INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILL

Irwandi
Bukittinggi State Islamic Institute (IAIN of Bukittinggi)
Sumatera Utara
irwandinashir@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

This paper discusses the strategy of integrating the language learners' intercultural communication competence in teaching oral communication skill. The idea emerges from the concept that English teaching and learning acquires a need to understand intercultural communication competence. An English language class that just focuses on grammar, syntax, phonetics, and some social conventions associated with the target language cannot contribute significantly into the learners' insight on how people whose different culture communicate. Moreover, intercultural communication is more complex than communication between persons of the same culture. Thus, the practitioners of English language teaching need to know how to integrate the knowledge of intercultural communication in English language classes. However, there is no universally accepted strategy that can be applied by the instructors on how to integrate intercultural communication competence into the lessons at the classroom. This paper specifically proposes the strategy of integrating intercultural communicative competence in teaching English speaking skill. The strategy mostly encompasses activating learners' cultural awareness, considering context, understanding obstacles to intercultural communication, understanding verbal and nonverbal issues, and designing classroom tasks for the intercultural competence. By including such strategy, the learners are guided not only in more successful communication, but also in constructing meaningful relationship with the target language speakers.

Keywords: intercultural communication, cultural awareness, high-and low-context cultures, cultural obstacles

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a widely known fact that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced to the teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. The contemporary modelsof communicative competence indicate that the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness is integrated to learning a language (Bachman 1990; Council of Europe, 2001). In other words, to learn a language well usually requires knowing something about the culture of that language. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often becomes the source of serious miscommunication and misunderstanding.

The interconnection of language and culture in the foreign language classroom has become central discussion among the scholars (Liddicoat, 2002). This idea is triggered by the changing global environment that also brings the increasing cultural diversity in many contexts. Thus, there has been a growing recognition for the need for an intercultural competence in foreign language education.

Intercultural communicative competence in English Language Teaching and Learning (ELTL) includes learners' ability to understand the language and behavior of the target community, and explain it to members their own community and vice versa. In this case, the learners possess both communicative competence in that language as well as particular skills, attitudes,values and knowledge about a culture. When language skills and intercultural competency are linked in a language classroom, learners can be optimally prepared for participation in a global world. This paper proposes the idea on strategy of integrating intercultural communication competence inteaching oral communication skill. The strategy contains fivestages, which are: activating learners' cultural awareness, considering context, understanding obstacles to intercultural communication, understanding verbal and nonverbal issues, and designing classroom tasks for the intercultural

competence. By employing these, it is hoped that learners canimprove their intercultural communicative competence during learning oral communication skill.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

2.1 TheConcept of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is a communication which occurs between people from different national cultures (Gudykunst,2002:179). Intercultural communication comes primarily out of an interpersonal orientation and addresses the mutual negotiation of social reality among participants. Intercultural communication refers to the verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. This is used sometimes to describe a single person trying to interact in a foreign environment but more often, it is a two-way street, where people from both cultures try to improve their communication.

Nowadays, intercultural communication comes out of a mass media and political orientation; it addressesinformation flow between and among nations and other large groups of people. While these areas are constantly inthe news and represent the more visible issues confronting us, it is needed to recognize that these concerns subsume themore personal aspects of interpersonal communications (Hill, 2009).

The context of intercultural communication varies depending on the participants in conversation, their relationships and their membership in particular cultural groups. Intercultural communication therefore focuses on cultural identity–the self-concepts of individuals as having certain cultural traits (e.g.,a set of beliefs about the world, values, thought patterns) that characterize the mas members of a national culturevis-a-vis members of other national cultures. It is assumed that participants in intercultural communication view the similarities and differences they see in one another are attributed to their membership in their national culture. Yet people simultaneously participate in many groups based not only on our nationality, but also gender, age, profession, family background and so forth. People should not, therefore, presuppose that it is always cultural identity derived from membership in a national culture that predominates in intercultural communication, because the enactment of a particular identity by participants in communication depends on their specific relationships in the situation. It could be their personal identity characterized by individual traits they share or social identity derived from their membership in the same profession that can guide their interaction in a given situation (Janik, Z, 2014).

In order to develop their communicative competence, English language learners need to recognize the rich and diversified context to intercultural communication. Moreover, since the process of communication is the process of complete interaction, the learners must have awareness that it's not an easy thing to fully communicate because of different histories, cultures, social habits in different peoples (Samovar, 2001).

a. The Concept of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication is a transactional and symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different culture (Novinger, 2001). The ultimate terminal of intercultural communication competence is the preparation of learners to interact appropriately and effectively with those from other cultural backgrounds. Consequently, culture is often considered as the core concept in intercultural communication. Nieto (1999:48) proposes definition of culture as the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people. An additional complicated dimension of intercultural communication competence relates to the goal of those who are preparing individuals for intercultural relationships as numerous contexts and multiple models of intercultural competence exist that include international business, study-abroad, international schools, medical careers, living abroad, and education.

Finally, intercultural communication competence is needed as a result of technological imperative. Technology has increased the frequency with which many people encounter multilingual situations and so must decide which language will be used and how to create a cross-cultural understanding with the target language speakers.

Intercultural communication competence occurs when people of different cultural background interact, but this definition seems simplistic and redundant. To understand properly the intercultural communication, it is necessary to describe four building blocks of intercultural communication, which are: culture, communication, context, and power (Martin and Thomas, 2008:28). Culture can be viewed as learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviors, shared by a group of people that is also dynamic and heterogeneous. Culture is communication and communication is culture (Novinger, 2001:14).

In a living and dynamic circle, culture governs communication and communication creates, reinforces, and re-creates culture. Culture also provides identity for humans. It is the total communication frame-work for words, actions, body language, emblems (gestures), intonation, facial expressions, for the way one handles time, space, and materials, and for the way one works, makes love, plays, and so on. All these things become complete communication systems. Communication is a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated. In addition, communication is dynamic, may be unintentional, and is receiver-oriented (Martin and Thomas, 2008:58). The relationship between culture and communication is complex since culture influences communication and communication reinforces culture, and communication is a way of resisting the dominant culture. The context- the physical and social setting in which communication occurs or the larger political, societal, and historical environment- affects that communication. Then, power plays an enormous role in intercultural communication interactions. Power relationships are determined mostly by social institutions and roles which influence communication.

Byram (1997) depicts someone who gains skills in intercultural communicative competence as an individual who is successful in building relationships while speaking the foreign language of the other participants; negotiating how to effectively communicate so that both individuals' communicative needs are addressed; mediating conversations between those of diverse cultural backgrounds; and continuing to acquire communicative skills in foreign languages not yet studied. This final characteristic stresses that when an effective intercultural communicator learns to interact with those from specific culture, a foundation of language and culture learning has been built, and the individual is more likely to continue to gather linguistic information from other cultures in order to broaden his/her spectrum of intercultural encounters.

In the context of English language teaching, the learners are guided through the process of acquiring competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using English as a foreign language. The English teachers must lead learners through activities in which attitudes about the other cultures with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with otherness in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity (Byram, 1997). As learners continue to engage in analysis of other cultures, certain knowledge must be acquired.

It is imperative that English language teachers allow time to explore the national identity of the home culture and the target culture in relation to history, geography, and social institutions. Once learners have taken time to discover the similarities and differences between their culture and that of the target culture, the teacher must craft activities that will prepare learners to build relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and languages (Byram, 1997). Then, English language learners must be facilitated the time and the space to develop skills in interpreting and relating the meaning among different cultures. When learners begin to identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to cross-cultural situations, they become able to understand and then explain the origins of conflict and mediate situations appropriately in order to avoid misinterpretations (Byram, 1997).

Finally, skills in the discovery and interaction allow intercultural speakers to identify similarities and differences between home cultures and foreign cultures resulting in successful communication and the establishment of meaningful relationship (Byram, 1997). A successful intercultural speaker seeks out opportunities to meet individuals from diverse cultures in order to share information through communication in a foreign language.

Moreover, it is a must for English teachers to reconsider methods for teaching language and culture in the classroom if the goal is to create true speakers who have true intercultural competence in using English. Thus, the focus of teaching must shift from preparing learners to communicate accurately in order to survive a foreign culture to communicate openly in order to construct relationships so that they can thrive in a foreign culture. When the teaching of intercultural communicative competence includes models of reciprocal relationships in which learners play the role of a "social actor", learners experience the mutual discovery of another language and culture, and language classrooms become places where learners and teachers consider questions of values and morals.

b. Dimensions of Intercultural
Communication Competence

Intercultural communicative competence(ICC) has defined by many researchers in a variety of ways. It has been investigated under different labels, such as cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural understanding, intercultural effectiveness, cross-cultural awareness. According to Chen (2010) that intercultural communication competence is defined asthe ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment.

ICC sets the path towards effective intercultural communication by emphasizing the concept of otherness and appreciation of differences:the ability to interact with others, to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives should help us recognize and understand others and their meanings (Byram & Fleming, 1998: 5). Recognition of other realities, rather than the assumption that people are all the same, coupled with knowledge of multiple cultures and identities will enhance each person's capacity to discover and relate to new people from other context (Byram & Fleming, 1998:12).

By examining the many dimensions of intercultural communication competence proposed by intercultural communicational scholars, it is found that most of the dimensions more or less overlap. Essentially, The dimensions ofintercultural communication competence can be defined as four categories: (a) Personal Attributes, (b)Communication Skills, (c) Psychological Adaptation, and (d) Cultural Awareness. Comparing dimensions ofcommunicationcompetence with those of intercultural communication competence, it can be seen that PersonalAttributes indicate the ability to be relaxed in social interaction and the ability to self-disclosure or be open withothers; communicationskills mean the ability to send and receive messages and the ability to demonstrate socialskills.

Cultural Awareness implies the understanding of environmental varieties. Psychological Adaptation focuseson the ability to handle problems such as frustration, stress, alienation and ambiguity which are caused by culturaldifferences. Scholars have consistently suggested that only through intercultural communication competence canpeople from different cultures effectively communicate with each other (Chen, 2010). This definition shows thatcompetent persons must not only know how to interact effectively and appropriately with people and environment,but also know how to fulfill their own communication goals by respecting and affirming the multi-level culturalidentities(Chen, 2010).

3. DISCUSSION

Some stages can be considered in integrating intercultural communication in teaching oral communication skill: understanding the context, understanding obstacles to cultural communication, and designing tasks for intercultural communication.

(1) Understanding the Context

Context often plays a significant role in determining how people communicate, and the same context may call for different behavior in different culture. Context may consist of the physical, social, political, and historical structures in which the communication occurs (Martin and Thomas, 2008:47).

Communication styles that relatively focus more on words to communicate and less on behavior-the context in which the words are used-are called as *low-context*. On the contrary, *high-context* cultures rely relatively more on nonverbal context or behaviors than they rely on abstracts, verbal symbols of meaning.

Novinger (200:6-7) explains that a high-context message is one in which more of the information is contained in the physical context or internalized in the person receiving it, and less in the coded, explicit, transmitted verbal part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite in which it focuses on vesting more of the information in the explicit verbal code. Thus, a low-context person consciously focuses on words to communicate, but a high-context person is acculturated from birth to send and receive a large proportion of message through behavioral context, both consciously and unconsciously. When this high-context person receives a verbal message from a low-context person, misunderstanding is necessarily created when the high-context person erroneously attributes meaning to nonverbal context when such meaning is not intended. This same high-context person will then, in turn, communicate much by context along with a verbal message. The low-context person may not apprehend, much less understand, much of the contextual nonverbal message that is being expressed. The low context person relies primarily on words themselves for meaning when, in fact, the context probably contains the real message.

The distinction between high- and low-context cultures means that context is meaningless in low-context cultures. It means that culture dictates a large variation in degree of importance of the context to communicate (Novinger, 2001).

(2) Understanding Obstacles to Intercultural Communication

There are two main obstacles that may occur in intercultural communication, namely: obstacles of perception, and obstacles of process. Obstacles of process contain verbal processes, and obstacles in nonverbal processes. Perception is the internal process by which people select, evaluate, and organize the stimuli of the outside world (Novinger, 2001:26). From the time people are born, they learn their perceptions and the resulting behavior from their cultural experiences. Perception filters behavior and interaction-which are essential components of communication. There are four aspects relating to personal perceptions within a cultural framework: uncertainty, attitude, ethnocentrism, and adaptability. A primary factor affecting intercultural communication is uncertainty. Since people are conditioned to conform and expect others to conform to the norms of their own culture, a person's deviation from the rules which have been trained to comply makes them uncertain and uncomfortable. Attitude is psychological state that influences overt behavior and distort perception. It causes interpretation of events in predisposed ways. Ethnocentrism refers to perceptions which are learned through acculturation. Adaptability is a person's capability to alter the structure and attributes of his/her psychic system to meet the demands of the environment and to suspend or modify his/her cultural ways to manage creatively the dynamics of cultural difference.

The obstacles in verbal process relate to understanding certain elements which affect language competency. The elements encompass accent, cadence, connotation, context, idiom, polite usage, silence, and style. In the case of accent, the more closely a non-native speaker emulates the native accent and pronunciation of the target language, the better the non-native speaker will be able to communicate in that language. Cadence refers to rhythm which can be found in every language. Cadence is necessary to achieve a native accent. The term of connotation refers to the connotative meaning of a symbol which arises out of one's experience in the context of culture. In addition, nonverbal behavioral context affects, amplifies, explains, and supplements verbal language behavior.

Besides, idioms, jargon, figurative expressions, exaggeration can also cause misunderstanding. Polite language usage is also required in a target language. Meanwhile, silence is viewed by some cultures as an important form of speech rhetoric. A silence gap in speaking is used differently by different cultures. Silence can also be considered nonverbal behavior. In case of style, it is understood that different styles of expression are cultivated and appreciated in different language. Finally, the obstacles in nonverbal process relate to the nonverbal behavior through which a person communicates. The behavior in this sense includes gestures, facial expressions, to one of voice, dress, and body language.

(3) Designing Task for Intercultural Communication Competence

There are certain components that can be modified in designing task for intercultural communication competence in the classroom. The components encompass defining the objective, providing input, proving learning activities, defining learner's role, defining teacher's role, and providing setting. The objective refers to the pedagogical purpose of the task.

Nunan (in Corbet, 2003:41-42) proposes some specific goals (objectives) which might be used for intercultural tasks: to investigate how everyday conversation maintains the solidarity of social groups; to investigate how the individual's status in a group is negotiated through casual conversation; to observe the different roles played by men and women in conversation in the target culture. Input refers to the stimulus provided by the teacher for the learning to occur. The input may be a written or spoken text for discussion, or a visual image for interpretation and evaluation, or media text for analysis (Corbet, 2003:42). Not all input in the speaking classroom needs to be authentic. The input can be constructed by the teacher, such as setting outlines for conducting and reporting on an interview, a proposition for debate, and etc.

The learning activities refer to a full range of communicative activities which are used to serve the objective of an intercultural task. Learners may collect and share information through class presentation or group work. They may discuss their different observation and findings. After observing cultural behaviors, they may be asked to reconstruct that behavior in role plays or simulations.

The learner's role is regulated according to the kinds of learner's responsibility in the activity of collection, organization, evaluation, reporting, and reconstructing of materials exemplifying cultural behavior. In the early stages of a course, the learners are needed a support for the activities. In this case, the teacher needs to provide guidelines, models if needed, and lead the learners through speaking task. Later, it is hoped that learners have good self-confidence and active contribution to the construction and implementation of intercultural tasks.

The teacher's role relates to how the teacher provide materials for the task, to suggest and show how they may be used to increase intercultural competence, to provide models of evaluation, and to suggest language that might be used to explore or reconstruct cultural behavior. Intercultural tasks also allow

for a range of setting: from individual work, pair work, and group work to whole-class activities.

4. CONCLUSION

It is important to integrate intercultural communication competencies in the activity of teaching and learning oral communication skill for preparing learners becoming success in a globally interconnected world. When intercultural communication competence is an integral part of speaking classroom, leaners have knowledge and experience on how to use the target language to create relationship and understanding with members of other cultures. The strategy of integrating intercultural communication competence presented in this paper represents a variety of perspectives to teaching intercultural competence in foreign languages classroom. By including such strategy in English speaking classroom, the learners are guided to see how their attitudes, knowledge, and language skills can affect their intercultural experiences. As a result, learners will achieve an understanding not only in more successful communication, but also in constructing meaningful relationship with the target language speakers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bachman, L. F. 1990. *Fundamental Considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Byram, M. 1997. *Teaching and Assessing InterculturalCommunicative Competence*. Clevedon,UK: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Flamming, M (Eds). 1998. *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches through Drama and Ethnography*. Cambridge: Cup.

Corbet, Jhon. 2003. *An Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching*. Clevadon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf.

Chen, Guoming. 2010. *Foundations of Intercultural Communication Competence.* Hong Kong: China Review Academic Publisher Limeted.

Gudykunst, W.B., and Moody, B (Eds). 2002. *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication.* 2nd Edition. London: Sage Publication.

Hill, L. Brooks. 2009. "The Future of Cross Culture Communication: Perspectives from 20 Years of the IAICS." *Intercultural Communication Research.* Vol.1, 83-108.

Janik, Z. 2014. *Self-Concepts and Views of Others in Intercultural Communication.* Online Presentation. 12th International Cultural Studies Conference. Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 30-11-2014. Available online at: https://is.muni.cz/auth/publication/1204088.

Liddicoat, A.J. & Scarino, A. 2013. *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*: Malden, M.A: Wiley-*Blackwell*.

Martin, Judith and Thomas Nakayama. 2008. *Experiencing Intercultural Communication: An Introduction.* Boston: Arizona State University.

Nieto, S.1999. *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities: Multicultral Education Series.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Novinger, Tracy. 2001. *Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide.* USA: University of Texas Press, Austin.

Samorar, L.A., et al. 2001. *Communication between Cultures.* Beijing: Foreign Language Education and Research Press.