Intercultural Approaches to the Cultural Content of Indonesia's High School ELT Textbooks

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Abstract

The role of English in intercultural communication entails an understanding of the linguistic and cultural variations of English users. Intercultural approaches to English language teaching (ELT) promote an awareness of source culture, target culture and international target culture. This paper examines how the cultural content is incorporated into Indonesia's high school ELT textbooks. The data were collected from two ELT textbook series for Indonesian high school students. Findings show an extensive use of local references, which help learners adopt the language material, adapt it to their context of language learning, and serve their own purposes of communication. The complex relationship between language and culture manifests in the way the textbooks deal with the cultural aspects of linguistic forms and cultural representations of English-speaking community. This issue draws attention to the important role of ELT teachers in addressing shortcomings of ELT textbooks.

Key words: Intercultural approach; Cultural content; ELT textbook

INTRODUCTION

The use of English now involves people from diverse national, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. English users in expanding circle countries -- where English is spoken as a foreign language -- have significantly exceeded those in inner-circle and outer-circle societies where English has the status of a first and a second language respectively (Crystal, 2008; Graddol, 2000; Kachru, 1992). The worldwide spread of English has carried linguistic, cultural and pedagogical implications (Alptekin, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2007a; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Sharifian, 2009). The unprecedented changes in linguistic and cultural dimensions of English require that English learners be cognizant of the linguistic and cultural variations of today's English speakers. Yet, in spite of the increasing opportunity for English learners to have intercultural encounters, little attention has been given to the developments in the intercultural field (Fantini, 1997; Lange & Paige, 2003). Not surprisingly, little is known about the way intercultural issues are addressed in the context of ELT in Indonesia. Hence, this study aims at exploring how the cultural content is incorporated into Indonesia's high schools ELT textbooks from an intercultural perspective.

INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES TO ELT

A number of principles form the basis of intercultural approaches. First, the need to establish a link between target culture and native culture and to reflect both on target and one's own culture (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; McKay, 2000). In the process of learning about another culture through language, it is important for

learners to not only be exposed to a mere presentation of facts. Through the establishment of a "sphere of interculturality", as Kramsch (1993) suggests, learners may understand and appreciate their culture as well as the cultures of others, and study the language in order to be able to share their community's cultural beliefs and practices with people whose values and behaviour differ (Corbett, 2010).

Second, interculturalism rather than biculturalism should serve as the goal of learning in EIL classrooms (McKay, 2000; Byram, 2003). It is worth noting the fundamental difference between interculturalism and biculturalism as well as between biculturalism and bilingualism. Interculturalism allows learners to gain knowledge of or competence in another culture without necessarily seeking acceptance of the values of other culture as biculturalism may entail. Thus, as Paulston (McKay, 2000) argues, it is possible for language learners to become bilingual without becoming bicultural, that is without identifying or affiliating with a particular culture, while the reverse is unlikely.

Third, an intercultural approach to ELT maintains that culture learning is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby, 2003). The culture-specific approach refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertinent to the world view and behaviour specific to a particular culture group. Culture-general learning relates to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to universal, generalizable cross-cultural phenomena.

CULTURE IN ELT TEXTBOOK

Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework for an inclusion of cultural content in ELT materials is used in this study since it includes consideration of culture and helps learners to raise an awareness of intercultural issues. The model proposes three different types of cultural element, i.e. 1) source culture: learner's native culture; 2) target culture: the culture of country where English is spoken as a first language; 3) international target cultures: a variety of cultures in English and non-English-speaking countries. The representations of source culture, target culture and international target cultures will enable culture-specific and culture-general information of the cultures to be properly explored.

As regards the cultural content to learn, the terms "*Big C*" and "*little c*" culture are proposed to explicate the multifaceted components of culture (Hinkel, 2001; De-Capua & Wintergerst, 2004). *Big C* refers to visible aspects of cultural creations, whereas *little c* refers to invisible cultural values. *Big C* signifies aspects of people's lives which are readily apparent and embodies general and tangible cultural products. These may include style of dress, cuisine, customs, festivals and traditions, institutionalized aspects of culture (social, political, economic, educational, religious, etc.), geographical monuments, historical events, sciences, and artistic products. The *little c* culture is psychological in nature and involves people's sociocultural norms, world-views, and cultural value systems. The subtle and pervasive cultural attributes find their way into all facets of language use and language learning. This elusive nature of culture has also made it difficult to integrate into the linear and objective instructional formats of language programs (Lange & Paige, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from two ELT textbook series consisting of six books intended for Indonesian senior high school students in grade 10, 11 and 12, i.e. "*Interlanguage*" and "*Developing English*" series (Table 1). The textbooks were written by Indonesian authors and claimed to comply with the 2006 Standard Contents of English stipulated by Indonesia's National Agency for Education Standards. The Ministry of National Education owns the copyright on all of the books and has granted an official approval to the books for nationwide usage. There are also the digital versions that are made available for download from the Ministry's website. It is the ownership of the copyright, the approval and the availability of the e-books that distinguish the series from other locally-produced ELT textbooks.

Table 1
ELT Textbooks for Indonesian Students in Grade 10, 11 and 12

Book Title	Grade	Author(s) & Publication Date
Interlanguage: English for Senior High School Students X (*InterlanguageX*)	10	Joko Priyana, Arnys Rahayu Irjayanti & Virga Renitasari (2008)
Developing English Competencies for Senior High School Grade X (*Developing EnglishX*)	10	Ahmad Doddy, Achmad Sugeng & Effendi (2008)
Interlanguage: English for Senior High School Students XI - Language Study Programme (*InterlanguageXI*)	11	Joko Priyana, Zayin Adib Muhammad & Eka Denis Machfutra (2008)
Developing English Competencies for Senior High School Grade XI (*Developing EnglishXI*)	11	Achmad Doddy, Ahmad Sugeng & Effendi (2008)
Interlanguage: English for Senior High School Students XII - Language Study Programme (*InterlanguageXII*)	12	Joko Priyana, Zayin Adib Muhammad & Eka Denis Machfutra (2008)
Developing English Competencies for Senior High School Grade XII of Natural and Social Science Programmes (*Developing EnglishXII*)	12	Achmad Doddy, Ahmad Sugeng & Effendi (2008)

Cultural contents were collected from every part of the series including readings, dialogues, special sections, and exercises. The elements comprised both texts and visuals. Such cultural information was first classified according to the three different types of cultural materials proposed by Cortazzi and JIN, i.e. source culture, target culture, and international target cultures. Then, the cultural components were analysed in terms of *Big C* and *little c* categories. Finally, as Hancock and Algozzine (2006) assert, the phase would require that the researcher consider the themes in light of relevant theory, offer analysis for findings, and relate the analysis to the extant literature on the subject.

FINDINGS

Source Culture

Interlanguage and *Developing English* are generally a rich source of local references and information on source culture. The cultural information manifests in texts and visuals and comprises elements of *Big C* and *little c*. A broad range of topics or themes are introduced in the cultural materials which appear in all section, including reading passages, dialogues, tasks, and special features. The topics include family life, daily activity, famous place, public figure, social and political institution, rites of passage, and world view. Consider, for example, the themes that the visuals address in *Interlanguage X*. There are approximately 60 visuals of home culture events, places and personalities, whereas less than 20 photos of target culture and no more than 10 photographs of international target cultures are available. The themes range from art work, local tradition and festival, food, celebrity to legend. As such, these may help the learners to activate their local knowledge, i.e. familiarity with customs and preoccupations of their community (Widdowson, 1998).

Another defining characteristic is a problem-free depiction of home culture. This is evident from, among other things, the inclusion of pictures of Indonesians queuing for kerosene supplies and organizing a massive demonstration. There are also reading tasks on rural poverty and the problem of access to clean water. It is essential that learners are aware of the fact that problems may exist in any culture. In this regard, the book's attempt to evade portrayal of problem-free culture can play an important role in defying cultural stereotypes. In general, the textbooks may assist learners in extending knowledge of source culture and linking cultural materials to their cultural context. This, then, draws attention to the issue of the cultural appropriation of language material.

Target Culture

Components of target culture concern a variety of topics, ranging from famous place, public figure, national symbol, art work, cuisine, to historical building. For example, a reading and speaking task in *Developing English X* deal with the Niagara Falls. The Grammar Review section that follows cites the Niagara River and the Niagara Falls. Also, Unit II (*Interlanguage XI*, p.21) is entitled "Sydney is a metropolitan city" and displays pictures of the Sydney Opera House. It requires students to match other famous buildings with their names and locations. The cultural information denotes national symbols and important geographical factors, that represent the *Big C* and *little c* of target culture.

The approach to cultural content in the textbooks can be specifically identified from two special sections, i.e. "Cultural Tips" (Table 2) and "What to Say". "Cultural Tips offers additional cultural information about behaviour of mostly English-speaking people. The topics covered are varied, ranging from greetings, giving gift, punctuality, dress style to directness in communication. What is particularly interesting is the use of such expressions as "in Australia", "in the US", "British people", "Australians", and "English-speaking countries". These expressions indicate an overgeneralization of the cultural diversity of target culture. "What to Say" is a recap of English speech acts in question. They include making and declining an invitation, requesting, promising, and criticizing, which entail target culture conventions. In spite of that, there is no further explanation as to when to use the speech acts or why a given speech act should be used instead of the others. For example, "Giving advice" expressions (*Developing English XI*, p.32) are presented along the continuum from 'more formal' to 'less formal'. No other information is conveyed except the linguistic forms, their functions and the different levels of formality.

Table 2
Topics in "Cultural Tips" (*Interlanguage Series*)

Topics	Interlanguage X	Interlanguage XI	Interlanguage XII
Meeting and greeting in Australia			
Giving gifts in America			
What to bring for dinner or party in America			
Punctuality in the US in business context			
Functions of "please" and "thank you" in America			
Functions of hand-written thank-you note in the UK			
The way men and women dress in America			
Eating horse and pony in British culture			
Small talk in Britain			
Irish road bowling			
Refusing requests	x		
Australians' reply to tease	x		
Starting a conversation with strangers	x		
Giving advice, especially in Australia	x		
Australians' respect for people with strong opinions	x		
Americans' appreciation for numbers and statistics	x	x	
Conservatism of Swiss businessmen	x	x	
Americans' liking for smile	x	x	
Complaint about food in Britain	x	x	x
Americans' preference for directness in communication	x	x	x
Australians' dislike of one-upmanship		x	x
Gestures of 'crazy' across cultures		x	x
Waving in the US and Indonesia		x	x
Greeting after 00:00 in English-speaking countries and Indonesia			x
Americans' perception of silence			x
Americans' style of debate			x
How British people value punctuality			x
Men-women differences in seat position			x
Topics of conversation in Britain			x
Group reading			x
How to start conversation with people of different backgrounds			x

Despite the textbooks' effort to offer an adequate representation of *Big C* and *little c*, the approach to cultural content is questionable given that overgeneralizations of target culture are common and explanations on speech acts are devoid of information on cultural conventions of the relevant community.

International Target Cultures

Attempts to introduce learners to international target cultures appear obvious. The themes of are mostly about famous place and city, historical site, food, and folklore. Such culture-general contents can be found in various tasks for the four skills. For example, Activity 5 in Unit 5 (*Developing English X*, p.106) asks learners to match pictures and descriptions they hear, i.e. the Coliseum, the Borobudur temple, and Stonehenge. Other places are Niagara Falls, the Great Wall, the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids, the Great Zimbabwe, and the Easter Island. The pictures signify three cultural categories, i.e. home culture (Indonesia), target cultures (England, US, Canada), and international target cultures (Italy, China, India, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Chile). Also, Task 2 (*Interlanguage X*, p.57) requires students to match international food with its name and origin: kebab (Turkey), pizza (Italy), hamburger (Germany), tempura (Japan), and nasi lemak (Malaysia). The generalizable cross-cultural phenomena are clearly suggested.

It is worth mentioning that the discussion of the universal phenomena is mostly presented within the context of home culture and target culture. By way of illustration, the topic of *Thanksgiving* in Unit I (*Interlanguage XI*, p.1) introduces similar traditions across cultures, that is in Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Korea, and Japan. The theme 'Sydney is a Metropolitan City' (p.21) discusses not only Sydney, but also famous places around the globe. Popular destinations in Indonesia, Britain, the US, Japan and Italy are presented in tasks that follow. The materials help learners to be more familiar with international target cultures

Also, a number of topics discuss stories, traditions, and cultural festivals across cultures. For instance, three out of ten themes in *InterlanguageXI* contain folktales from a variety of countries, such as Britain, America, Indonesia, Greece, and India. In general, the themes imply visible and invisible components of culture, i.e. the cultural values and practices of people, and give learners increased exposure to representations of universal phenomena.

DISCUSSION

Cultural Appropriation

The extensive use of local references in the textbooks is concerned with what Kramsch (1998) refers to as

"cultural appropriation". According to Kramsch, cultural appropriation allows learners to make a foreign language and culture their own by adopting and adapting it to their needs and interests. The question of cultural appropriation is intriguing with regards to the Indonesian socio-educational context of ELT. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, learners have a limited exposure to target culture, and the majority of learners will most likely use English to communicate with other non-native speakers within South East Asia (Hill, 1996; Mistar, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2007b). In view of the situation, the frequent local references in the textbooks will make it easier for the learners to localize and adopt the language material that have obvious relevance to their context and goals of learning, that is to have a command of English for international communication, improve academic or professional qualifications, or gain wider access to modern science. The general orientation of ELT, that is utilitarian purpose or practical implication, is manifested in the explicit incorporation of varying aspects of source culture into the textbooks. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the source culture-laden English material has given the learners ample opportunity to adapt the language material to the learners' cultural world and for serving their own goals of learning and purposes of communication.

Likewise, Widdowson (1994, 1998) highlights the importance of appropriate language material. He contends that in the learning process it is important for learners to be able to activate local knowledge, make the language their own, and engage with the language cognitively, affectively, and personally. It appears evident that in the textbooks the familiarity with local customs and preoccupations and the disposition of the learners are emphasized. That the textbooks considerably discuss facts, events or activities in the local cultural setting may encourage the learners to reflect on their cultural practices. In addition to increasing the cultural awareness, it may lead to an activation of their local knowledge. The reality of language use is also localised and realised in the context of the learners' particular community by integrating a variety of local issues, perspectives and pertinent tasks. In this case, the language material is appropriated in that the learners can localise the material within a particular discourse community so that they can engage with it as discourse on their terms. Not only is the material concerned with to the learners' specific contextual realities, but it also highlights the beliefs, attitudes, and interests of the learners.

Generally speaking, the textbooks may help the learners to adopt culturally familiar information by integrating a lot of source culture-specific materials. It can then be seen as a conscious effort to activate the learners' local knowledge, localise English, and relate the language and cultural information to the learners' appropriate context.

Cultural Vacuum Language Functions

Both textbook series examine speech acts in a quite similar manner, which suggests a cultural vacuum elaboration. There is no additional information on linguistic and socio-linguistic differences of the language functions. The social contexts or cultural values that may affect the selection and use of the speech acts are not presented. The way the textbooks discuss speech acts raises two important issues, i.e. first, the socio-linguistic appropriateness of learner's production, and second, the linguistic and cultural norms in the context of EIL.

Concerning the first issue, studies show that cultural factors affect the grammatical constructions of speech act and how it is used. Brown and Levinson (1997) contend that three factors affect the use of speech act, i.e. the social distance between speaker and hearer, the relative social power of speaker and hearer, and the degree of imposition of speech act. Obviously, these factors are culture dependent and vary from culture to culture. Likewise, Wierzbicka (2003) argues that different cultures have different culture-specific modes of interaction and speech acts. A given English speech act may be considered as indirect or polite, but it may not be the case in other language due to different cultural values attached to the form. With the absence of supplementary information on cultural associations of the speech act, the textbooks do not seem to provide the students with a basic understanding of the relationship between language and culture. It is important for them to understand the idea that what is acceptable, appropriate, and expected in one's behaviour is culturally determined (Hinkel, 2001), or that a learner's awareness of cultural beliefs and behaviours among people of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds is predominantly first-culture bound (Hofstede, 2001).

The second issue concerns the use of English in intercultural communication and the linguistic and cultural norms that are relative to the type of communication. As Baker (2011, 2012) puts it, although the native speaker is generally not considered to be excluded from these types of communication, the linguistic and cultural norms of such communications are not driven by native speakers. It is probably fair to say that the norms are emergent and negotiated by the participants, especially in the contexts of outer-circle or expanding-circle societies where no native English speakers may be present. Hence, on the one hand, the absence of additional information on cultural associations of the speech acts in the textbooks may create false perceptions about the complex relationship between language and culture. On the other hand, it may give the learners opportunity to relate the expressions to their particular cultural context and use speech acts to fulfil their personal needs. In such situations, the learners are encouraged to negotiate the norms with their communication partners and use English to serve their own purposes of communication.

Overgeneralized Cultural Representation

The overgeneralized cultural representation refers to the information on target culture that presents inner-circle countries and the native speakers as a single cultural entity as evidenced in "Cultural Tips" section. That English serves as the native language in inner-circle countries should not ignore the cultural and linguistic variation of target culture, the English-speaking people, and their different cultural conventions. While the information might to some extent be helpful for learners to focus on cultural patterns of the native speakers, the overgeneralized cultural representation is likely to create a misleading impression of the target culture community and at worst lead to cultural stereotypes. The overgeneralized expressions may lead learners to ignore the salient diversity of target culture and its effects on the cultural behaviour of the native speakers. In this case, the use of relativising phrases that offer more realistic generalizations is recommended (Welsh, 2011), for example "Some/many people believe that ..., but ..." or "Many/most Americans/Australians ...". These relativising expressions may help learners to avoid equating one language or country with one culture, and to be aware of the diversity of inner-circle countries and English-speaking people in particular with reference to their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the textbooks' attempt to discuss social problems and evade portrayal of problem-free culture plays an important role in defying stereotypes. Stereotype can carry either positive or negative evaluation of broad social categories, including gender, race, age, or profession. However, it can seriously jeopardize intercultural communication because it holds rigid preconceptions that are oversimplified, exaggerated, and overgeneralized (Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Neuliep, 2009). Bearing in mind that stereotypes and culture are both learned, the learning materials and activities in the textbooks as well as the learning process in general may accordingly make significant contributions by enabling the learners to acquire the relevant knowledge and the ability to challenge stereotypes. In this respect, what is then important is how to make the learners familiar with a person's natural tendency to engage in categorization, the nature of stereotypes, and the ways to counter stereotypes.

In particular, the skill of relativising relates to the concept of cultural relativity and the need to develop critical cultural awareness. This could be referred to as the ability to generate empathy towards other cultures and suspend cultural beliefs and disbeliefs of self and others. By acquiring this ability, it is expected that learners will not easily associate negative or positive sides of some members of a particular culture with the whole group, or that they will not consider practices of several individuals of a given culture as representations of the culture. In this fashion, the harmful effects of cultural stereotypes may also be controlled.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural approaches to ELT foster the development of a sphere of interculturality in which English learners link their cultural beliefs and practices to those of target culture and international target culture. The extensive use of local references in the locally-produced ELT textbooks for Indonesian high schools not only encourages the learners to reflect on and relate their cultures to the cultures of others, but it also helps them to readily adopt the language material and adapt cultural components to their realistic context of language use and language learning. Only then will the learners be able to make the language and cultural material their own and to use it to serve their specific needs and interests.

That the learners are introduced to a variety of elements of target culture and international target culture should seek to increase their awareness of the status of English as an international language and the uses of the language in intercultural communication. In such a way, the learners are given the plenty of opportunity to explore the universal cross-cultural phenomena, compare and contrast their cultural behaviour with that of people from different cultures, and increase their critical cultural awareness. Hopefully, the learners may acquire the ability to challenge cultural stereotypes as well.

The difficulty in explaining the complex relationship between language and culture as well as the complexity of cultural representations in ELT materials is manifested in the way the textbooks discuss English speech acts and the cultural diversity of target culture and its people. This issue carries further implications for intercultural approaches to ELT and calls special attention to the important role that ELT textbook writers and teachers may play in intercultural language education. In that regard, ELT textbook writers should strive to enhance the learners' knowledge of the nature of culture, the relationship between language and culture, and the bare fact of linguistic and cultural variations of English-speaking community in particular and today's English users in general. In the same vein, ELT teachers are expected to be fully mindful of the possible shortcomings of ELT textbooks in the exploration of cultural contents. The important role of ELT teachers is clear given that they are reasonably familiar with the background and characteristics of learners, the immediate sociocultural context of ELT, and the general orientation of ELT in the Indonesian context.

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