

ISLAMIC CULTURAL APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the cultural approach in teaching English. A foreign language teacher has a responsibility to implement the cultural approaches in order to socialize the language to the learners through the culture. Consequently, students must learn culture when they learn language. In other words, the culture must be adapted by the students in order to get success in learning language.

Key words: teaching English, reflects of culture, Islamic cultural approach

Pendekatan Budaya Islam dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris

Abstrak

Tulisan ini menganalisis tentang pendekatan budaya dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Seorang guru bahasa asing memiliki tanggung jawab untuk melaksanakan pendekatan budaya agar dapat mensosialisasikan bahasa kepada pelajar melalui budaya. Karena itu, para siswa harus belajar budaya ketika mereka mempelajari bahasa. Dengan kata lain, budaya harus diadaptasikan oleh siswa agar berhasil dalam mempelajari bahasa.

Kata kunci: pengajaran bahasa Inggris, refleksi budaya, pengaruh budaya Islam

A. INTRODUCTION

Quoting the statement by Brewster, Jean, et al. (2002: 1) ‘the growing trend for using English as a world language’ becomes the reality. This has led English teaching and training in the era of globalization for all levels of education and for all fields of studies is demanded by any institution and any where in the world. Therefore, English is taught either as GE (General English) or ESP (English for Special Purposes).

The teaching and training of English is a must; however when language is inseparable from culture causes the teaching and training of a language to be in conflict. This conflict exists when a language is studied deeply. Language is not merely related to linguistic study but it reflects culture. Peterson, Elizabeth and Bronwyn Coltrane in Goode, Sochalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000 defined culture as:

“an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations”.

In foreign language teaching and training, students must be taught and trained both accuracy and fluency to communicate in the target language. Students learn a foreign language for the purpose of being accurate and fluent in communicating the target language, they must be taught not only linguistic competence but also other communicative competences such as *pragmatic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence, and fluency* (Hedge, Tricia, 2000: 46 in Canale and Swain, 1980; Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1984; and Bachman, 1990).

B. DISCUSSION

1. Communicative Competences

Hedge, Tricia in Stern (1983) maintains that being competent in a language, language learners should have the ability of communicative competences as stated previously. First, linguistic competence is concerned with knowledge of the language itself; its form and meaning involving knowledge of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word

formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure and linguistic semantics. This competence is regarded as language accuracy.

The second competence relating to pragmatic is the ability to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly in order to be able to produce messages (spoken or written) in a social context appropriately. This competence covers sociolinguistic competence – ability to select the language forms to use in different settings, and with people with different roles and different status (Hedge Tricia in Bachman, 1990).

Discourse competence according to Carter and Nunan in McCarty, 2001: 48 is the ability to examine the text and the situation in which it occurs – to organize the language beyond the level of the sentence and the individual speaking turn, whereby meaning is negotiated in the process of interaction.

Another communicative competence called strategic competence referring to Hedge in Canale and Swain (1980) is the ability how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open.

The last competence recognized as fluency – the ability relating to language production, the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation (Hedge, 2000: 54).

2. ELT and Cultural Influences

Learning a language in a broad term, language learners are not only required to have competent linguistically but they have also to be culturally proficient how to address people, express gratitude, make requests, agree or disagree with someone as the reflection of

communicative competences (pragmatic/sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and fluency). Therefore, in order to be successful in the target language communication, they have to be associated with other appropriate culture. Further, Peterson, Elizabeth and Bronwyn Coltrane Coltrane maintain that culture is taught implicitly in language teaching through the ways:

- a. imbedding in the linguistic forms that students are learning;
- b. discussing cultural features in relation to linguistic forms being studied;
- c. organizing and incorporating cultural activities and objectives into lesson plans;
- d. using authentic sources and experiences through films, news broadcasts, and television shows; web sites; and photographs; magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and other printed materials;
- e. discussing common proverbs in the target language;
- f. acting out role plays based on cultural differences
- g. introducing culture capsule – students investigate or find information about the origin of certain objects;
- h. exchanging students with diverse cultural background as cultural resources;
- i. having students to carry out ethnographic interviews with native speakers in the community;
- j. having students to read literary texts that are replete with cultural information.

In relation to the approaches of how culture is taught in language learning, a foreign language teacher has a responsibility to implement most of approaches above mention in order to socialize the language learners into what members of the target language society consider being linguistically and socio culturally appropriate behavior. Consequently, a successful

language learner must be adapted in the culture (acculturation) of the target language. As a result, when language learners are introduced to adapt to the new culture – the culture of the target language, they must gradually break a part of their own culture. Similarly, Mohammed Asraf, Ratnawati, 1996 in al-Attas argues that the words and expressions we use are very much a reflection of the culture of which we are a part of the experiences that we have undergone. In addition to the English Teaching (ELT), basic vocabulary of English has been determined by the Judaeo-Christian religious worldview. Penny Cook further claims ELT as a legitimate site for missionary work. Quoting Julian Edge (1996), Penny Cook states that ELT has the purpose of cultural imperialism in order to export religious certainties to the rest of the world.

3. ELT and Cultural Imperialism

Relating to the view point above, the growing trend of English as the impact of globalization causes cultural violence of other cultures and languages. Pennycook views that English teaching aims for various goals with implications for culture and development; and pedagogical implications as illustrated in variety goals through the impact of English culture.

Variety Goals from the impact of culture in teaching English

No.	Views of cultural approach in teaching English	Implications for culture development	Pedagogical implications
1.	Colonial era	English is an inherently useful language	Teach English to those who can appreciate it
2.	Modernization	English is a crucial mean for	Teach English to modernize

		modernization	the world
3.	Laissez-faire liberalism	English is a functional mean for pragmatic purposes	Business as usual: give people what they want
4.	Imperialism	Homogenization, destruction of other cultures and languages	Language rights, instruction in mother tongues; protectionism
5.	Linguistic hybridity	Languages and cultures change and adapt	World Englishes, multiple standards; assume change
6.	Postcolonial performance	Cultural politics in changing language, knowledge and difference	Critical language education for struggle; appropriability

Further, Auerbach, Elsa Roberts in her article 'The Politics of the ESL Classroom: Issues of power in pedagogical choices' (1995, 9) has similar view that language teaching and learning has political aims. She argues that issues of power and politics are generally seen as inherent in language policy and language planning on a macro level, classrooms themselves may be seen as self-contained, autonomous systems, insulated from external political concerns. The political aims in language teaching and learning as Auerbach argues are hidden in the language curriculum development, in the language material development and in the language instructional content. The survival model of curriculum, according to Auerbach quoted from Tollefson (1995) serves ESL/EFL learners unconsciously to practice the hidden power and politics of American life. Unconscious practice of the hidden power and politics are as means of imperialism – homogenization, destruction of other cultures and languages.

4. ELT Practice and the Violation of Islamic Culture

Concerning the ELT practice relating to the violation of Islamic culture, (Andrea Charise, 2007) referring to Pennycook and Makoni, 137 in the

article of *More English, Less Islam? An Overview of English Functions in the Arabian/Persian Gulf*, identifies that the practice of ELT in Islamic context aims to spread political goals: English as a “missionary language” of imperialist, Judeo-Christian values and it is often associated with Western practices, some of which –including alcohol consumption and overt or alternative sexuality– directly oppose Islamic doctrine. Argungu, Dahiru Muhammad (1996, 1) also claims that English was (and still is) one of the major weapons, with which the West launched its massive intellectual and cultural onslaught against the Muslims.

However, Ratnawati Mohd-Asraf summarizes the issue succinctly: “In the same way that English is more than just a language, Islam is more than just a religion. Indeed it is a way of life, with its own worldview; a way of looking at the world that is different –on some fundamental issues– from that of the Western world” (104). Mohd-Asraf, Ratnawati in the reference to Pennycook 1994: 6, regards that some of these differences seem irreconcilable with the purported values of Western culture. For example, government censorship of films, the media, the internet, and textbooks is commonplace in Muslim land.

Moreover, English instruction materials are usually published in Western countries and reflect values that are at odds with those of the Muslim faith. References to the non-Islamic celebration of birthdays are often removed and one English teacher in UAE has recounted the “attentive...blacking out” of words and phrases deemed offensive including “‘Halloween,’ ‘Valentine’s Day,’ ‘alternative lifestyle,’ ‘homosexual,’ and a reference to a ‘father cooking’”.

C. CONCLUSION

Argungu, Dahiru Muhammad (1996, 1) argues that the needs of English become a double-edged problem in which to some extent English with the western cultural consequences needs to be treated with caution; and to the extend, Muslims definitely need English particularly in education and plays its a role as a strategic bridge linking Muslims with a vast English-speaking non-Muslims world with great potentials for outreach *da'awah* activities, business and international relations. Therefore, he suggests that ELT will not become a threat to destroy Islamic culture if Muslims clearly identify and define English needs both in general and specific terms.

Andrea Charise, 2007 offers the response the solution to ELT practice in Islamic context, that is:

“Some language scholars have suggested specific strategies for transcending the apparent discord between ELT and Islamic culture. For example, one suggestion involves simply sensitizing English instructors to the cultural differences that may be encountered in the classroom (Mohd-Asraf 117). By adopting an “Islamic approach” to ELT in which references to non-Muslim material is excluded, English could be made compatible with Islamic culture (Shafi 34-7). However, Pennycook notes the pragmatic and ideological difficulties associated with this seemingly reasonable compromise: “[i]t would involve the retraining of teachers, the teaching of lexical items and Islamic concepts in context, rewriting syllabuses and textbooks, changing exam systems, and comprehensive structural support with the domination of Western teaching practices, theories and textbooks around the world, a constant rearguard battle has to be fought to maintain such a project” (1994, 209-10)”.

Therefore, Islamic cultural approach in teaching English is one of the way how to preserve Islamic Culture through the practice of ELT, mainly at

Islamic Institutions covering Islamic Primary Schools, Islamic Secondary Schools and Islamic Higher Education must begin soon. The ways are suggested above, they are:

1. Establishing training for ELT teachers how to match ELT within the perspective of Islamic ELT Methodology,
2. Contextualizing teaching lexical items with Islamic context,
3. Re-evaluating the existing syllabus and matching it with students' needs within the framework of Islamic values,
4. Assessing the existing ELT textbooks not violating Islamic values,
5. Rewriting ELT textbooks matching with Islamic values,
6. Changing the exams dominated by Western values/cultures.

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