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## The Importance Of Cross Cultural Understanding and Awareness In English Language Teaching

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**Abstract.** Interrelated, interconnected and influential describe the relationship between language and culture. So that in the process of learning both languages can not be separated. English as an international language has the potential to be associated with culture because everyone from all over the world from different countries even different cultural backgrounds use it to connect with the outside world. Nowadays, English is everywhere and even learned everywhere. In this connection knowledge and understanding as well as cultural awareness become some of the important things to be integrated into learning. This article aims to reveal the importance of cross-cultural understanding and awareness in teaching English. This article was written using a qualitative research design and collecting data from reference observations from the several sources, which were then discussed in a narrative manner so as to discover the importance of cross-cultural understanding and awareness in teaching English.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Understanding, Cultural Awareness, English Language Teaching

### INTRODUCTION

Tang (1999) suggests that "culture is language and language is culture". From this statement it can be interpreted that culture is an embodiment of language, and vice versa. In relation to learning of the two, it can be said that when one is learned, the learning of the other must also follow. This means that, if we want to learn a language, it also means that we cannot ignore learning about culture.

The importance of understanding culture and having an awareness of it are the most important parts in language learning. From the point of view of the position of culture in language learning there are two main parts that need to be well understood, namely the culture of the target language and the culture of language learners. Brown (2000) states that "Language and culture are intricately intertwined so that one cannot separate the two without losing the meaning of language or culture". This means that culture has automatically been embedded in the language learned and vice versa. So it is important for a language teacher to try to integrate the target language culture into the design of teaching and learning so that a good understanding of the language can be achieved.

Post and Rathet (1996) state that "Familiarity with the contents of the targeted text refers to their previous experiences achieved in their daily lives which affect their understanding of the target language". In this case it can be understood that, if the culture of language learners is integrated into language learning, an understanding of the language content they learn will lead to positive development. Because as Jenkins (1999) states, "familiarity content helps students to understand lessons and validate their feelings by utilizing

their own framework". So it can be ascertained that as expressed by Renner (1994), "If language teaching and learning are strengthened by students' life experiences, it will be far more meaningful". From the explanation of the theories above, it can be concluded that cultural understanding in the cultural context of learners is important because it can be one of the supporting factors that influence the achievement of language learning objectives, namely the success of the target language acquisition.

The explanation above is the reason behind writing this article. The importance of understanding and cultural awareness in language learning is a fundamental thing that needs to be known by all parties involved in the teaching and learning process of English. This article was written using the narrative analysis method to answer the following questions:

1. How does language affect culture and vice versa?
2. Why is it important to have cultural knowledge and understanding in teaching English?
3. Is it important to have cultural awareness in learning English?

### **Literature Review Definition of Culture**

Spencer-Oatey (2012) argues that "it is difficult to provide an appropriate cultural definition". This happens because if we talk about culture, it also means talking about many aspects. Jandt (2003) revealed that "culture refers to the totality of thought, experiences, behavior patterns and the values of their concepts, and assumptions about life that direct behavior and how they develop with contact with other cultures. "This means that when culture is discussed, various aspects within it will also be touched and discussed, such as ideas, attitudes experience, values and so on.

Here are the views of some experts related to culture. According to Brown (1994), "culture is a very inherent part of the fiber of our being". This implies that culture has existed since humans existed and cannot be separated from human life, including interacting with others. Meanwhile, according to Jandt (2004), "culture can be defined as the process of social transmission of the thoughts and behavior of people who are learned from birth in families and schools for generations". Another view put forward by experts is that "culture as a way of life for people", Chastain (1988). This definition is similar to what Condon (1973) said that "culture is a way of life".

### **Definition of Cross-Cultural Understanding**

According to Sugirin (2009), "Cross-cultural understanding is the ability to recognize differences (culture), make correct interpretations and react well to people or situations in communication with this community. Parsons (1962), believes that" cross-cultural understanding is needed in wherever there are cultural differences, it seems most appropriate

to focus on developing ways of thinking about human behavior and cultural determinants ". In this case, understanding culture is very important for someone to be able to create good interactions in their daily lives with others.

### **Definition of Cultural Awareness**

The Collins English Dictionary defines, "A person's cultural awareness is their understanding of the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values." In addition, Tanaka (2006) also claims that "Cultural awareness means understanding of different cultures, so it can be concluded that cultural awareness is an understanding of cultural differences from other people and other countries that covers broad aspects such as backgrounds, attitudes, and values".

### **Definition of Language**

According to Wibowo (2001), "language is a symbolic system that is meaningful and articulates sound (produced by these tools) which is arbitrary and conventional, which is used as a communication tool by a group of people to give birth to feelings and thoughts". Other definitions are also put forward by some experts including Lyons (1981) who stated that "Language is the main communication system used by certain groups of people in certain communities that are members" Also Derbyshire (1982) argues that "language is undoubtedly a kind of communication tool between humans". According to Sapir (1921), "language is a purely human and instinctive method for communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through a voluntary produced sound system. This definition by Sapir states that language is primarily concerned with only humans and is the sound system produced by them for communication ". All this understanding focuses on the definition of the function of language as a communication tool.

### **Definition of Teaching English**

Before discussing what English teaching is, it is first necessary to know the definition of language teaching. According to the free dictionary by Farlex, language teaching means "teaching people to speak and understand foreign languages. Whereas teaching English means practice and theory of learning and teaching English for the benefit of people whose first language is not English ".

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Relationship Between Culture and Language**

Everyone has a different culture from the others. People who live in different places or regions can use different languages. Although culture and language are two things that differ in their definition and function, they are interrelated and influence one another.

According to Brown (1994), "culture is a deep part of our fiber". This means that culture is inherent in human life in various aspects so that in practice it cannot be separated from humans. The fact that culture has various aspects, such as covering ethnic background, gender, race, and even religion makes it has a strong potential to change and influence human behavior and even society. In relation to language, culture also contributes greatly in influencing language. When new cultural patterns are created then at the same time a new language pattern will be formed, for example, when a major event occurs in the community at the same time and several new languages emerge as a result of this event.

As stated earlier that "Language is undoubtedly a kind of communication tool among humans", Derbyshire (1982); this statement implies that there is interaction in the use of language. Now, this interaction can direct people to culture. In relation to culture, language can also influence culture in the community itself. For example, someone who learns language A can interact with people from country A. Well, in the interactions and communication made here, that person can automatically learn the culture of country A and has the possibility to bring culture of country A to their home country. Even for everyday life so that in situations like this can encourage the creation of cultural assimilation and maybe even new cultures.

### **The Importance of Understanding the Culture of Language Learners in Teaching English.**

Similar to the culture of the target language, it is also very important to have an understanding of the culture of language learners when they want to teach English to students. In teaching English the teacher cannot ignore the target language culture as discussed in the previous section, but it also needs to be remembered that when the teacher starts introducing students to the new culture and ignores the culture of the students themselves, it will cause disturbance both in class management even in achievement learning objectives. In this situation, understanding student culture is a must. To be able to manage classes including student behavior, a teacher needs to have knowledge about the culture of language learners so that he can use strategies, methods, techniques or learning approaches that are appropriate for students so that the language teaching process will take place properly and effectively.

In addition, the use of material that is authentic or that is close to students' lives can also have a positive impact on language teaching. As expressed by Post and Rathet (1996) that "Students' familiarity with the contents of the targeted text refers to the experiences they have previously achieved in their daily lives affecting their understanding of TL". This means that when students are supported to use material that is close to their real life, which is oriented towards their culture, it will make it easier for them to get an understanding of the target language. This view reinforces the statement from Renner (1994) that "if language teaching and learning are strengthened by the students' life experiences, it will be far more meaningful." For this reason, it is very important for language teachers or instructors to have knowledge of the culture of language learners.

### **The Importance of Cultural Awareness in ELT**

Just as it is important to have cultural knowledge, cultural awareness is also important in teaching English. Cultural awareness helps us reduce the possibility of making mistakes in interacting with others and increases the likelihood of us being wiser in communicating and determining attitudes in those interactions. In the context of language teaching, cultural awareness directs teachers to positive attitudes and behaviors to support learning and for students cultural awareness minimizes failure to interact using the target language.

But keep in mind that, important learning points that must be stressed, being aware of culture is not about compromising your own culture or compromising your values or identity for 'others'. But how does that help us understand how to adapt our best approaches, thoughts and decisions to ensure we create positive results in cross-cultural interactions. The conclusion is how to respect the culture of others and also our culture.

### **CONCLUSION**

The relationship between culture and language is concluded to be very important where the two are interrelated and influence each other. With this condition, it is very useful to integrate culture into language teaching to encourage the achievement of competencies in understanding and even applying language targets for students. In addition, cultural awareness encourages us to respect other cultures just as we respect our own culture.

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