

# Not Only Language Awareness but also Cultural Awareness Required in Teaching English as a Global Language

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## *Abstract*

Language use involves not only making choices about lexis, grammar, discourse structures and other language aspects, but also contexts, i.e. topics, participants, settings. The explicit knowledge, sensitivity, and perception on the language regularities, so-called language awareness is essential for the language users to understand and produce language accurately. Learners are also expected to recognize language users' norms, belief systems and behaviors. Cultural awareness, as the knowledge of cultural differences among the first language cultures and others speakers' cultures, is of paramount. Since the number of 'new variants' of English from *periphery countries* are increasing (Canagarajah 2002) and at the same time English has become 'de-nationalized' (McKay 2002) other speakers' culture--the writer means--are cultures of inner-cycle (native) speakers, outer-cycle (L2) speakers, and extended-cycle (FL) speakers (see Kachru 1985). Intercultural awareness is vitally taught to English learners as the response to global English.

**Key words:** language, cultural awareness, global English

## **Introduction**

Teaching English to Indonesian learners is generally aimed to enable them to communicate thoughts, feelings and ideas to others. Learners need to master the language rules. The rules lead the language users to be able to construct good sentences in which the ideas can be transferred to others. The teaching of English actually has attempted to consider that language rules are pivotal for learners in order to understand descriptions, narrations, reports, etc conveyed by others and to interact and transact with other in both spoken and written language. Other components like vocabulary and phonology are also essential for them to comprehend and express feelings and share ideas. The explicit knowledge, sensitivity, and perception on the language regularities, what so-called language awareness, is essential for the language users to understand and produce language accurately.

As an approach in ELT language awareness as generally known as transferring the knowledge of target language to learners. In fact it is relatively effortless for learners to understand rules as 'theory', but hard for them to put it into 'practice'. They have some obstacles in practicing what they learn in classrooms, because they often lack of knowledge of sociolinguistic and socio-cultural contexts. The influences of social variables on speech act realizations have not optimally developed. Though learners have learned some formal, neutral and informal utterances, they still have problems in selecting the most appropriate utterances. For instance, they have learned how to make requests to a person who has the same level of social status. In fact they tend to use indirect request strategy, 'Could you lend me your pen, please?' As another example, in native speaker contexts, they do not need to call upon their friends by 'mister', 'sir', or 'mom'. Indeed Indonesian learners of English use it when talking to their classmates.

When the teacher benchmarks these examples with the target language (standard) usage, they seem inappropriate. It is generally identified that the native speakers tend to use more direct strategies when realizing requests to the same level persons. They might enact indirect requests to persons of the same age, but of distance in relationship. So simply language awareness makes learners accurately apply the rules, but does not really see the appropriateness.

The writer considers that contexts (topics, participants, and settings) are of importance in realizing speech acts. The norms embedded in communications are influenced and even determined by contexts. In traditional perspectives, norms are provided based native speakers (NS) orientations.

This paper will discuss the cultural awareness, how cultural awareness plays important roles, and some recommendations to be implemented in order to cope with the issue of language awareness and cultural awareness in relation to English as an International or Global language.

### *Cultural Awareness*

Cultural awareness is defined as a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication (Baker 2011, p 65). An awareness of culture as a set of shared behaviors, belief, and values is essential in learning English as a foreign language. When speakers are aware of others' behaviors, belief and values they can adapt themselves in order to avoid communication breakdowns. Recognizing others' cultures can also make nonnative speakers of English, like Indonesians share ideas successfully with others.

The communicative approach has been preoccupied with the notion of language is no more than a means of information exchange within a particular mono-cultural speech community (Lee 2012, p. 193). Communicative competence models proposed by experts (e.g. Canale & Swain 1981; Bachman 1990) firmly upheld an idea that the communicative norm is the native speaker interacting with another native speaker. So no wonder, many teachers of English formerly perceived 'if we speak English think in English'. The learners are informed and sometimes exposed with the norms of native speakers of English, so-called Inner Circle (termed by Kachru 2005) varieties. The teachers of English taught norms used by the countries where English is the primary language such as UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The countries were also classified into norm-providing circle (see Kachru 1985; Lee 2012).

The primary teaching goal was to enable learners to possess communicative competence referring to NS competence. The learners were trained to have ability to communicate with NSs. The explicit comparisons between native culture (C1) and target culture (TC) were the mostly done by the teachers. They teachers attempted to promote cultural awareness, but in term of target culture awareness. Learners are facilitated to have cultural knowledge, good or attitudes and behaviors in order to understand the NSs' ways of communications. Intelligibility depends on the success of learners which is determined by their knowledge of NSs' ways in expressing and sharing ideas. In short, the success of NS-NNS is really determined by how NNSs recognize the Inner Circle cultures.

In fact, the number of English speakers in outer circle and expanding circle is growing very fast, the learners are not only taught English to communicate with English speakers in inner circles, but also with whom to use English as a second and foreign language. At this juncture, they need knowledge of outer circle's and expanding cultures. By knowing other cultures interlocutors can negotiate meanings. As commonly known, meanings are constructed by both language and cultures. English language users need to familiar with some typical ways in greeting Japanese speakers of English. They, for instance, bow heads when saying 'good morning'. Such typical culture is also applied to Indonesians. They lower foreheads when shaking hand to respect elders.

### *Teaching Implications: Intercultural awareness*

Again the number of English speakers is increasing. There are 350 million speakers of English as a mother tongue, 400 million speakers of English as a second language, and 750 speakers of English as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003). Further, Rohde (1996) claims that there are more than one billion people are believed to speak some form of English Although the numbers vary, it is widely accepted that hundreds of millions of people around the world speak English, whether as a native, second or a foreign language. English, in some form, has become the native or unofficial language of a majority of the countries around the world today.

The multiple numbers of English speakers and the speakers of English as a foreign language is the most has made English as a lingua franca among nations all over the globe. The Outer and Expanding Circle varieties have functional position in international communication and at the same time have already made Inner Circle varieties 'denationalized'. It is identified that 80% of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a foreign or second language involve no native-speakers and are between nonnative users of English (Gnutzmann 2000; Lee 2012). People from all over the world speak English with their own typical pronunciation and norms. With typical characteristics, people can commonly identify the speaker's dialect origins. In international conferences, we can observe how delegates deliver speeches and talk to one another. They can negotiate meanings. The intelligibility is achieved because interlocutors share the norms embedded in their utterances.

The statistical dominance of non-native speakers of English, especially from the expanding circle gives them a central position in the shaping and developing English (Lee 2012). It makes English of the inner-circle countries may no longer be the ultimate goal for the majority of learners. The competence covers intercultural awareness, i.e. a conscious understanding of the role culturally-based forms, practices and frames of understanding can have in international communication, and the ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real communication as explained with number of features within three level of awareness: basic cultural awareness, advanced cultural awareness and intercultural awareness (Baker 2011, p. 66).

Level 1: basic cultural awareness

Awareness of:

1. culture as a set of behaviors, belief, and value;
2. the role culture and context play in any interpretation of meaning;
3. own culturally induced behavior, values, and beliefs and the ability to articulate it;
4. others' culturally induced behavior, values, and beliefs and the ability to compare this with own culturally indeed behavior, value, and beliefs;

Level 2: advanced cultural awareness

Awareness of:

5. the relative nature of cultural norms;
6. cultural understanding as provisional and open to revision;
7. multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural groupings;
8. individuals as members of many social groupings including cultural ones;
9. common ground between specific cultures as well as an awareness of possibilities for mismatch and miscommunication between specific cultures;

Level 3: intercultural awareness

Awareness of:

10. culturally based frames of reference, forms and communicative practices as being related both to specific cultures and also as emergent and hybrid in intercultural communication;
11. initial interaction in intercultural communication as possibly based on cultural stereotypes or generalization but an ability to move beyond those through;
12. a capacity to negotiate and mediate between different emergent socio-culturally grouped communication modes and frames of reference based on the above understanding of culture in intercultural communication.

It is obviously stated that intercultural awareness posited in Level 3 has three features. The intercultural competence deal with possessing knowledge of cultural references, especially those of various cultures: general culture, specific culture and individual behaviors. Put the conceptions into practice with 'tactical' skills, in certain context, speakers may initiate communication with other nonnative speaker of English and apply the knowledge of the

interlocutors' norms. If the generalization does not work, he/she can use other strategies to avoid the communication breakdown. Perception on equality of diverse norms is also the other aspect of the awareness. This attitude plays an important role. The speakers having this positive attitude towards typical norms embedded in utterances of others from different cultural backgrounds determine the communication success.

Further, Clouet (2008) cited in Lee (2012) develop definitions of intercultural competence by combining of social and communicative skills as follows: (1) empathy, (2) ability to deal with conflict, (3) ability to work collaboratively, (4) flexibility, (5) foreign language awareness, (6) awareness that culture causes different discussion styles, speech speeds, interpretation and thought patterns, (7) techniques for handling interactional difficulties, (8) reflection on one's own cultural background, (9) tolerance of ambiguity.

The teaching of English as a Global language in which all people over the world use English for all purposes; economic, education, and others should be evaluated in terms of goal formulations, teaching materials and techniques. The goal should enable the learners not only to master language regularities, but also negotiate meanings in intercultural communication contexts. Assuming that the speakers of English are not limited native speakers, the nonnative varieties are much more than the speakers of English in Inner Circle.

Teaching materials should cover international cultures considered as general culture. For instance, the teachers select materials from textbook discussing various cultures. Specific cultures are also needed to be taught to the learners. As stated previously that the number of speakers in expanding circle are developed, that, the teachers should know all cultures. The techniques are also very essential. Various ways are offered, for example, the learners are exposed by means of role-plays, simulations, and discussions. They can be facilitated to visit websites to find out some information on, for example, how people from different cultural backgrounds celebrate wedding parties. In small group they discuss, for instance, how the brides and bridegrooms dress, what rituals they have proceeded, how the guest congratulate them, and so forth.

## Conclusions

Cultural and intercultural awareness may not be neglected in teaching English to the learners of any level, since language are not divorced from cultures. In cultures there are norms, beliefs and values which contribute to meanings. Reality shows that English has become International language, as a lingua franca among nations, language of communication and technology (ICT), economy and academics. Having the awareness, speakers of English can interact and transact with other people all over the globe.

Teaching goals, materials, and techniques should be adapted in order to accommodate this new perspective. Enabling learners to possess communicative competence as a previous goal of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Indonesia is merely irrelevant to the current context. At the present time, the learners should be facilitated to have intercultural awareness for their future intercultural communications. They need English to communicate with speakers from inner-, outer-, and expanding circle countries. In order to be able to communicate with other people from other nations, learners need to be trained in such activities in which they can have knowledge of others' cultures, skill, and attitudes.

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