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# PROCEEDINGS

## International Seminar

### LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT

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## CONTENTS

<b>Editors' Note</b> .....	
PRESRIPTIVE VERSUS DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS FOR LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: WHICH INDONESIAN SHOULD NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS LEARN? .....	1 - 7
<i>Peter Suwarno</i>	
PEMBINAAN DAN PENGEMBANGAN BAHASA DAERAH? .....	8 - 11
<i>Agus Dharma</i>	
REDISCOVER AND REVITALIZE LANGUAGE DIVERSITY .....	12 - 21
<i>Stephanus Djawanai</i>	
IF JAVANESE IS ENDANGERED, HOW SHOULD WE MAINTAIN IT? .....	22 - 30
<i>Herudjati Purwoko</i>	
LANGUAGE VITALITY: A CASE ON SUNDANESE LANGUAGE AS A SURVIVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE .....	31 - 35
<i>Lia Maulia Indrayani</i>	
MAINTAINING VERNACULARS TO PROMOTE PEACE AND TOLERANCE IN MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY IN INDONESIA .....	36 - 40
<i>Katharina Rustipa</i>	
FAMILY VALUES ON THE MAINTENANCE OF LOCAL/HOME LANGUAGE .....	41 - 45
<i>Layli Hamida</i>	
LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND STABLE BILINGUALISM AMONG SASAK-SUMBAWAN ETHNIC GROUP IN LOMBOK .....	46 - 50
<i>Sudirman Wilian</i>	
NO WORRIES ABOUT JAVANESE: A STUDY OF PREVELANCE IN THE USE OF JAVANESE IN TRADITIONAL MARKETS .....	51 - 54
<i>Sugeng Purwanto</i>	
KEARIFAN LOKAL SEBAGAI BAHAN AJAR BAHASA INDONESIA BAGI PENUTUR ASING .....	55 - 59
<i>Susi Yuliawati dan Eva Tuckyta Sari Sujatna</i>	
MANDARIN AS OVERSEAS CHINESE'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE .....	60 - 64
<i>Swany Chiakrawati</i>	
BAHASA DAERAH DALAM PERSPEKTIF KEBUDAYAAN DAN SOSIOLINGUISTIK: PERAN DAN PENGARUHNYA DALAM PERGESERAN DAN PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA .....	65 - 69
<i>Aan Setyawan</i>	
MENILIK NASIB BAHASA MELAYU PONTIANAK .....	70 - 74
<i>Evi Novianti</i>	

PERGESERAN DAN PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA SERAWAI DI TENGAH HEGEMONI BAHASA MELAYU BENGKULU DI KOTA BENGKULU SERAWAI LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE IN THE BENGKULU MALAY HEGEMONY IN THE CITY OF BENGKULU .....	75 - 80
<i>Irma Diani</i>	
KEPUNAHAN LEKSIKON PERTANIAN MASYARAKAT BIMA NTB DALAM PERSPEKTIF EKOLINGUISTIK KRITIS .....	81 - 85
<i>Mirsa Umiyati</i>	
PERAN MEDIA CETAK DAN ELEKTRONIK DALAM RANGKA MEREVITALISASI DAN MEMELIHARA EKISTENSI BAHASA INDONESIA DI NEGARA MULTIKULTURAL .....	86 - 90
<i>Muhammad Rohmadi</i>	
BAHASA IBU DI TENGAH ANCAMAN KEHIDUPAN MONDIAL YANG KAPITALISTIK .....	91 - 95
<i>Riko</i>	
TEKS LITURGI: MEDIA KONSERVASI BAHASA JAWA .....	96 - 101
<i>Sudartomo Macaryus</i>	
PEMILIHAN BAHASA PADA SEJUMLAH RANAH OLEH MASYARAKAT TUTUR JAWA DAN IMPLIKASINYA TERHADAP PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA JAWA .....	102 - 107
<i>Suharyo</i>	
BAHASA IMPRESI SEBAGAI BASIS PENGUATAN BUDAYA DALAM PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA .....	108 - 112
<i>Zurmailis</i>	
THE SHRINKAGE OF JAVANESE VOCABULARY .....	113 - 117
<i>Ari Nurweni</i>	
LANGUAGE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING ITS NATURE AND MAINTENANCE EFFORTS .....	118 - 123
<i>Condro Nur Alim</i>	
A PORTRAIT OF LANGUAGE SHIFT IN A JAVANESE FAMILY .....	124 - 128
<i>Dian Rivia Himmawati</i>	
LANGUAGE SHIFT IN SURABAYA AND STRATEGIES FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE .....	129 - 133
<i>Erlita Rusnaningtias</i>	
LANGUAGE VARIETIES MAINTAINED IN SEVERAL SOCIAL CONTEXTS IN SEMARANG CITY .....	134 - 138
<i>Sri Mulatsih</i>	
FACTORS DETERMINING THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE OF JAVANESE- INDONESIAN CHILDREN IN THE VILLAGES OF BANCARKEMBAR (BANYUMAS REGENCY) AND SIDANEGARA (CILACAP REGENCY) .....	139 - 143
<i>Syaifur Rochman</i>	
PERSONAL NAMES AND LANGUAGE SHIFT IN EAST JAVA .....	144 - 146
<i>Widyastuti</i>	

REGISTER BAHASA LISAN PARA KOKI PADA ACARA MEMASAK DI STASIUN TV: SEBUAH STUDI MENGENAI PERGESERAN BAHASA .....	147 - 151
<i>Andi Indah Yulianti</i>	
PERUBAHAN BAHASA SUMBAWA DI PULAU LOMBOK: KAJIAN ASPEK LINGUISTIK DIAKRONIS (CHANGE OF SUMBAWA LANGUAGE IN LOMBOK ISLAND: STUDY OF THE ASPEK OF DIACRONIC LINGUISTICS) .....	152 - 156
<i>Burhanuddin dan Nur Ahmadi</i>	
PERGESERAN PENGGUNAAN BAHASA INDONESIA AKIBAT PENGARUH SHUJOSHJI (PARTIKEL DI AKHIR KALIMAT) DALAM BAHASA JEPANG, SEBUAH PENGAMATAN TERHADAP PENGGUNAAN BAHASA INDONESIA OLEH KARYAWAN LOKAL DAN KARYAWAN ASING(JEPANG) DI PT. KDS INDONESIA .....	157 - 162
<i>Elisa Carolina Marion</i>	
PENGGUNAAN BAHASA DALAM SITUASI KEANEKABAHASAAN .....	163 - 167
<i>Fatchul Mu'in</i>	
PENGEKALAN BAHASA DALAM KALANGAN PENUTUR DIALEK NEGEI SEMBILAN BERDASARKAN PENDEKATAN DIALEKTOLOGI SOSIAL BANDAR ....	168 - 172
<i>Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar, Norsimah Mat Awal, dan Idris Aman</i>	
KONSEP DASAR STANDARISASI BAHASA SASAK: KE ARAH KEBIJAKAN PEMBELAJARAN DAN PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA SASAK DI LOMBOK .....	173 - 177
<i>Ahmad Sirulhaq</i>	
PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INDONESIA TERPADU (KOHERENS) .....	178 - 182
<i>Marida Gahara Siregar</i>	
HARI BERBAHASA JAWA DI LINGKUNGAN PENDIDIKAN .....	183 - 185
<i>Yasmina Septiani</i>	
JAVANESE-INDONESIAN RIVALRY IN AKAD NIKAH AMONG YOGYAKARTA JAVANESE SPEECH COMMUNITY .....	186 - 191
<i>Aris Munandar</i>	
PENGAJIAN BAHASA MADURA DAHULU, KINI DAN DI MASA YANG AKAN DATANG .....	192 - 197
<i>Iqbal Nurul Azhar</i>	
BAHASA INDONESIA ATAU BAHASA JAWA PILIHAN ORANG TUA DALAM BERINTERAKSI DENGAN ANAK DI RUMAH .....	198 - 202
<i>Miftah Nugroho</i>	
PILIHAN BAHASA DALAM MASYARAKAT MULTIBAHASA DI KAMPUNG DURIAN KOTA PONTIANAK (PENDEKATAN SOSIOLINGUISTIK) .....	203 - 207
<i>Nindwihapsari</i>	
PEMAKAIAN BAHASA JAWA OLEH PENUTUR BAHASA JAWA DI KOTA BONTANG KALIMANTAN TIMUR .....	208 - 212
<i>Yulia Mutmainnah</i>	
INSERTING JAVANESE ACRONYMS FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR RULES: A THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION .....	213 - 217
<i>Herri Susanto</i>	

THE JUNIOR SCHOOL STUDENTS" ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUNDANESE LANGUAGE LEARNING (A CASE STUDY AT 2 JUNIOR SCHOOLS AT BANDUNG, WEST JAVA, INDONESIA) .....	218 - 221
<i>Maria Yosephin Widarti Lestari</i>	
THE JUNIOR SCHOOL STUDENTS" ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUNDANESE LANGUAGE LEARNING (A CASE STUDY AT 2 JUNIOR SCHOOLS AT BANDUNG, WEST JAVA, INDONESIA) .....	222 - 225
<i>Tri Pramesti dan Susie C. Garnida</i>	
KEARIFAN LOKAL SEBAGAI BAHAN AJAR BAHASA INDONESIA BAGI PENUTUR ASING .....	226 - 230
<i>Hidayat Widiyanto</i>	
BAHASA, SASTRA, DAN PERANANNYA DALAM PEMBENTUKAN KECERDASAN EMOSI PADA ANAK (SEBUAH STUDI KASUS PELAKSANAAN PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA PADA KELAS SASTRA ANAK DAN SASTRA MADYA DI LEMBAGA PENDIDIKAN "BINTANG INDONESIA" KABUPATEN PACITAN) .....	231 - 236
<i>Sri Pamungkas</i>	
COMMUNICATION MODEL ON LEARNING INDONESIAN FOR FOREIGNER THROUGH LOCAL CULTURE .....	237 - 239
<i>Rendra Widyatama</i>	
VARIASI BAHASA RAGAM BAHASA HUMOR DENGAN MENGGUNAKAN UNSUR PERILAKU SEIKSIS DI DESA LETEH, REMBANG KAJIAN BAHASA DAN JENDER .....	240 - 245
<i>Evi Rusriana Herlianti</i>	
EKSPRESI KEBAHASAAN PEREMPUAN KLOPO DUWUR TERHADAP PERANNYA DALAM KELUARGA DAN MASYARAKAT (SEBUAH ANALISIS BAHASA DAN JENDER) .....	246 - 250
<i>Yesika Maya Oktarani</i>	
BELETER FOR TRANFERING MALAY LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL MORAL VALUES TO YOUNG MALAYS AT PONTIANAK, KALIMANTAN BARAT .....	251 - 255
<i>Syarifah Lubna</i>	
METAPHORS AS A DYNAMIC ARTEFACT OF SOCIAL VALUES EXPRESSED IN LETTERS TO EDITORS .....	256 - 260
<i>Deli Nirmala</i>	
THE EXPRESSION OF THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS "FRONT IS GOOD; BACK IS BAD" IN THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE .....	261 - 266
<i>Nurhayati</i>	
PEMERTAHANAN BAHASA: PERSPEKTIF LINGUISTIK KOGNITIF .....	267 - 270
<i>Luita Aribowo</i>	
KAJIAN LEKSIKAL KHAS KOMUNITAS SAMIN SEBUAH TELISIK BUDAYA SAMIN DESA KLOPO DUWUR, BANJAREJO, BLORA, JAWA TENGAH .....	271 - 276
<i>Vanny Martianova Yudianingtias</i>	

MANIPULATING SUNDANESES" PERCEPTIONS AND THOUGHTS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE THROUGH INDIGENIOUS LANGUAGE .....	277 - 280
<i>Retno Purwani Sari dan Nenden Rikma Dewi</i>	
THE POSITIONING OF BANYUMASAN AND ITS IDEOLOGY „CABLAKA“ AS REFLECTED IN LINGUISTIC FEATURES .....	281 - 284
<i>Chusni Hadiati</i>	
WHAT PEOPLE REVEALED THROUGH GREETINGS .....	285 - 289
<i>Dwi Wulandari</i>	
THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN MULTICULTURAL INTERACTIONS .....	290 - 292
<i>Eliana Candrawati</i>	
THE LOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND MORAL VALUES OF CULTURE-BOUND JAVANESE UTTERANCES USING THE WORD "OJO" SEEN FROM ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTIC POINT OF VIEW .....	293 - 297
<i>Muhamad Ahsanu</i>	
PENGUNGKAPAN IDEOLOGI PATRIARKI PADA TEKS TATA WICARA PERNIKAHAN DALAM BUDAYA JAWA .....	298 - 302
<i>Indah Arvianti</i>	
PEPINDHAN: BENTUK UNGKAPAN ETIKA MASYARAKAT JAWA .....	303 - 310
<i>Mas Sukardi</i>	
BAGAIMANA BAGIAN PENDAHULUAN ARTIKEL PENELITIAN DISUSUN? .....	311 - 316
<i>Jurianto</i>	
STYLISTIC IN JAVANESE URBAN LEGEND STORIES: A CASE STUDY IN RUBRIC ALAMING LELEMBUT IN PANJEBAR SEMANGAT MAGAZINE .....	317 - 320
<i>Valentina Widya Suryaningtyas</i>	
MAINTAINING SOURCE LANGUAGE IN TRANSLATING HOLY BOOK: A CASE OF TRANLSTAING AL-QUR"AN INTO INDONESIAN .....	321 - 325
<i>Baharuddin</i>	
TRANSLATING A MOTHER TONGUE .....	326 - 329
<i>Nurenzia Yannuar</i>	
TRANSLATION IGNORANCE: A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL SIGNS .....	330 - 334
<i>Retno Wulandari Setyaningsih</i>	
TERJEMAHAN UNGKAPAN IDIOMATIS DALAM PERGESERAN KOHESIF DAN KOHERENSI .....	335 - 338
<i>Frans I Made Brata</i>	
VARIASI FONOLOGIS DAN MORFOLOGIS BAHASA JAWA DI KABUPATEN PATI .....	339 - 342
<i>Ahdi Riyono</i>	
VARIASI FONOLOGIS DAN MORFOLOGIS BAHASA JAWA DI KABUPATEN PATI .....	343 - 347
<i>Ahdi Riyono</i>	

PROSES FONOLOGIS BAHASA KAUR YANG DIPICU FAKTOR EKSTERNAL LINGUISTIK .....	348 - 352
<i>Wisman Hadi</i>	
WORLD PLAY IN CALAOUNN OF CATATAN PLESETAN KELIK (CAPEK) .....	353 - 357
<i>Oktiva Herry Chandra</i>	
ANALYTIC CAUSATIVE IN JAVANESE : A LEXICAL-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH ....	358 - 362
<i>Agus Subiyanto</i>	
A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS ON JAVANESE POLITENESS: TAKING SPEECH LEVEL INTO MOOD STRUCTURE .....	363 - 367
<i>Hero Patrianto</i>	
PERGESERAN PENEMPATAN LEKSIKAL DASAR DALAM DERET SINTAGMATIK PADA TUTURAN JAWA PESISIR .....	368 - 372
<i>M. Suryadi</i>	
JAVANESE LANGUAGE MODALITY IN BLENCONG ARTICLES OF SUARA MERDEKA NEWSPAPER .....	373 - 377
<i>Nina Setyaningsih</i>	
POLISEMI DALAM TERMINOLOGI KOMPUTER (SEBUAH UPAYA APLIKASI PENGEMBANGAN DAN PEMELIHARAAN BAHASA) .....	378 - 384
<i>Juanda Nungki Heriyati</i>	
STRUKTUR FRASE NAMA-NAMA MENU MAKANAN BERBAHASA INGGRIS DI TABLOID CEMPAKA MINGGU INI (CMI) .....	385 - 389
<i>Wiwiek Sundari</i>	

## SOME REASONS FOR USING TRANSLATED INDONESIAN FOLKTALES IN TEACHING GENERAL ENGLISH FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT OF NON-ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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### **Abstract**

*The teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia universities is gaining popularity nowadays. Indonesian Universities give English as the vehicular language for all or part of the general curriculum. It is therefore important to identify the types of materials that best prepare students for academic work in L2. The traditional structurally-based texts and the newer, integrated, communicative courses might not be sufficient for the demands of the academic classes. On the other hand, material for reading comprehension that is based on translated Indonesian folktales provides a motivating medium for language learning while fostering the development of the thinking skills that are needed for L2 academic literacy. Folktales can act as a powerful change agent and lead to student cultural awareness while at the same time nurturing empathy, tolerance, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore through folktales, Indonesian students can promote their culture become a world heritage like batik and anklung*

### **1. Introduction**

Many universities in Indonesia give English as part of the undergraduate curriculum. English for college students is taught in 2 semesters. The first semester is general English, while the second semester is ESP (English for Specific Purpose). For ESP teachers do not find any difficulty in choosing the materials, because there are many books on ESP. For general English teacher has to find the materials by himself or herself. English for university in Indonesia is emphasized on Reading comprehension because one of the purposes is to make students accustomed to read text books in English.

To the fact that most universities in Indonesia, English is treated like other subject such as ISD (Basic Social Science), in which the teacher must face a large, multilevel class. Teachers of EFL suggested by Brown (2001) apparently familiar with the importance of meaningful, authentic principles, but in practice, many of them, especially at university, tend to emphasize more on language forms; using correct grammar, but less on language functions acceptability, so teaching English at university level in Indonesia is considered less successful because there is no awareness to English forms and functions, the students haven't succeeded to learn English.

Based on those problems, English teachers are challenged to find ways to make English learning more meaningful and successful in Indonesia. In an attempt to improve the quality of EFL teaching learning process, this paper argues that using translated Indonesian folktales in English class for non-English Department students can make students enter to a world familiar or unfamiliar to them due to the cultural aspects of folktales, and leads to critical thinking.

Folktales is no stranger in North American or Australian ESL classes, where for many years literary circles and a rich variety of reading response activities have been used to foster first and second language development<sup>22</sup>. The use of folktales also has a number of justifications in high school EFL instruction, particularly in those contexts where academic language proficiency is the goal.<sup>23</sup> The moral message in folk tales have inspired, and entertained people for a long time. Indonesian folktales such as *Jaka Kendil* give some benefits in EFL class.

Why a folktale?

Based on the idea that the most important foundation of education is character development, Folktales also help the readers/ students build their character. It does not mean that folktale or reading

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<sup>22</sup> See Ghosn "Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT" in *ELT Journal Volume 56/2 April 2002*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*



story leads directly to character development, it can help readers to grow, that pushed them to rethink their views, perhaps even brought about a change in their standards-in other words, story/ folktale influenced our character and helped to make us the person we are today.<sup>24</sup>

Representing human struggles and feelings is an essential part of good story telling. Whether the story is for children or young people, it gives the readers the vicarious experience of living through the trials and the thrills of characters in a book. With reflection, the readers can decide how he or she personally would have responded to the decisions the fictional character made. Each of those reflections and decisions gradually influences the thoughts and actions of the reader. With the guidance of teachers, some of the titles of folktales can help students to reflect, to decide, to become a principled person. The value of reading folktale and discussing life's challenges with students explore life's realities as they have never done before. Thoughtful teachers can use that folktale as a means of bringing students to the commitments that will gradually form character traits and citizenship attitudes that we all will be proud to acknowledge.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Some considerations for selecting translated Indonesian folktales

When choosing a folktale, for instance, one should exercise caution and look for stories that mirror the prevailing cultural values and traditions of a people, and avoid stories that portray outdated customs and beliefs that lead the student with impressions of 'funny', 'weird', or even 'dumb'.<sup>26</sup>

Though the original language is not english, in choosing translated Indonesian folktale, language becomes the first consideration in EFL class<sup>27</sup>. A certain amount of amusing and predictable repetition, repeated grammatical structures and formulaic expressions that are made clear in the story contex are important especially for students with low-intermediate level<sup>28</sup>. The use of vocabulary that provides synonyms and alternative expressions is also recommended. The assignment given to the students include looking for main points and supporting details; looking for cause-effect relationships; evaluating evidence, and becoming familiar with the type of language needed to express the thinking. Furthermore, teacher must be bearing in mind that a folktale is not only interesting to students, but also facilitates integration of the language skills<sup>29</sup>. Folktale may also help L2 learners to internalize the new language by providing access to a rich variety of linguistic items and a context for their communication efforts. teacher to expand the themes while making use of the new language in different contexts, and accommodating to student needs and interests.

Taylor further states that theme, illustration and the storyline are also important in choosing a folktale for EFL. The universal themes are recommended since students everywhere can identify with fear, courage, hope, love, belonging, and the need to achieve. Universal themes make variety of activities possible.

An aesthetically pleasing illustrations will help students to understand the text; good illustrations provide opportunities for discussions in which the key vocabulary can be exploited. The teacher may give a pictorial presentation of the story. Such an activity can provide important clues for predicting the content of the story. There are many texts that have front- cover illustrations including pictorial representations of the contents. Alternatively, the teacher can draw a picture based on the folktale or take the help of an artist friend. An illustration of folktale, *jaka Kendil* should show a "kendil".<sup>30</sup>

The next consideration is The Storyline . The story line should be clear, uncomplicated story-line with a satisfying, unmelodramatic conclusion. No flashbacks or complex, multifaceted characters for non english students are Important: The storyline should appeal to the adult reader; a high quality children's story which allows for a variety of interpretations and is thus enjoyable to various age groups.

## 3. Some benefits of using translated Indonesian Folktale

As one of literary genre, using folktale in ELT gives some benefits. One of the benefits is it educates the whole learner's personality and is motivating (Clandfield and Foord n.d). Students usually find literary texts more interesting than coursebook texts. Literature involves "affective, attitudinal, and

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<sup>24</sup> See *Developing Character through Literature: A Teacher's Resource Book*.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> See Taylor *Using Folktale*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> See Taylor *Using Folktale*

<sup>30</sup> See Aman *Other Folk Tales from Indonesia*

experiential factors" and so may motivate learners to read (McKay 1986:192). Duff and Maley stress that literary work is motivating because it deals with situations and themes that the writer considered important to address.<sup>31</sup> They point out that the motivational effect of literary texts is increased when the topics relate to the learner's personal experience (1990:6). Collie and Slater emphasize that it is the personal involvement encouraged in readers by literature that makes literary texts useful in language learning process and claim that "engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system" (1987). Moreover, "literature holds high status in many cultures and countries" therefore students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature" (Clandfield and Foord n.d.). Literature educates the whole learner's personality since it includes a lot of cross-curricular and cross-cultural relations. Through literature teachers may not only develop the learners' attitudes to reading and learning languages but they may also cultivate learners' attitudes to values. Folktale can be used to provide vicarious experiences that foster the development of emotional intelligence defined by Goleman (1995), which is essential for empathy and tolerance. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is learnt through experience, and interaction with others. Folktales seem to have the potential to provide, the much-needed experiences that will promote emotional intelligence. It can help the student to understand self and others better; it demonstrates that there is always hope, and that one can overcome even seemingly obstacles; it can foster development of empathy and tolerance<sup>32</sup>. Though different cultural backgrounds reflected in literary texts may cause some difficulties in reading and general comprehension, it is suggested to overcome this problem by exploring foreign cultures rather than to avoid using literature (Duff and Maley 1990:7; McKay 1986:193). McKay takes this argument further and makes the point about that in this way literature may increase learner's understanding and tolerance for cultural differences (1986:193). According to Carter and Long "literature can be a special resource for personal development and growth" offering "many linguistic opportunities to the language teacher" and allowing "many of the most valuable exercises of language learning to be based on material capable of stimulating greater interest and involvement" (1991:3).

Using translated Indonesia folktale in English class for undergraduate students can develop their thinking skills. Folktales can promote academic literacy. Academic literacy according to Ghosn "refers to the academic reading, writing, and thinking skills required for success in the general curriculum". Academic literacy requires critical thinking skills, and folktale offers a natural medium through which students can be introduced to the type of thinking and reasoning expected in academic classes. Critical thinking is important for students because it enables him or her to analyze, evaluate, explain, and restructure their thinking. It is believed that schools should focus on teaching their students critical thinking [skills](#) and cultivation of intellectual traits. Howie (1993) discusses the use of children's stories to introduce critical thinking to college students. He believes that "stories have two crucial advantage over traditional content: ... (First), because they are entertaining, students pervasive apprehension is reduced, and they learn from the beginning that critical thinking is natural, familiar and sometimes even fun. Second, the stories put issues of critical thinking in an easily remembered context"(p.90). He points out that instructors have responsibility to help students to develop cognitive skills because everyone needs to "make judgement, be decisive, come to conclusion, synthesize information, organize, evaluate, predict, and apply knowledge" By reading and writing, students develop their critical thinking skills (p.24).

Questions added to each story should train students to think critically. Some of the questions are exemplified below:

1. Without considering his social class, Jaka Kendil in the story of *Joko Kendil* proposes one of the king's daughters to be his wife, do you think Joko Kendil is a dreamer or a man who believe in the idea that every human is to choose?
2. What would have happened if princess melati did not break the 'kendil' ?

Different stories will have different questions. The questions depend on the plot, characters, conflict, climax, complication and resolution of each story. The more questions requiring critical thinking students answer, the better prepared they will be to face the world once they graduate.

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<sup>31</sup> See Duff and Maley in *Literature*.

<sup>32</sup> See Irma K Ghosn "Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT" in *ELT Journal Volume 56/2 April 2002*

Folktale also make students creative as they asked to re-write. Re-writing exercises is a creative activity that the teacher can introduce in order to enhance the students' understanding and appreciation of the story for the improvement of their expressive and receptive skills.

Re-writing activities may be 'free' or 'controlled'. In the former, students enjoy the freedom of expressing, in their own words, what they have understood from the text. Here they can write a parallel folktale using the same theme in a different background, may be from other part of Indonesia or abroad. In controlled or guided writing exercises, students are given guidelines. They may be asked to summarize the story in a fixed number of words, or to rewrite the text with a different ending. There are numerous folktales that the students can perform with the guidance and encouragement from the teacher.

Furthermore, using translated Indonesian folktales lead to students cultural awareness. Folktales are effective when teaching culture to students. Folktales transmit the culture of the people about whom the stories were written. By learning about the culture, student learn about the past and present, and about people's customs and traditions. As in *jaka Kendil* students will be introduced with the word "kendil". Teacher can ask students the use of kendil, which

Finally, by using translated Indonesian folktales in English class for non-english department, students can have a better understanding on their own culture and tradition and at the same time they preserve one of national heritages.

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