INTEGRATING SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT INTO THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of teaching and learning activities of English in Indonesia is that the students can comprehend and apply the language communicatively in their daily activities. Then success of teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language needs understanding of four language communicative competence. Since socio-cultural competence is one of the competencies, the teacher should integrate it in their teaching and learning process. Because it cannot be denied that language itself is part of socio-cultural competence. This writing is about how to integrate socio-cultural context in language teaching and learning process for the students. The study is considered important, because the students are assumed to be successful if they understand about socio-cultural context in the practice of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, context, competence, teaching and learning, English.

A. Introduction

English is an international language and a foreign language in Indonesia. It is used as the medium of communication and information in science, technology, culture and some others in the world. Since English is the first foreign language in Indonesia, it is taught as a compulsory subject to the students from secondary level of education up to university one. Even it has been taught as a local content subject for the students at elementary schools. Thus, nowadays, English is not a new subject anymore in Indonesia. Moreover, by realizing the importance of English, it is hoped that the students who study English will not feel scared and frightened to study English and feel it as a must for them to master it for their future.

Language is part of culture and it is used by people in society. It cannot be denied that in teaching and learning process of language, the language teachers have to consider about sociocultural context in their teaching and learning process. It is in accordance with the aim of language teaching as mentioned before, that is, to prepare the learners to perform a specific set of roles in a new language in their society and in
their new culture. There are some competencies that should be known by the language
users (students) as called as communicative competence of language. The teachers in
their language teaching have to prepare or teach the student about all competencies
since language is all about culture, society, context and some others.

In relation to this, the linguists study the relations between language forms and
social context to understand how the individual choice of language enables him to
perform his social functions. The socio-cultural perspective on second language
learning, highlights that all learning, including language learning, is based on social
interaction with more proficient others, on an interpersonal and intrapersonal plane. This
paper is about integrating socio-cultural context into foreign language teaching.

B. Discussion

As has been mentioned before that the aim of teaching foreign language is to
make the students able to use it communicatively. In order to be communicative, the
language users have to know about the language communicative competence as
Savignon (2001), Halliday (1978), and Hymes (1972). It is stated that there are four
language competencies in this case (it is called Communicative Language Teaching
(CLT)): grammatical or linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic
competence and sociolinguistic competence.

Linguistic or Grammatical Competence is the ability to use the forms of the
language (sounds, words, and sentence structure). Grammatical competence is the
primary focus of study in most academic language courses. Most scholars agree that
there is some kind of fundamental difference between being able to use the forms of the
language and being able to talk about the forms of the language: the relationship
between those two kinds of knowledge is a controversial topic.

Discourse Competence, is the ability to understand and create forms of the
language that are longer than sentences, such as stories, conversations, or business
letters. Discourse competence includes understanding how particular instances of
language use are internally constructed. Discourse competence also includes
understanding how texts relate to the context or situation in which they are used.
Strategic Competence is the ability to compensate for lack of ability in any of the other areas. What do you do when you don't know a word that you need? How do you manage a social situation when you aren't quite sure about the rules of etiquette? In both cases, you rely on your strategic competence to help you communicate. Everyone has some degree of strategic competence in any language. If you are hungry, but cannot speak the language, you can probably still make your need known through gesture and facial expression because hunger is a universal fact of human life. Language learners who really need to communicate in their adopted language tend to develop a number of strategies for making themselves clear in spite of their incomplete knowledge.

Sociolinguistic Competence or Socio-cultural Competence is the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. Sociolinguistic competence overlaps significantly with discourse competence because it has to do with expressing, interpreting and negotiating meaning according to culturally-derived norms and expectations. Sociolinguistic competence is most obvious to us when the conventions governing language use are somehow violated, as for example when a child innocently uses a "bad" word or when the expectations present in one culture are unsuccessfully translated for another. It is our sociolinguistic competence that allows us to be polite according to the situation we are in and to be able to infer the intentions of others. In our everyday life we vary the kind of language we use according to levels of formality and familiarity.

If the teacher talks about communicative competence, it means that he or she may use communicative approach. The communicative approach does a lot to expand on the goal of creating communicative competence compared to earlier methods that professed the same objective. Teaching students how to use the language is considered to be at least as important as learning the language itself. Brown (1994:77) describes the "march"towards CLT:

Many educators and professionals argue that it is not feasible to teach language without teaching culture (Neff; 2013). Then, the role of the language teacher has been described as that of a “professional mediator between foreign languages and culture” (Byram and Risager 1999, 58). Vernier et al. (2008, 268) consider the teaching of culture as a fifth skill for language learners that “enhances students’ overall learning
experience.” Kramsch (1993: 1) argues that the role of culture in language teaching is even more central, calling it not just the fifth skill, but rather something that is “always in the background, right from day one.” It means that teaching English by integrating socio-cultural context is fundamental in the teaching and learning process.

In reality or actual use of language, we can get the meaning of the language not only by its linguistic forms but also others such as culture and social context. It is language in its cultural context that creates meaning; creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework. In language learning classrooms, teachers need to prepare their students with the knowledge of culture and its social context. It affects the understanding the language communicated. This context is about the socio-cultural context of source language the target language.

Talking about context, it is about the situation, place where the language is used. Because language is part of culture, it is used in society, so in teaching the language, the teacher has to prepare his or her students with the understanding about culture and the society in general. Integrating socio-cultural language learning and teaching is how to develop learners an understanding of their own languages and cultures in relation to situation or context of language and culture. Learners in their daily practice of language develop a knowledge towards language and culture as understandings of the variable ways in which language and culture exist.

As the development of teaching foreign language, it is considered that culture plays the important part in teaching foreign language. Integrating the sense of socioculture into the classroom becomes one of suitable ways in teaching foreign language since the language being taught is relatively different from the native language used by students. Canale and Swain (1980) argue that the appearance of communicative approach in second or foreign language education brings culture as an inseparable part of language (Canale and Swain, 1980). Hence, it is suggested that the teachers use or integrate the cultural sense in appropriate context in the classroom to the students. In relation to this Spradley (1980) states that, “cultures contains of three essential part of human experience: what people do (cultural behavior), what people know (cultural knowledge), and what things people make and use (cultural artifacts)”. It means that it is better tha the teacher may use or integrate the socio-cultural context in their foreign
language teaching in order that the practice of language can be done appropriately suitable with the culture and context of society.

Teaching Foreign Language in Socio-cultural Context

As mentioned before that language, culture and society cannot be separated each other. They are both important components in teaching foreign language and the knowledge of them help the students to understand the language as the whole part. Culture refers to how people exist, think, feel, and relate with others, culture belongs to several components including symbols and signs, language, values and meanings, beliefs, norms, rituals, and material objects and that all aspects of life including environment, daily life, hope and fear, and culture should be included in the process of teaching and learning.

Language and culture cannot be separated each other. So, teaching English as a foreign language should integrate the context of socio-culture. The teachers have to get students to be in touch with foreign cultures that is meant the culture of the target language used together with the understanding of the native culture or their own culture of the language used. It means that the success of the students in learning foreign language does not only depend on the students’ knowledge toward the target culture, but also to their own culture. The understanding of both socio-cultural contexts is integrated in the teaching and learning process of the four language skills.

As has been mentioned before, a language learning occurs in social context, so the involvement of social element, such as interaction among language learners, is inevitable during the process. Brown (2000) asserts that social context is used to convey message to others in order to speed up the learning process. Then, cultural integration into the language learning is stressed by many theorists. Moreover, language and culture are regarded as two inseparably interrelated parts; a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing significance of either language or culture. It means that language should be taught together with the understanding of the culture of the target language and one own culture. As language and culture are inseparable, it can be assumed that language learning is culture learning and accordingly language teaching is cultural teaching and they should be taught in its social context. It means that socio-cultural context is the necessity for the language learners to cope with culturally related communication problems they might encounter when learning and mastering the target
language. In teaching and learning process, there should be integration of socio-cultural context in the foreign language teaching.

C. Conclusion

Based on the description before, it is concluded that in order to be successful in teaching English as a foreign language, the students are able to use the language appropriately, integrating the socio-culture in the process of teaching and learning English as foreign language is a must, because it is the fact that culture and social context cannot be separated and they should be considered in the language teaching process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


