

PLACING LOCAL CULTURAL CONTENT INTO EFL TEACHING IN INDONESIA'S SCHOOLS

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Abstract

English as a foreign language teaching (EFLT) in Indonesia could not yet enable high school graduate communicate intelligibly. Placing local cultural content into curriculum English for Indonesia's schools shall improve EFLT for a better result, since it would raise the students cross cultural awareness. Local cultural content is the learners' background of cultural values that influence their "what to say and how to say" on communication as a whole. English language learners in Indonesia are taught by or with model teachers from its locality. Hence, it is un-avoidable for the class (both teachers and students) to refer back to their local culture and values in their efforts to develop their transitional English. While it is hard to deny that a mere English cultural content in the EFLT contributed a lot to learners' un-intelligible English and miss-communication, which may be caused by 'broken culture'. I am proposing that local culture become issues in the EFL teaching content, and it should be intertwined with English culture, to foster a better understanding. But, the class must remain EFLT's, not dangling to cultural study. In the end, students learning in EFLT classes will become aware that they are communicating in English language inter-culturally.

Keywords: *local cultural content, transitional English, intelligibly English, broken culture dangling*

A. INTRODUCTION

Richard Nordquist offered for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) definition in his website: About.com Guide as follows: A traditional term for the use or study of the English language by non-native speakers in countries where English is generally not a local medium of communication. EFL corresponds roughly to the Expanding Circle described by linguist Braj Kachru in "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle" (1985). Example and Observations: "ESL and EFL instructional approaches differ in significant ways. ESL is based on the premise that English is the language of the community and the school and that students have access to English models. EFL is usually learned in environments where the language of the community and the school is not English. EFL teachers have the difficult task of finding access to and providing English models for their students. As the number of ESL students has increased in schools across North America, more classrooms and school have become more like EFL than ESL environments." (Lee Gunderson, *ESL (ELL) Literacy Instruction: A Guidebook to Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. Routledge, 2009)

Although ESL and EFL are often used interchangeably, there are unique differences between the two. ESL countries are nations where the medium of instruction in education and government is in English, although English may not be the native language. "On the other hand, EFL countries do not use English as a medium of instruction but English is taught in schools. Malaysia was once considered an ESL country but now leans more towards EFL. "The distinction between second language and foreign language is not, however, a sharp one, and there are cases, like Indonesia, where classification is disputable. Moreover, there is a

considerable amount of variation in the roles played by second languages, for example in education, in the fields of discourse used, and in the giving of prestige or power. In India, the medium of instruction in schools was changed from English to the regional languages after Independence, and subsequently there has been a gradual process of Indianization of the universities, which at one time were all English-medium." (Charles Barber, *The English Language: A Historical Introduction*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000)

Although Charles Barber says that: the distinction between second language and foreign language is not, however, a sharp one and that there are cases, like Indonesia, where classification is disputable; but Christopher Fernandez indicates that; "The methods and approaches of teaching English as a second language and foreign language do differ greatly."

B. DISCUSSION

Culture Position in both ESL and EFL

It is believed that language denotes one's culture – "*Bahasa menunjukan bangsa.*" Whatever language you use to convey your speech will always disclose your nation, or culture of your origin; be it your native, second, foreign or one of whatever number of languages that you master. As in a case to a Minang language speaker, you can instantly tell whether he is a native Minang or a person who learned it as his 'second' language. His *what and how to say things* shows you this. President Barack Obama, *if can speak melodious Arabic*, in his visit to Egypt would not explain about the miracle of Spink and Pyramids to Egyptians. But, instead he would boast about Niagara Falls, Liberty Statue, and probably about US cities cleanliness. What would our students talk about if they visit America?

ESL teachers in Canada and in the US realize the importance of the learner's cultural background in learning (English) as shown in the discussion below. Another way to look at the idea of culture in ESL classrooms is as a means of providing opportunities for English language learners to share aspects of their own cultural backgrounds. "Getting to you know you" ESL lesson plans may offer an opportunity to share this information. Asking questions like, "Where are you from?" and "What do you do for fun?" can teach basic conversational skills while also opening a dialogue about students' backgrounds and experiences.

Comparing and contrasting is another way to recognize and respect ESL students' diverse backgrounds while presenting cultural information about the English-speaking world. For instance, during a lesson about the Super Bowl, the teacher could ask students to compare the event and the attention it gets in the U.S. to the way in which World Cup games are celebrated in their country of origin, Google: Aspects of Culture in ESL Classrooms
If Canadian and American give ESL learners chance to talk about their own native culture, why do not EFL classes in Indonesia do more of such things, since learners of EFL are expected to be able to present themselves, with their own native culture, in intelligible English to foreign people they shall communicate with?

Expressing delicate cultural contents of your (own) side in your native tongue is a challenging task. I believe doing it in a foreign language is far more difficult. So why do not you help your students in EFL classes to express their native cultural contents through the new foreign language (English).

It has long been declared that English language teaching in Indonesia is as a foreign language. Christopher Fernandez stated that; "The methods and approaches of teaching English as a second language and foreign language do differ greatly." While methods and approaches

applied in Indonesia's schools are of no different to those of ESL. Why? In my opinion, EFL teaching in Indonesian should be based on a study to decide for the most suitable frame of EFLT. Methods and approaches that are suitable in EFL countries, like India and Malaysia, may not be suitable for Indonesia. Due to cultural background differences and socio-geographical condition, EFL learners of different Indonesian sub-ethnic groups like: Minang, Malay, Dayak, Java, Bugis, Flores and Maluku must be better approached with their respective native values and backgrounds too.

A foreign language teacher shall have to have sufficient cultural content knowledge on both student's L1 (native language) and L2 (target language). Teacher's not knowing student's L1 (local culture content in their usage) may result in a conflict that causes misunderstanding. An idiomatic expression translation effort (by a student) may trigger a misunderstanding, like the following:

Mr Dellar : *How come you are so late to submit, Faisal?*

Faisal : *I have a problem Sir. I am not a pure student, Sir. I also look for money. I am busy outside Sir.*

To some native English teachers who do not know their students' local culture, it may take weeks before they can understand: ... *that as a student Faisal also has a side job, and is busy with it.* As an English teacher at SMP or SMA you have lots and lots of expressions like this to cope with. But, they do not worry you, since you know the cultural content of your students' side. You can stop your students from translating idiomatic expressions word per-word, and *funny expressions generated from inter-translating* can be kept into minimum.

English Language Teaching In Indonesia

First foreign language. "Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, used to emphasize the teaching of Dutch. The movement towards English as a foreign language began at independence, and English is now the main foreign language being learned in Indonesia. English is taught for eight or nine years from primary school (from Grade 4 or 5) through high school (Renandya, 2000). The main objective is to provide reading skills to enable Indonesians to read science-related materials in English."(Maria Lourdes S. Bautista and Andrew B. Gonzalez, "Southeast Asian Englishes." *The Handbook of World Englishes*, ed. by Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson. Blackwell, 2006)

English language teaching, as the first foreign language to learn, was declared in Indonesia in 1950s. Indonesia is grouped under the "Expanding Circle" meaning that speakers of English here (in Indonesia) are not developing norms of their own but rather dependent on existing norms, be they British or American Dardjowidjojo 1996 , in Sukamto, Katharina E. 2003 p.57.

Indonesia's choice of language norms to develop of either: British, America, or even Australian shall of course build a dominant influence on; teaching methods and approaches, teaching material and resources, and so is on how the language teaching progress is measured in Indonesia. As a result to this adopted norms people tend to compare Indonesian learners' English with the English language of those native lands; and that most of Indonesian learners' English are un-intelligible.

So, if English as a foreign language teaching is said to have been failed to enable high school graduate to communicate *intelligible English*, it must mean that: our students cannot understand those peoples' English, and those foreign peoples do not understand Indonesian students' English. Their English is not understandable.

Tom McArthur (2002) notices that English language is a correct choice of lingua franca for Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore despite the fact that Bahasa Indonesia and its variant Bahasa Malaysia are existing *limited lingua franca* for among the three nations. But English is the only known language for younger Singaporeans/Hongkong, now a part of the Peoples' Republic of China, is very serious in considering English as its lingua franca (Andy Kirkpatrick, 2007)

Teaching Methodology

Several English language teaching methods and approaches have been applied in Indonesia. They were: *Grammar Translation Method, Reading Method or Direct Method, Oral Approach**, *Audio-lingual Approach, Transformational Approach* and *Communicative Approach* (CA). Oral Approach text book, which were known as Salatiga Material were developed by some STC graduates of Jogjakarta and Bukittinggi. While CA was adopted in the 1994 National Curriculum, Dardjowidjojo 1996, in Sukamto, Katharina E. 2003 p.58.

The last (*Communicative Approach*) was developed in PKG (Pemantapan Kerja Guru from the middle of 1980s) era growing from what so called Eclectic Methods and or Transformational Approach and it is continuously on the stage until now. Although, CA has been on the stage more than two decades, its application is not of one same translation in practice. There is no single national interpretation or model of CA shared by teachers, throughout the nation. This is because there is no national English teaching board as to maintain and to police the national approach, like in the PKG era.

In the past, PKG with its *key teachers* and '*sanggars*' financially supported had regular meetings in '*sanggars*' with *English teachers. The activities, in sanggars, could help straighten their teaching methods, and teachers could develop teaching materials together.* The PKG's role ended in the middle of 1990s. *Sanggars* are now run by MGMP of either SMP or SMA at district (*kabupaten/kota*) level. Some *sanggars* (which get local government financial supports) work, while so many do not.

If we look at the number of hours a student spends at the junior high and senior high schools and the optional hours at the elementary school, we would expect that high school graduate would be able to use English fairly well. This is, far from the truth. With few exceptions, generally, a high school graduate is not able to communicate intelligibly in English. Those who are can be suspected of having taken private courses or come from certain family background Dardjowidjojo 2000.

Despite this not so conducive government guidance, a few schools of each district in West Sumatra are still managed to send their students to compete in NHSDC (National High School Debate Championship) tournament in the province level. Native speakers of Australian Volunteer Indonesia (AVI): Kate Hartig, Barbara Selvay, and John Duke were fascinated to see them debate. Credits must go to their teachers who trained them at their schools.

I guess it is about time that we must do a research to find out: why the result of English as a foreign language teaching (EFLT) has not been encouraging. Perhaps, we must reconsider the objective of the EFLT at our schools, and do a reformation on it.

New Curriculum

New 2013 National Curriculum has been officially launched to use for: SD on its first and fourth grade students, SMP, SMA and SMK for first year students, this July 2013, but The Ministry of Education decided to scope introduction to only 2% of the total national number of schools. In West Sumatra, there is no such trial school in: Pasaman, West Pasaman, Solok

Selatan, Dharmasraya, and Mentawai Islands districts. The new curriculum socialization stage has just begun, within the last three month.

The new curriculum stops offering English in primary school. In general, it has so much similarities with its predecessor, Curriculum 2006. The curriculum has already been enriched with “*Pendidikan Karakter*” (national character education). It has four *Kompetensi Intis* (KI), which are as follows:

1. Students religious values
2. Social and ethical values
3. Factual knowledge
4. Applicative skills related to the knowledge taught

The above KI shall have to be adhered into each basic competence, or KD. All the four KI(s) should be *elaborated* into each KD in the syllabus and lesson plans (RPPs) prepared by teachers for classroom teaching.

Teaching approach suggested, for all subject matters in National Curriculum 2013, is *Scientific Approach*, where students are treated like learners who have heads with previous knowledge. This is of a no deviation to English language approach, CA. So, you who have been doing teaching CA ways do not need to worry with your approach.

Teacher’s level of language mastery and their knowledge on methodologies and approaches are important indeed for curriculum implementation. In the past, ‘failures’ in the teaching of English did not lie so much on the above academic obstacle. Other problems that were not of less significant were of non-academic ones. These include, among other things, (a) classroom size and set up, (b) students’ motivation, (c) teachers’ motivation and income, (d) availability of textbooks, and (c) supporting facilities: Dardjowidjojo 2002.

As for teaching materials, teachers must use government textbook as the main source, although using other learning sources, for enrichment and expansion is not prohibited. There are only three (3) Curriculum 2013 textbooks available at the moment: Indonesian, Mathematics, and History books. *English textbooks* are still on preparation. Demands to include local cultural contents into textbooks is becoming stronger and urgent as stated clearly on the new national curriculum, in *core competencies* (KI): 1 and 2, above. But there is no indication that *Kemendiknas* consider this important. So before the new curriculum with its new textbooks knocks on your school door, business can just go as usual. Do not worry. Let curriculum planners, in Jakarta, do their job.

Indonesian Students’ Need for English

Although of a very (heterogeneous) cultural backgrounds, Indonesian students of Sabang to Merauke have a similar needs for English language skills. After graduating from senior high schools those who do not continue to tertiary education or universities will look for jobs to learn earning lives. ‘Global village’ economy trends may attract (or trap) more and more youngsters in. English language skill is of course becoming a more prioritized language among its economy citizens, and those who can communicate effectively, in the language, will be benefitted. Those who continue their tertiary education, with intelligible English, will be benefitted too, since English is the world’s language of sciences.

If you believe in the culture’s role in EFL teaching, I guess you would take Indonesian student different cultural background into a consideration to speed up learning. They must be better approached with their respective native values and backgrounds, when taught English.

I guess, although they have similar needs for English language, when teaching them they should be better *instructed* in consideration as to include their local cultural content on their way to reach inter-cultural English for lingua franca.

Placing More Local Cultural Content into EFL Teaching in Indonesia's School

What I am trying to propose now is that: to include *cultural content** in the EFLT at our schools. Most students' English textbooks are dominated with foreign culture. So far we spent most of our time teaching our students as if we wanted them to '*become*' English persons. We teach them all about foreign culture and ethics. But, we do not teach them to present themselves, with their own culture, in correct English language. That is probably why sometimes, some foreigners do not understand some of our peers' English. And, some of us cannot understand most native speakers' English. Especially if the native speakers have no foreign culture awareness.

It is high time that our students be made aware of multi-cultural communication. When they speak English, there could be two or more cultural contents are present, like: English, Minang and other cultures. They could be overwhelmed with more than two sets of different cultural contents when speaking in English as a lingua franca to Vietnamese and Burmese at a time. In order to be able to cope with this challenging situation, I believe that English teachers and our students should be supplied with textbooks which can give them enough information on these problematic issues. At least, our teachers and students should have a better grip on expressing their local cultural content in intelligible English. Otherwise, their (foreign) language is never going to be a shared language among them, because they cannot talk about their own local culture.

Our past, long teaching experience told us that a mere English cultural content in the EFLT had contributed a lot to learners' un-intelligible English and miss-communication, which was caused by 'broken culture'. Indonesia has put an enormous amount of her money 'investing' for the teaching of English as a foreign language. Although believed to have brought so little benefits, and is far from expectations, investment should go on rather than reduced or stopped all together. Something should be done as to improve EFLT. It should undergo a total surgical review. What should have been done would have to be done. What was done wrong should be made right.

Local culture content should be intertwined with English culture, to foster a better understanding. But, the class must remain EFLT's, not dangling to a kind of cultural study. So far we have been teaching EFL focusing on, or through, English cultural values that are within its native speakers range only. Probably, we are doing this so, to make students *think in English*. So, students are positioned as perceptive learners. There is no room for them as to also talk of their own culture scope. If they try, they tend to produce un-intelligible English that may be caused by *broken culture*, for they *think in Indonesia* and translate it into 'English'. I guess there should be a *cultural bridge* to help students express *their local cultural what and how to say in English language*.

Without the above approach, teachers often find it difficult to make correction on students' language, although knowing what student wants to say, because teacher and student think in the same local language. Besides, local teacher and their students can do side talks in Bahasa Indonesia, which most native teachers of English cannot do. Quite often both students and teachers do not smell anything queer with *their English*, but more learned teachers do. A

native ESL teacher, in Indonesia, may find it difficult to quickly draw the meaning of the following student's statement:

I don't trust him father, he is big trousers, he speaks only. Enemy comes he is afraid

How to place culture content into a new curriculum

It is more to the design of the teaching material rather than pushing a new tangible aspect of a curriculum. Foreign language teacher most challenging task is to prepare for teaching material like, *transactional English* to use with foreign: religion heads, lecturers, doctors, police, and senior persons in social gatherings.

The following list of (1) *words and saying in Minangkabau society* should be taught or re-taught if (2) *the words were originally taken from English*. The first is important to teach because the Minangkabau (or Indonesian) words have no equivalent in English, while the second kind of words (which were originally English) have endured shifting in either or both *meaning* and *pronunciation*.

Lets us begin with investigating learners' local *peculiar* culture content that they need to express in correct English. The following are a few examples of cultural words that students may often asked

<p>Religion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aurat • nikah • muhrim • solat • sahur • berbuka (puasa) • sedekah • fitrah • hari raya • salawat • isra' mi'raj • ta'ziah • talak (perkawinan) • rujuk (perkawinan) • mahar (perkawinan) <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rapor • naik kelas • tinggal kelas • wali kelas • kantin jujur • sarjana • magister (S2) • sarjana tiga (S3) <p>Technical Terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'unduh' (computing) 	<p>Socio-cultural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • salam hormat • camat • kecamatan • penghulu (adat) • bundo kanduang • ninik mamak • cerdas pandai • alim ulama • meminang (perkawinan) • memanjatkan (doa) • puji-sukur • merantau • perantau • 'gadang sarawa' • 'dicabuik indak mati, diasak indak layua' → teguh • 'tagak maninjau jarak, duduak marawik ranjau' → efisien • Nilai-nilai: kebangsaan, kejujuran, tenggang raso, rasa ingin tahu, persatuan, setia kawan, dan rendah hati dll. <p>Arts & Sports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'saluang' • puput • rebana
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘shut-down’ (computing) • ‘paste’ (computing) • blujin (auto-mobile) • serfis (auto-mobile) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘tansa’ • ‘talempong’ • macam-macam silat (starlak, kumango) • ‘sajamang’
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Both teacher and student should be made aware of the most acceptable equivalent intercultural expression of *what and how to say in their local culture* in English language to reduce miscommunication. They must agree on one same English (*translation*) expression on each of the above examples. And it is not easy to do this without one common textbook to refer to. Please check the expressions below:

...that Barbara should cover up to meet with Amir’s uncle, prior to their cross cultural marriage which is due next month.

... that Farida, Amri’s wife, must not be seated close to Amir because they are in-laws.

Most native speakers of English would not understand the above statements at their first read or hear. It is our students duty to explain what and how to say that we have in Minangkabau culture.

C. CONCLUSION

It is the fittest momentum to place student local culture content into the new English language curriculum textbooks now. English teaching linguists, local culture scholars and English language teaching practitioners throughout the nation must now sit together to design for *better textbooks with local cultural contents* for students and teachers. The textbook should contain student’s re-actualized religion and social local values written in intelligible English language that are intertwined with English (international) values. In that way, Minangkabau students will have different textbooks from those of Flores island. Balinese students will learn English from a different textbook to those of North Sulawesi, and Javanese students will hold different textbooks from students of Aceh. If their re-actualized religion and social local values are written in an intelligible English language textbook, the learners will find it easier to talk, participating in the class. The textbook will also teach them *what and how to say* internationally.

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