
The Linking of Cultural Elements in EFL Learning as the Implication of Linguistic Relativity: A Framework Proposal

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Abstract

Learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) is not only learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but also learning its culture including song, film, food, building, and specific circumstances. This paper focuses on how Indonesian learners are introduced to foreign culture induced in the EFL teaching and learning. It is qualitative research employing the meta-analysis approach in exploring the culture content in EFL teaching and learning. The analysis helped in identifying some possible ways of teaching foreign culture to Indonesian learners. The result is in the form of proposed framework of EFL learning integrating the research shows that the learners are still lack of foreign culture contents taught through the EFL teaching and learning. The present research recommends that English teachers still need to explore many skills and approaches of teaching foreign culture especially to young learners and to improve methods of teaching EFL both English as foreign language and foreign culture.

Keywords: *Culture, EFL Learning, Language Relativity*

Introduction

What is the language is a question that encourages language experts and observers to examine the nature of the language (Emmorey, 2001; Searle & Society, 2008). Language is generally described as the ability of humans to communicate through the use of certain types of signs arranged in certain units and systems. As Humboldt (1767-1835) says, language is a reflection tool that also influences thought patterns which infers that language and mind are two inseparable entities (Kozlova, 2016; Pajević, 2017; Underhill, 2009).

Gumperz and Levinson (1996, p. 32) quote Humboldt's statement saying that "if speech is a thought that manifests itself, it must also be true that thought is interior and hidden speech." This statement means there are the close relationship between society, language and culture. At the ideal stage, to meet it appeared as a trinity: a community, a language, a culture (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996, p. 362). Further, von Humboldt asserts that the structure of language influences the development of human thought patterns, and in all languages contained a unique worldview (Lopez, 2020; Sinha & López, 2001). In short, the deep vision of Humboldtian affirms that the relativity of the language means the determinism of the language: a language absolutely determines the mentality of the speaker.

The relationship between language and society emphasizes the discursive nature of the social life since it is closely tied up with the social structure and value systems of society and has its social functions (Lupyan & Dale, 2010). Some approaches should be aimed at viewing social relations as symbolic portraits of social actors as language is the key element in social interaction (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996; Qinghong, 2009). It helps us not only to establish and maintain relationships, but also to convey information from speakers to the listeners as the linguistic mediation of the social relations plays roles in language regarding knowledge and the social action of understanding.

The relationship between language, society, culture, and the human spirit (speaker) has become a subject that continues to grow and is interesting to learn since most of the social sciences have turned their attention to the study of language in social life (Bockover, 2012). In regards to the position of a language as "itself" and the function as a tool of communication, language has to do with the society, culture and spirit of its speakers, even with the world at large. Thus, various approaches to the analysis of discourse have been developed beyond linguistics itself. The topic is to in order to explore the possibility of a particular view of the relationship between language and social life.

The modern world nowadays is coloured with intercultural communication, translation, and the teaching of languages (Madya, 2002, 2019). As an internationally spoken language as the true *lingua franca*, the world's global language, English has been learned as a foreign language in Indonesia. Initially, English is studied as the means of communication in economic business, indeed, in the present post-industrial economy, English has been the prominent requirement of factory workers to have adequate linguistic skills to be used in the communication (Heller, 2003). The languages are becoming as the economic commodities by which the traditional perception on language as the symbol of identity both national and ethical is displaced (Holborow, 2018). The commodification of the language affect people motivation in learning languages as well as affecting the choices of language to be learned. Additionally, the language education institutions (local or national, public or private) are also affected by the phenomena of language commodification in terms of the allocation of the resources for language teaching and learning.

Learning English is not limited on learning linguistic aspects; structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, and language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also learning the culture of English speakers. Language and culture are on both sides of a coin and they shape each other (Trosborg, 2010, p. 2) since language is a culture element playing the role in preserving the existence of a certain culture. The statement infers that people as the member of cultural society has ability learn a culture through its language and conversely, learning a language through its culture. Culture as the focus of the present study is defined using several theories by experts. In the simplest way, culture "is defined as shared way of seeing, thinking, and doing" (Thompson, 2003, p. 15). Similarly, Brown (2000, p. 176) states that "Culture is a way of life. It is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the 'glue' that binds a group of people together for some people."

It means culture is to socialize and is transmitted from one generation to another one.

In a broader sense, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, pp. 6-7) define that culture “includes culturally-influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially as expressed through language as well as through cultural behaviors that affect acceptability in the host community”. Therefore, culture can be identified as identity which is inseparable from cultural communities as long as its people live and preserve the culture. The idea indicates that teaching-learning a language is also teaching-learning about its native speaker’s cultures (Sukarno, 2012). In short, there should be common belief and perception occupying the cultural life of a cultural society related to its identity and culture preservation. For this reason, language can play significant role to keep the culture as there is close relationship between language and culture.

Understanding foreign culture in the form of intercultural studies remains unconcerned in learning English as a foreign language at the formal and informal schools whereas this is extremely vital to avoid the failure and breakdown of communication (Kadarisman, 2015). Consequently, the communication skill abilities in English involving pragmatics skills which is related to the culture do not improve significantly during the lessons. It is because being able to speak fluently only does not merely mean being aware of foreign culture while this is the more important thing to understand the language learned. This becomes more significant notion in intercultural communication more and more. In line with this point of view, Krasnick (1995) predicted by the year 2020, the problem of English (as a grammatical code) will lessen, while of intercultural communication competence will arise. Moreover, Cakir (2006) points out that communicative competence thus includes communicating not only in local culture but also cross-culturally, and while doing so, one meets inevitably with factors of cultural differences. If not so, communication falls into failure, or breakdown communication will occur then miscommunication and misinterpretation happen.

The studies related to language and culture as well as some techniques and methods used have been done. Deneme, Ada, and Uzun (2011) determine that the students learn foreign culture through their parents, family members and relatives, television programs, and computers as the most effective factors in children’s foreign culture acquisition besides friends, school, real life experiences, books, newspapers, magazines, games and songs. The other is one conducted by López and Méndez (2004) providing recommendation that in teaching foreign language education during the stages of young learners it is important to present the language integrated with other subjects, like culture in order to see target language as something natural and normal.

In Indonesia especially in its education setting, the different culture may cause some difficulties and problems how Indonesian learners acquire their English. There should be investigation on the extent of Indonesian learners understand and recognize the foreign culture as well as the way they acquire the knowledge. Therefore, the issue of language relativity in relation to the context of EFL in formal

education will be discussed in relation to the intercultural studies involved in the EFL teaching and learning in Indonesia

Methods

This paper presents a review on studies regarding the cultural content of EFL teaching and learning. It is accomplished through conducting reviews of studies related to the development of EFL in Indonesian curriculum, the culture content of EFL teaching in learning, and the development of intercultural studies in regards to the preparation for being the global citizen. Due to the novelty of the development of EFL teaching and learning along with the usage in the EFL context in terms of preparing the learner to be the global citizen, more recent studies were favoured than the over older ones. The present study was to analyse and identify the similarities and differences, patterns, as well as themes on the domain of culture content in EFL teaching and learning for intercultural studies of English as a foreign language in order to prepare the learner to be the global citizen. The meta-analysis is a systematic approach in reviewing and synthesising a large number of published research studies, particularly the findings to build new knowledge on the particular topic discussed (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 240-241).

Result & Discussion

In regards to the issue of language relativity in the context of EFL in formal education and intercultural studies involved in the EFL learning in Indonesia, there are 4 studies worth to consider. They are:

Table 1. Formal Education and Intercultural Studies Involved In The EFL Learning In Indonesia

No	Author	Year	Title	Journal
1.	Manneke Budiman	-	<i>Pengajaran Bahasa Asing Peng-'indo"-an atau Pencerahan Bangsa?</i>	Unpublished work, affiliated with Universitas Indonesia
2.	Urip Sulistiyo	2016	English Language Teaching and EFL Teacher Competence in Indonesia	Proceedings of the Fourth International Seminar on English Language and Teaching (ISELT-4)
3.	Subhan Zein	2017	Language-In-Education Policy on Primary EFL: The Case of Indonesia	International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning
4.	Minglin Li	2010	EFL teachers and English language education in the PRC: Are they the policy makers?	The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher

The first reviewed article is written by Budiman (-) questioning the impact of foreign languages on the cultural identity of a group of people. Its rationale is on the

condition in which English has been dominating our lives as part of the international community and, thus, it tends to be taken for granted as a fact that cannot be denied and should be considered as a serious problem. Indonesian people are no longer feeling the need to ask why because we have received the need of being able to speak English as well as our needs to eat, breathe, and sleep. In other words, English has become part of the daily life, even though it does not necessarily mean that English has been mastered perfectly.

In his explanation, the problems explored in EFL teaching and learning include imperialism and mimicry, impact and resistance, and hegemony in language teaching. Imperialism and mimicry are the results of paradigm built by the western countries such as Britain, France and Germany considering themselves as a group of nations one step ahead of other nations, both in terms of culture (Western civilization), economics (liberal capitalism), as well as politics (democracy). By therefore, the standard of progress in the world is measured by standards of progress that has been achieved in Western Europe. This is what gave birth to Orientalism as a paradigm of thinking and, later, as a knowledge discipline. Orientalism and noble mission civilization eventually became the pillars of the project Western imperialism in the part of the world called the "Third World."

In the mission of imperialism, there was a solution that is of a nature ironic for the dilemma faced by imperial forces. There is a desire for *othering* that has undergone "reform" and is no longer "primitive." In order to effectively support civilization and imperialism as a whole overall, *other* must be able to think and act like the creator, but it can still be distinguished from its creator: a subject that is almost similar, but it is not really the same as his master.

In terms of hegemony in language teaching, there is a threat of losing own language because of tendency of feeling better of using foreign language. It is suggested that we just take advantage of the hegemony and sophistication of English, especially in terms of teaching methods, to equip teachers of local languages. Thus, marginalized local languages should be preserved through the government policy, consciousness of the parents in planning their children to preserve the use of local language considering three prospective reasons of the parents' choice of language. They are identity, practicality, and career consideration.

The second reviewed article is written by Sulistiyo (2016) presenting an overview of English language teaching and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education in Indonesia. He states that there are factors appear to hinder the success of teaching and learning EFL in Indonesia. They are the teacher's qualifications and low English proficiency, classroom size, students' motivation, classroom-oriented learning, and limited sources of learning. Those are factors that influence the quality of EFL teaching and learning success. There are some problems need to be solved in terms of language policy and language teaching classroom practices in Indonesia. Firstly, motivation and ethical background of the students that might be an obstruct in designing the single curriculum that suits all (or most) students across the country in addition to different resources for EFL teaching learning. Secondly, insufficient funding that leads to low wages for teachers affects poor resourcing and the trend of putting the learners in classes with large number

of them. It is also found that low teacher salaries as the ground of the phenomena in which the majority of teachers works in additional jobs outside of school hours, which reduces the time they can allocate to lesson preparation, efforts to improve teaching practices, and undertaking development to enhance their professional knowledge. Thirdly, the influence of policy and curriculum politics is a constraint to language learning. In EFL teaching and learning contexts, teacher competence is essential to facilitating successful English exposure and learning during classroom activities.

In terms of the EFL teachers, they should have complete knowledge on the social, political and ethical dimensions of language education and they must be able to articulate a vision or philosophy of the role of a teacher generally, and of their work specifically. It is based on the rationale that EFL teaching and learning context in Indonesia requires the instruction to provide language exposure of contextual English use for daily life thus the teacher's competence plays the important role in facilitating the learner to learn the language as well as its culture.

The third reviewed journal is one by Zein (2017) examining language-in-education policy on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in primary schools in Indonesia. The language-in-education policy on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in primary schools in Indonesia has experienced vast changes recently. In order to achieve the objective of the research, the author overviews the EFL teaching and learning in the primary education focusing on its policy development, instructional aspects, and primary EFL teachers.

The findings of the research indicate that the materials are taken from imported books from Singapore in which English is used as the second language in addition to the local ones. It has been asserted that the content of the imported books is not appropriate to the local Indonesian culture. The adjustment of the culture-related content was demanding for the teachers, though the application of the culture content must be in line with local Indonesian culture. On the other hand, the course book produced by local authors does not put the emphasis on the Indonesian culture preservation. Though, there are arguments stating that foreign language learning is believed to be beneficial for technology and international relationship. In addition, the other positive effect of learning foreign language is as the intellectual enrichment of Indonesian people in which they can learn the intercultural differences when they learn the foreign language.

In this study, Zein (2017) recommends that since there is a need for obtaining knowledge of linguistic and cultural diversity in the EFL teaching and learning, the teaching materials should cater this objective by exposing the learners to the diversity occurring in the linguistic and cultural domain in the target language. It is also suggested that the contents of materials need to expose learners to the ethical identity of linguistic and cultural domains of the local language. The materials also need to be global in a sense building recognition of cultures of the world to prepare the learner to be the global citizen.

In order to have a comparison to Indonesian policy in terms of EFL education, a study by Li (2010) is reviewed. The study is aimed to explore the relationship between the Chinese's national policy in English language education and its

implementation at the local level in Chinese schools on the bases of in-service teachers' perception. It is based on the belief that the level of teachers' involvement in policy making, especially for English language education in primary and secondary schools in the PRC has not yet been explored. Similar to other countries, national policy on language education has been formed through political, economic, and social interests and forces. In regards to the hierarchical social system in China which is deep-rooted, the top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government take decisions and make policies for national development on political and economic goals. Following the hierarchy of the decision and policy making, in order to make educational policy including language education policy, the MOE (Ministry of Education) establishes coordination with elites and experts in education. The policy is then forwarded to the Education Department at Provincial and lower levels for implementation. Under this social-political system in China, the lower level people do not speak policy making including the English language curriculum that is already developed by the MOE and this is a good example in that teachers are only envisioned as implementers of the policies and they do not play a key role in the centralized language planning processes.

The findings of Li (2010) show that all teachers interviewed reported that they are only policy implementers. There are no chances for them to be actively involved in policy making in areas such as curriculum design, constructing and selecting teaching materials, and methodology since they would at least be able to provide data from their actual situation in regular schools as inputs to policy. It infers that the data from the teachers would be consideration for the experts as a basis for their policy making leading to meet the needs of the majority of students in China if it were to become national policy. In addition, the education paradigm in China is still "teaching for testing." It was determined that the examination in China's education remained unchanged with not quality-orientated educational system. "Students' marks" and "teaching for examinations" were the most important EFL teachers. Trials is applying the teaching methods recommended in the 2001

English curriculum was not possible since they did not want to risk their teaching careers, even though the teaching methods are in line with the recent international trends in second language teaching. Furthermore, the teachers were to help students to get high marks in examinations, and did not want to be "losers" and disappoint students and their parents.

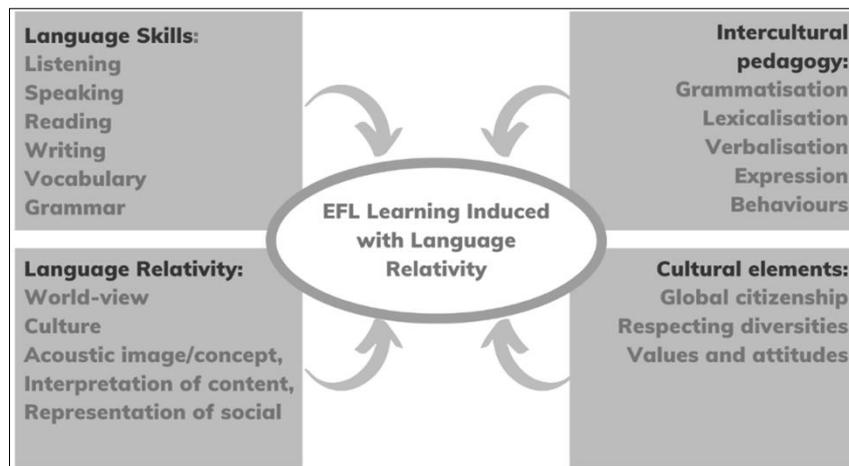
In regards to the contents of new English curriculum, there are three goals of language education. They are about knowledge, process and methodology, and the affective attitude and value embodiment. EFL teachers are to have examination marks as their priority, which is different from the English curriculum objectives. They follow the instructions in the curriculum in writing teaching plans, which may be inspected by their educational inspectors, and teach for examinations. In the moments of school inspection or surveys, the teachers would try to apply the English curriculum (for example, communicative language teaching methods) in specially prepared classes presented as a model class for teachers from other schools, but most of the time teachers and students are still learning English in the traditional way (mostly by grammar translation). The conclusion leads to implication that policy

makers will face a major challenge in the future of how to provide a more open system by effectively involve classroom teachers in the educational policy making process. This also has the implication to the social system in that empowering teachers in language policy making may make them feel the equality as individuals of the community and society, and thus encourage them to undertake the responsibility and actively participate in the construction of language education policies.

Findings of the research revealed that instructors mostly focus on the “values and attitudes” dimension of global citizenship such as respecting diversities, human rights, gender equity and sensitivity to global issues. According to the findings of the research, although participants included conflict resolution skills within the context of global citizenship, they were not aware that skills such as critical and creative thinking, empathy, cooperation, ability of managing complexity and uncertainty, communication etc. were also included within the concept global citizenship. This result clearly shows the lack of knowledge of the participants about this topic and is not inexplicable when taking into account that global citizenship has been currently studied in certain subject areas in the country. The findings of the research also show that most of the ELT instructors, who are unconscious of their role and responsibilities in the development of global citizenship in their students, reflect their ideas into their classroom practices. Instructors’ lack of awareness about the subject may have caused them not to struggle enough to raise students’ awareness on this issue. It may be helpful to provide ELT educators at all levels with in-service training on integrating global citizenship education into ELT so that they can organize the teaching-learning environment according to global citizenship education.

To ensure the development of English language competence by including cultural elements as the implications of language relativity, there are needs of a proposed framework. The elements considered need to be realized in the form of learning English as a foreign language through a commitment to treat English language proficiency as a means to achieve the goals of personal national education and professional development to achieve cultural-based communication. The framework is developed by integrating the principles of language relativity, intercultural pedagogy, cultural elements and the framework for learning English as a foreign language.

Picture 1. Proposed Framework



The goal of the proposed framework is to include cultural elements as the implication of language relativity in the EFL learning. The principles of EFL learning integrating the cultural elements are as follows.

1. EFL learning materials should be constructed on the bases of intercultural communicative competence in which the ultimate goal of learning is preparing the students to be the global citizens.
2. Critical thinking skills in EFL learning should be accompanied with empathy, cooperation, and communication and is manifested in the learning materials and classroom activities.
3. EFL teachers should be empowered with equality in policy making leading to the encouragement of undertaking the responsibility and actively participating in the construction of language education policies.
4. EFL learning materials should be induced with culture-related content to build recognition of cultural patterns of the target language compared with cultural domains of the local language as Indonesian culture preservation.
5. EFL students' decisive goals are mastering the target language and being able to communicate interculturally as global citizens without tearing down the Indonesian local entities.

Implication and Suggestion

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. EFL teachers still need to explore many skills and approaches of teaching foreign culture especially to young learners and to improve methods of EFL learning both English as foreign language and foreign culture putting forward the role of the EFL teacher/instructor to prepare the learner to be the global citizen. The teacher should be able to empower the learner with skills in understanding cultures and cultural differences, analyzing the problems of the world from different perspectives, and producing new ideas for the world.

Conclusion

The present study has identified the implication of Humboldtian's linguistic relativity in EFL learning plays a strategic role in the era globalization, in the sense of being able to enable the learners to acquire a new pattern of 'thinking for

speaking' through instilling critical thinking skills in students in classes foreign language teaching. Thus, this project was undertaken to design an EFL framework integrating the principles of language relativity, intercultural pedagogy, cultural elements and the framework for learning English as a foreign language.

This study has also found that generally, foreign culture contents taught through the EFL learning are aimed at preparing the learners to be the global citizens as well as the preservers of the local entities. In relation to the culture content of EFL materials, the focus is on the teacher and the materials. The study contributes to our understanding that in regards to the adjustment of materials used in EFL learning to include the culture content, the teacher should also be knowledgeable on the issues of the social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of language education and they must be able to articulate a vision or philosophy of the role of a truly teacher, and of their work specifically especially in providing language exposure of contextual English use for daily life

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