K CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE IN LEARNING ENGLISH: A SIGNIFICANT GAP ELT IN EAST JAVA

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Abstract
Language is a part of culture, and plays a very important role in the development of the culture. Some sociologists consider it as the keystone of culture. They believe, without language, culture would not be available. At the same time, language is influenced and shaped by culture, it reflects culture. Therefore, culture plays a very important part in language teaching, which is widely acknowledged by English teaching experts. This study delineates the relationship between culture and language. As a result, the gap of cultural knowledge is one of the most important barriers in English teaching and study. Among the students, lacking of cultural background knowledge can, to a great extent, hold up the improvement of English teaching and become a noticeable problem. At present, the objective of English teaching has broken free from the traditional listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the demand for cultural background knowledge in language learning has been gradually concerned. Presentation of history of the country which has the target language, cultural background knowledge and customs are the proposed solution to the problem. This paper mainly discusses how to present cultural background knowledge and expose learners to it in the need of English teaching at rural schools in east java so as to solve the problems caused by cultural differences, help learners grasp the nub of the language and develop their English ability.

Keywords: cultural knowledge, learning English, rural schools

Introduction
The linguist Robert Lado defines the goal of learning a foreign language as “the ability to use it, understanding its meanings and connotations in terms of the target language and culture, and the ability to understand the speech and writing of natives of the target culture in terms of their great ideas and achievement” (Lado, 1964: 25) Therefore, the English teaching inevitably involves the culture teaching of target language. With Indonesia’s open-up policy and entry in WTO, G-20, ACFTA, and MEA how to lay a solid foundation for cultivating learners becomes an important objective in teaching English as a foreign language. In traditional teaching, though students master the pronunciation, grammar, vocabularies and a lot of skills about listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, they still cannot be said to fully understand and master English. English, as a foreign language, is the unity of the language itself and culture. One purpose of English teaching is to develop learners’ awareness of cultural differences reflected in languages. The teacher must help learners to realize that thoughts and views of different nationalities and different types of societies about nature and human society are quite different. Therefore, it is a great importance to take for cultural background knowledge as one of the contents in the whole process of English teaching so as to help students to have a good command of necessary cultural background knowledge and to develop their comprehensive English ability. Though culture instruction may not be new to most English teachers in an examination-oriented environment in East Java, Indonesia, the research and practice of English teaching in East Java still have a
long way to go before they reach satisfactory results.

Therefore, this paper aims to find what are the cultural knowledge in learning English in rural area and the major issue in this paper the extent to how to present cultural background knowledge and expose learners to it in the need of English teaching so as to help learners grasp the crux of the language and develop their comprehensive English.

Methodology

This paper is using quantitative descriptive for describing and explaining the phenomenon. According to Creswell (1994: 145), qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through word or picture. In unfolding meaning, data analysis is considered to be a systematic search. Hatch (2002: 148) describes that it is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationship, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories.

In this study, I reported an interview and observation from several teachers from four cities in East Java.

In this study, the observation and interview instrument were used as the main method of collecting data. In addition, the teaching and learning process was investigated in order to know the significant gap of cultural knowledge in learning English.

Analyzing the data was done right after gathering the data had been done well. After collecting the data by using interview guide and observation guide. The analysis was done based on it. Writing the findings as the last step was done after the analysis complete.

Finding and Discussion

ELT in East Java

From 1960-1990 English in east java is considered as a forbidden thing. The majority is bringing pesantren perspective which is still having a negative perception about English, a language which is come from colonialism era. In 2000 till now the barrier is slowing down come to be eliminated. But the cultural background comes into another problem, from grammar, pronunciation, and phonetic, vocabulary. They learn English by using traditional method. This make serious gap in several city, especially in rural area. The pesantren and religion as a cultural background has become the main factor. The writer has come in four cities which are preferable as dominantly have cultural background than other cities. Those are Magetan, Sampang, Jombang, Lamongan. There are five gap which is dominantly happening in the field.

Cultural Knowledge in Vocabulary

Language is the carrier of culture and vocabulary is the basic ingredient of language. The cultural difference will inevitably exhibited on the vocabulary, and the explanation of vocabulary will also reflect the cultural difference.

Cultural Knowledge in Listening

In foreign language learning particularly in training their listening ability to understand better, learners often complain that although they spend lots of time in learning and practicing their ability of listening comprehension, their progress is not satisfactory. But a relatively more important reason is that they lack the necessary cultural background knowledge of the language they have learned. Listening is closely related to the culture, politics and economy of the target language. In judging one’s listening ability, we are in fact considering his comprehensive ability, including the English level, intellectual range, analytical and imaginative ability, etc.
Cultural Knowledge in Speaking

The ability of speaking is not a matter only concerned with pronunciation or intonation. People need to read a lot to understand the cultural background knowledge of the target language; only in this way they can communicate successfully with the others. So in the training of oral English, teachers should emphasize the practical use of the language, and try to use the materials which come from the daily life. This can help people use proper sentences in proper context.

Cultural Knowledge in Reading

The reading process is not simply the repetition and reappearance of the language knowledge which the students already have, but it is a complicated process under the stimulations of outside information to decode, recognize, analyze, judge, and infer the material through the cognitive system (Larsen-Freeman, & Long, 2000, pp.193-196). So, it is critical for us to catch the nonverbal information, such as: the background information about humanism, history, geography, and the traditional local customs, etc. Linguistic knowledge can affect one’s reading, but cultural factors plays a more important role in the reading process, most of the true and serious reading barriers are not only from the language knowledge itself, but also caused by the cultural differences between the target language and our mother tongue. Cultural differences exist in background information, words, sentences, and text structures, all of which are going to become potential barriers in reading matters.

Cultural Knowledge in Translating

It is widely believed that translating is greatly influenced by culture. In translating, we should have enough knowledge about both the target and the source language. The difficulty in translation mainly lies in the understanding of cultural background knowledge. The cultural background knowledge includes many aspects, such as art, history, geography, philosophy, science, etc.

Conclusion

One culture or language is unique and differs from another. Cultural differences can be viewed as the way in which other groups, societies or countries are socially organized, developed and communicated which have customs, laws and lifestyles from other ethnographic groups. Therefore, understanding the target language is not quite easy and it is very important to be aware of cultural differences, only with that will someone knows how to respect other cultures and how to use their languages well. To sum up, teachers should let learners not only pay attention to cultural differences but also try to understand and study the differences to avoid misunderstanding in study and communication. It is necessary for students to be taught directly and develop their awareness of cultural background knowledge in order to overcome the obstacles produced by cultural differences.

All in all, cultural factors play an important role in English teaching. The aim of English teaching is to foster students’ comprehensive English capability by learning language and its culture. In successful teaching and study of both language and cultural background knowledge, cultural introduction contributes to foster students’ cultural consciousness of target language. By doing so, students can improve their English comprehensive capacity and cultural communication of the target language. This accomplishes the target of foreign language teaching.

References


