particular. Consequently, we need to incorporate culture into foreign language curriculum and materials. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language because it is not used in daily communication. However, in reality we observe that many students in Indonesia do not understand the English culture although they learn the language. For example, we often hear students asking questions that are not culturally acceptable in English context such as asking about a woman's age, asking about someone's salary, and asking about the prices of someone's clothes and shoes. Many other expressions are not suitable for the occasions where they are used. This condition is probably caused by the curriculum and materials that have not incorporated English culture into the English language teaching. English teachers need to have adequate knowledge concerning with English culture if they want to be successful in their teaching. They should acquaint themselves with the specific customs and habits of the English people and they should try to be sympathetic to English culture as well. Knowledge about English culture is particularly needed when people want to visit England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America. Without having knowledge about English culture, people will probably experience some culture shock when they visit those countries.

Keywords: *incorporating, culture, curriculum*

Foreign students need to understand the linguistic, social, cultural features of English if they want to achieve intercultural understanding. Culture is all those historically created designs for living explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men. In other words, cultures are structured systems of patterned behavior.

Patterns of culture are organized into a system or set of systems that is

open and subject to change. Edward Sapir states that all cultural behavior is patterned. In every culture certain acts which in physical terms are different might be considered the same. For example American breakfast might consist of scrambled eggs, whole wheat toast, orange juice and coffee one morning. Another morning, it may consist of fried eggs, white toast, grapefruit juice and coffee. Still another morning, it may consist of bacon and hard-boiled eggs, apple juice and

coffee, but all the varieties belong to the same term 'Breakfast'.

According to Lado (1964), we cannot compare two cultures unless we have accurate knowledge and understanding of each of the cultures being compared. We must be able to eliminate the things that we claim we do but actually we don't do. We must be able to describe the things we do without being conscious of doing them and we must make sure we are able to describe practices accurately. We must be able to describe the situations in which we do what we do.

In this paper, I would like to present some American culture elements that are often confused by Indonesian students when they are learning English. Many students make their interpretations of acts that they see on television, movies, textbooks, magazines, or direct observation in tourism areas. Many Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language think that English people are very free in terms of relationships.

However, they do not realize that the acts on TV and movies are not always representatives of English culture. Most acts on TV or movies are dramatized and not realistic. Many people might label the English people as egoistic or materialistic because they do not care much about other people and they often show materials luxury. In real life situations, there are different kinds of acts that are not parallel to the movie acts.

It is important not to judge other people's cultures using our own standards. Every culture is good in its own context and therefore we need to learn other cultures so that we can understand them well. But it does not mean that we should imitate other cultures. We can learn a lot from other cultures and they can enrich our

understanding of different ways of doing things. People tend to consider their own culture as the best and other cultures are not as good. Some of the misled opinions about English culture are as follows.

ENGLISH PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS IN A HURRY

This opinion may spring from English city activities where people always walk fast in order to get things done quickly. But people in rural areas are not acting the same way. They have more freedom to arrange their activities and they do not look so in a hurry. Probably, life competition in the city is so intense that people always act in a hurry.

When we compare it to Indonesian situations, we can probably say that Indonesian people are more relaxed and sometimes too relaxed that they do not achieve their goals. Although English people always act in a hurry, they always arrange their weekends for relaxation. The division of work and play is quite clear in English culture.

In addition to weekend relaxation, they also plan for annual holiday where they can relax and forget about work for a while. By doing so, they will feel fresh again when they come back to work. Probably we can understand this from a popular saying "*All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*". English people realize that there should be a balance in life between work and relaxation so that life will be interesting and not boring. In addition, they realize that there is a limit to human's energy and strength, but it is possible for English people to plan for holidays and relaxation since they have sufficient budget for that.

In Indonesia people do not always care about holidays and they sometimes mix them up. They relax when it is time

to work and they work when it is time for relaxation or rest. Of course, there are relatively few people who enjoy holidays and relaxation and they are limited to wealthy people who consider holidays important in life and can afford to pay for the expense. Most Indonesian people do not make plans for holidays except for the annual visit to their hometowns for certain religious celebrations when they can afford it. The enjoyment is in meeting family members, old friends, and relatives.

ENGLISH PEOPLE ARE MATERIALISTIC

This is another common misled opinion. In reality, some people are materialistic but some others are not. There are a lot of people who care about other people's prosperity. Many people make great contributions to help poor people in poor countries. They send their money monthly to Africa to sponsor poor children and they feel happy to hear and see progress made by the children. This is possible to happen because English people are not worried about their children's future. They have prepared their children by providing them with good education so that they become independent. They send their children to another city as soon as they finish their high school education. Therefore, university students must stay away from their parents. This does not mean that their parents do not love them. They keep in contact by telephones to make sure that they are in good conditions.

During the study break, the children come back home for a while or their parents come to visit them to show their affection to each other. When English people retire from their jobs, they still want to be independent and stay by themselves rather than staying with their children. They prefer to stay

in old folks' home when they get older. In Indonesia, many people worry so much about their children's future that they prepare for their children's homes and sometimes even for their grandchildren. Many Indonesian people feel happy and comfortable to stay with their children even after their children have been married and have had their own children. They feel happy when they can always see their descendants every day.

DISCUSSION

There are many unique characteristics in every culture and it is good when we can understand each other. The cultural differences can cause misunderstanding because everyone tends to consider his culture to be the best. However, people need to understand each other although they come from different cultural backgrounds. Understanding other people's culture can help avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding. Everyone will probably agree that we need to live peacefully without having conflicts to each other.

One important requirement to get happiness in life is to live peacefully. It might be difficult to eliminate conflicts and wars due to conflicts of interest and high competitions in all facets of life but we can at least lower it by having mutual understanding through learning other people's cultures and sympathizing to them. We need to broaden our knowledge about cultural differences so that we can have intercultural understanding. One way to implement intercultural understanding is by incorporating culture into foreign language curriculum and materials.

When we look at our English teaching and learning curriculum, we cannot find any effort to explain the English native speakers' culture. We

do not see any explanation about English cultural points that the students need to understand so that they will not make wrong ideas and judgment about English cultures. In this occasion, I would like to discuss some cultural points that can cause misunderstanding to the English learners or students. First of all, most students do not see the real English culture in action. They only see English native speakers from television programs, movies, or encounters in some tourism places. The problem with these events is that they are not natural and they tend to be dramatized.

Let me share my observations of American cultures or values during my two year stay in the country to earn my master's degree. At first sight when I arrived in January 1984, I noticed that people wore thick clothes due to the cold weather during the winter. I was ready for that because I had already prepared for winter clothes before my departure to the US. I did my shopping in Singapore when I had a stop over there and I could find all things that I needed to wear for the season. It was the first time for me to experience walking in the snow and it was quite exciting, many students learning English in Indonesia do not have an idea how it feels to walk in the snow. They just imagine that it is similar to ice. In fact ice is very different from snow. The point is that people in America wear different kinds of clothes in accordance with the seasons that they face.

The next season is spring where people still wear warm clothes but not as thick as before. The leaves are beginning to grow again and the sun is beginning to shine. When it is getting a little warmer, people start to go out to enjoy the sun shine and have conversations with friends. Many youngsters start making dates during

this season. People can get special discounts for winter clothes which are on sales and they call it clearance sales. The stores get ready for products needed for the season.

Then summer comes and people start to wear different kinds of clothes which are suitable for the season. They usually wear shorts and thin clothes because the weather is getting warmer and even hot. For Indonesian the summer clothes might be considered sexy and inappropriate to wear in public, but for Americans it is just normal and ordinary to wear such kinds of clothes during the summer. The stores also adjust again the products that they sell for the season.

After the summer comes the fall where the winds start to blow hard and people must wear suitable clothes for the fall and hence the stores adjust their products again for the season. The leaves start to have different colors before they finally fall at the beginning of winter. We can probably say that different weather conditions and seasons influence the people's activities and cultures.

When Indonesian people plan to pursue their studies in America, they need to acquaint themselves with the specific customs and habits of the American people. Small cultural differences may cause misunderstanding. For example, when we offer a weak handshake with an American while looking downwards, the American will think that we are not very polite and consider us as a lackluster kind of persons. American people normally have firm handshakes symbolizing warmth.

Most Americans are welcoming and friendly, as far as my observation is concerned. I could feel it when I arrived for the first time at a US airport in Los Angeles back in 1984. The Americans'

friendliness can also be seen in everyday encounters with them. When we ask them questions for directions for instance, they are happy to answer them and they always try to be helpful especially to foreigners. Americans are straightforward people. They say yes when they agree and they say no when they disagree to something. They are not very strict in terms of correct behavior like the English people in London. For instance, they usually eat apples without using a knife and a fork.

There are few taboos and not many formalities expected of anyone. The rules of behavior are quite loose in America except for certain formal ceremonies. Many people wear blue jeans for various daily activities and few people are offended by that. In spite of their being modern, many Americans still have some superstitions. For example, bad luck comes from walking under ladders, number 13, black cats, and broken mirrors. Friday the 13th is considered a very unlucky day, and some people avoid going by planes on that day.

Other things that might need to be included in the English materials are the American English values. American people in general want to get things done quickly. Indonesian people, on the other hand, do not consider getting things done as top priority. An American cannot understand people who do not aspire to change their standards of living or to change their status in the society. American people are dynamic individuals who never stop seeking a better way. In addition, they believe that all people should have an equal chance at success. The opportunity makes America as the Land of the Free. They also believe that democracy can promise visible fruits. Not everybody can win, but everybody is eligible to join the race. Family and

connections are not required. Effort, brains, and creativities are needed for progress. The American system leads everybody to play by the same rules. The government's job is to keep the course equal and to protect the rights of the individuals.

In Indonesia, many people get good positions because of good connections with the decision makers although they do not have good competence. Some highly qualified people do not get strategic positions because they do not have good connections or relations to the high-rank officials.

Another American characteristic is their being future-oriented. They believe in a brighter future and it keeps them optimistic. They believe that they have power to affect the course of events by having good planning and they believe that every problem has a rational solution. Americans always work in a hurry because they believe that the present can always be improved and that makes them energetic in all activities.

The American ideal is self-reliant, tough, and risk taking. Their highest aspiration is self-fulfillment. Many decisions are made by the individual. This condition is probably caused by the fact that American children quite regularly leave home at the age of 18. Of course this happens with their parents' blessings. From then on, they make most of their own decisions without their parents' help because they have been quite independent during their teenage years. The job of the parents is to give the children every opportunity while they are growing up and then get out of their way. In America, the individual comes first and they do not consider it selfish. A person serves society by living up to his potential.

The next American characteristic is efficiency. The assembly line which was initiated by Henry Ford has reduced workers to cogs of machinery and produced cars and other goods fast. American people say that time is money. The supermarket has made the shopping time very efficient because food is prepackaged and shopping is impersonal. Fast-food operations have also reduced the customers' waiting time to get hamburgers, sandwiches, and cokes to few seconds. Bank service has become very efficient since the creation of automatic teller machines. Similarly, the vending machines have made the purchase time very efficient. People can practically purchase goods or items that can be placed in vending machines such as stamps, soft drinks, coffee, etc.

Another thing that Indonesian students need to know when they learn English and plan to go there is that there is no bargain there. Almost the only chances we get to bargain in the USA are when buying houses, used cars and used goods in the second-hand stores, and when shopping in farmers market.

The next cultural point that students need to understand is that we need to give tips of around 10 to 15 percent of the food price when we eat in restaurants in the United States. Taxi drivers also expect the same percentage of tips. Furthermore, a percentage is added to the price of most goods sold and collected by state and/or local governments. This is very important to know when someone wants to visit the USA.

CONCLUSION

People around the world need to understand each other in order to maintain peace and progress. One way to achieve it is by learning about other people's culture. In relation to this

purpose, it is important to learn foreign languages and incorporate the culture into the curriculum and materials. English is learned in Indonesia as a foreign language and it happens to be the most international language of all. In the present practice of English teaching and learning process, we have not paid enough attention to the idea of incorporating culture into the English teaching curriculum and materials yet. Therefore, it is high time to consider designing the course or lesson materials that incorporate the culture of the native speakers of the language. By knowing the culture, we will have a better competence in the language being learned or even acquired. But this does not mean that we should act like the native speakers of the language and forget about our own culture. We still can maintain our culture and identity when we learn a different language and culture. The positive point is that we can achieve intercultural understanding and can help keep the world peaceful.

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