Narrating Presence: The Exploration of Students' Linguistic and

Cultural Backgrounds

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Each language has been typically considered distinguished from one language to another. This vision opens our access to the landscape of distinct language horizons. We live on the stage of languages contested, which is one of reasons why foreign language should have interestingly been taught and learned. Similarly, teaching and learning languages should relate to our professional development. In this article, the imperative language values are prioritized and the merits of foreign language learning in particular are critically explored. The benefits of language learning are exemplified by university students learning micro linguistics, English Phonology, in the environment of local wisdom focused on the students' regional languages. The students are considered bilingual in the learning processes of micro linguistics enriching phonological self-awareness both by honouring their local language and culture while enhancing themselves through the learning of English as foreign language. The learning process can be managed through culturally relevant teaching where learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds are reflected in their foreign language learning process. In so doing, linguistic and cultural diversity as well as discretion would be fostered. Learning language has resulted a giant leap in language consciousness, which brings about linguistic astuteness in the nature of learners' culture communion.

Key words: linguistics, culture, teaching, learning, community

1. Introduction

The reason that draws my attention to write this paper is my basic tenets toward language. I am impressed by language and culture integration as stated by Shamail (2015). She argues that the integration of language and culture is intertwined, interdependent, and productive in today's world, in which most countries teaching English as foreign language (EFL) have adapted English language education by incorporating intellectual instructional materials, sketching parallel with the achievement of native and target cultures, underlining local wisdoms, and integrating inventive language teaching methods. In relation to language teaching, English language teaching (ELT) illustrates native speaker community and culture identity. Proshina (2014) states that the objective focus of ELT lies at the heart of communication, which requires successful users of English compared to a perfect-near native speakers. Being aware of linguistic identifications and revealing cultural identity motivate learners' awareness of varieties in forms and communicative strategies to transfer meanings. Vygotsky (1978) presumed that language is the mediating tool that defines an individual cultural identity, as language is the foundation of thoughts and communication. These ideas are underlined and enriched in this paper.

1.1 Professional Development, Language, and Culture

Professional development refers to skills and knowledge attained for personal development and career advancement (Saleem et al, 2014). Knowledge and skills are basically used in academic and social life. Equally, language teachers may not effectively teach students when the teachers have inadequate relevant language knowledge and skills. In line with Holmes' idea (2005), she

argues that knowledge has not been constantly static as it changes after every moment and one must keep informed accordingly. Guskey (2000) views professional development is designed intentionally, ongoing and systematic process that focuses on the advancement of individual's professional knowledge, skills and attitude so the learners' learning outcomes can practically be optimised. Jadama (2014) states that the successful teaching requires adequate knowledge regarding subject matter, which can practically be learned by students using in-depth learning about the content and successfully be gained in their examinations.

Teachers having adequate relevant language knowledge and skills bring about language preserves that can possibly be applied into thought building. In relation to individuals' advancement, language allows us to communicate feelings, ideas, concerns, and hopes. Hence, learning and sharing experiences from one another become possible, and we live on the stage of diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultures. Culturally and linguistically diverse student population, according to Bullock et al. (2013), will critically be motivated to increase a strong collaborative relationship between teachers and learners. Learners' diverse needs can be provided scientifically based instructional strategies and techniques (Little & Houston, 2003). Professional development and the implementation of evidence-based practices are needed to change in classroom by continually improving learners' needs incorporating university goals so that classroom students become learning community. Teachers as to the best-evidence practitioners professionally develop their knowledge and skills through a goal-oriented process within the learning community which is sustained through coaching, mentoring, and feedback provision.

Research on mother tongue includes a part of learning local cultures, which significantly lead to perceive the world of language and culture within the learning community. Language and culture appreciated in legitimate social contexts prove pride and confidence. This view can practically be evidenced in learning micro linguistic, English phonology classrooms. Students who usually take a linguistic class have learned theoretical views of phonology textbooks, and they need to prove evidence-related phonetics in their mother tongue language. In that case, Jenkins (2004) states pronunciation teaching research began to move on both to sophisticated approach to interlanguage phonology taking universal development and superasegmental features along with segmental. The students have considered essentially learning pronunciation, which can be obstructive to communicate with other people. When they cannot understand particular pronunciation and sounds, miscommunication can happen accordingly. Consequently, teaching-learning pronunciation should primarily be placed in both accurately sound production and meaningfully conversational comprehension to alleviate problems in corresponding with other cultures.

This article presents an objective of intelligibility and comprehensibility. The objective of intelligibility examines differences between English pronunciation students learn in university level. The factors included in the intelligibility are pronunciation, stress, intonation, and vowel-consonant sounds of English. Secondly, the objective of comprehensibility investigates the students' communication with other people from other cultures within the use of English as either foreign or second language. This comprehensibility part encompasses miscommunication factors in relation to intercultural issues, such as cultural, pragmatic and socio-linguistic aspects.

In this study, participants were 60 undergraduate students. A survey was also conducted to determine their background information and to search their attitudes toward English in contact with other cultures of parts of the world.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Intelligibility on Words

Teaching English pronunciation helps students accurately recognise sound production, and they finally become aware of learning language skills (Hayward et al, 2014) and explicit as well as systematic instruction in the development of phonological awareness (Taub & Szente, 2012). In the previous study, Field (2005) conducted research on intelligibility of pronunciation instruction, but left unanswered about aspects of what makes learners' speech intelligible. Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielak (2015, pp. 3-21) have addressed learners' or teachers' beliefs using form-focused instruction and offering remedy the situation by approaching pronunciation

teaching. However, this present study focuses on intelligible communication, as proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), contemporarily contends that explicit pronunciation is necessary in language curricula, and comprehensibility, as proposed by Kachru (1996) is a matter of assigning meaning to utterances that can be put upon verbal acts by interlocutors in social interaction.

2.2 Comprehensibility on Meaning

Apart from pronunciation issues, comprehensibility aspects may have miscommunicated with intercultural competence. Kachru and Smith (2008) contend that:

> The recognition of a meaning attached to a word or utterance, i.e. the contextual meaning of the word in a sociocultural setting as well as the illocutionary force of an utterance. For example, when someone listens to the word "please" he/she ordinarily understands it to be connected with a request or directive, usually polite. In such a case the comprehensibility of the word, or the recognition of the illocutionary act of the speaker, is high.

Speech act functions, furthermore, prove essentially relate to culture and language learning, in which intercultural competence and language learning can be traced back to Gulbinskienė & Lasauskienė (2014). They argue that teaching culture of the target language and teaching linguistic knowledge have primarily drawn language scholars' attention in the application of effective language skills and the knowledge of cultural environment, and thus foreign language teaching should help students base a solid foundation of language and grow their cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of social development. Jung (2010) contend that the proper instructions of teaching and learning materials to learn a foreign language may be needed to develop learners' cultural aspects and intercultural competence since among non-native speakers of English, learners may perceive diverse varieties of English from different cultural backgrounds. Lee (2003) also states that either foreign or second language has a small opportunity playing important roles in social development, while meaning and content are imperative in the development of social communication. Most previous studies suggest the emphasis of learners' communicative behaviour, but this present study uses intercultural competence to strongly relate to what is factual and what is learned.

2.3 Bilingual Students

Currently, most learners who have studied languages learn at least two languages and cultures. This idea is in line with Weinreich's bilingual system (1979) that the speech of bilinguals can be interfered due to a familiarity of more than one language. One may uneasily understand another language or need to get used to it through language contact. Learners make interim instructions which are neither their native language nor the target language. They are signs of linguistic creativity but may be considered as errors by some specialists (Gueye, 2015). Despite interference due to the either foreign or second language, it does not necessarily mean we abandon our culture identity. The interference caused cross-linguistic influence, according to Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008), is phonological transfer, orthographic transfer, lexical transfer, semantic transfer, morphological transfer, syntactic transfer, discursive transfer, pragmatic transfer, and socio-linguistic transfer. In the present study, however, it focuses on pragmatic and socio-linguistic transfer in the identification of comprehensibility on conversational meanings.

2.4 Socio-intercultural Aspects

English has been widely used among people to communicate with one another. When difficulties of communication occur, Gumperz (1983) individuals of different cultural backgrounds communicating in public speech events can exacerbate mutual representations. Social performance and people-based sharing the same background may tend to break down. Consequently, different cultural backgrounds in communicative competence can extensively be anticipated within intercultural competence, so that communication tend to maintain social relations. This is proposed by Byram (2009) intercultural communicative competence represents learners' relationships indicating critical cultural awareness, which ensures that language teaching has an educational function. In the present study, the author, therefore, uses intercultural communicative competence to comprehend conversational meanings.

3. Methodology
3.1 Participant

In this study as shown on Table 1, participants were 44 undergraduate students from two different phonology classes in a university, Indonesia. They used English as foreign language, and learned English at intermediate level of proficiency, majoring English. 6 students of them were basically at higher level of English proficiency. On the other hand, 5 students used Thai language, and 5 others spoke Russian. The students who spoke Thai and Russian learned English at pre-intermediate level of proficiency, and used English as second language. They were in contact with the 50 students taking English phonetics classes. The 10 students did major a variety of subjects, which were non-English department in two different Islamic universities.

Table 1. Students' Linguistic Information

Students	Assumed English Proficiency using Self-Evaluation				
	Pre-advanced	Intermediate	Pre-intermediate		
Number	6	44	10		
	Used English at most in present daily activities				
	Habitually	Occasionally	Seldom	undecided	
Number	4	27	15	14	
	Aimed at learning				
	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Grammar+Vocab
Number	9	7	25	15	4
	Spoke first language				
	Indonesian	Thai	Russian		
Number	50	5	5		

3.2 Instrument

A survey was conducted to administer students' intelligibility and comprehensibility of English either foreign or second language as well as the influence of their first language. The author conducted this survey at two Islamic different universities.

3.3 Treatment

This study was based on the treatment, which is on intelligibility and comprehensibility. The intelligibility was focused on pronunciation, stress, intonation, vowel sounds, and consonant sounds, while the comprehensibility was cultural aspects, sociolinguistic-pragmatic aspects, and linguistic aspects. The students were taught pronunciation subject in two different phonology classes. The 50 students learning phonetics were included in the classes, while 10 other students who majored non-English department were not.

3.4 Procedure

This study focused two steps conducted firstly on two different Islamic universities, Malang, East Java, Indonesia; secondly followed by the collection of questionnaire and further analysed aspects of intelligibility and comprehensibility.

4. Findings and Discussion
4.1 Intelligibility on Words

Students who needed to alleviate intelligibility issues learned pronunciation, stress, and intonation. They were also asked to respond whether pronunciation is obstructive. Besides, the most two essential factors concerned in EFL spoken activities, the students preferred to speak with other people in a particular type of English accent.

Table 2. Intelligibility on Words

4.1.1 What kind of English Pronunciation do EFL learners tend to use?			
Student Number	British 19	Australian 6	American 35
4.1.2 Which factors influence EFL learners to speak English? (Select Two)			
Student Number	First Language 10	Cultural Aspects 29	Educational Aspects 21	Occupational Aspects 0
4.1.3 Is pronunciation an obstacle to communicate with other cultures?			
Student Number	No 24	Yes 36	
4.1.4 Which aspects of English are the most distinctive from your first language?			
Student Number	Intonation 16	Stress 29	Pronunciation 15

4.2 Comprehensibility

In this part, the author needed to obtain informative and meaningful communication aspects of English both used as foreign and second language. The aspects include linguistic, social, cultural, and pragmatic means of communication.

Table 3. Comprehensibility on Meaning

Students	4.2.1 Which factor is imperative to communicate with other cultures?				
	Linguistics		Social Factors		Culture
Number	14		19		27
	4.2.2 Which aspects make you difficult to communicate with non-native speakers across countries? (Select Three)				
	Utterance Meaning	Vowel & Consonant	Cooperative Principle	Speech Act (perlocution)	Intercultural Competence
Number	16	8	10	13	13
	4.2.3 What do you best recommend teaching English in EFL contexts? (Select Two)				
	Linguistics	Phonetics	Pragmatics	Sociolinguistics	Culture
Number	12	10	10	11	17

5. Discussion

The students stated that English conversations among non-native English speakers from different countries and cultures were dominantly covered by intelligibility and comprehensibility. The intelligibility accented mostly by American English proved [r] phoneme, which is clearly heard. The students typically used American accent as most their contacts learned TOEFL. Compared to British accent, they were not much exposed within the accent community, and followed by the group of Australian accent as the group usually watched television-pay Australian news frequently.

The most influential aspects assumed by the students that they learned English skills, which were much influenced by cultural aspects, including social practices occurring in the students' community, such as social-media communication (BBM, Whatsapps), youtube.com website, and English movies. Educational factors, however, proved less significant influence, which came from both in classroom activities and learning community in a university, such as listening comprehension skills. Even though the 60 students are bilinguals, they did not think their mother tongue as their first language proves a pivotal impact on their foreign language learning. In contrast, the other 10 students who were non English students argued that their first language affected English learning as their second language due to their frequent use of first language to maintain their social-cultural heritage.

In relation to pronunciation barriers, the students considered insignificant to master English pronunciation despite the variety of world Englishes. They thought that even they understood Standard English pronunciations, they significantly needed to get in touch with other cultures and to get used to speaking English variety of the cultures. They suggested learning

pronunciation supported by intercultural competence would increase intelligibility and solve pronunciation issues in relation to the passion plea of communication sense.

The difference between first language and the English language they used to communicate with other people reflected in English stress. English stress was found that it has different ways of stress in words, and will differently be stressed when the words are applied into utterances. The students argued that the English stress become issues of utterance meaning unless the application of English stress incorporated individuals' power into culturally-bound language learning. Intonation and pronunciation, in contrast, was ineffectively compared with stressed words impinging on their communication with other people.

Dealing with comprehensibility on meaning, the students responded that the communication with other cultures was mostly accepted in culture, followed by social factors and the study of linguistics. The cultural factor played important roles as to the student environment reflected in their learning community and student-related intercultural activities supported comprehension on conversational meanings. The author himself, similarly, taught the students had learned the new development of adequate balance among students' needs to the meaningful improvement of culture and linguistic knowledge within linguistic classroom context. They argued that learning linguistic had brought about fruitful knowledge horizons when English language is no longer assumed 'foreign' or 'second', but synergised through socio-linguistic transfer to build a critical cultural awareness. It has been suggested that phonological awareness becomes inadequate when intercultural communication is absent-minded.

Despite essential cultural factors, the students' difficulty on comprehending conversations was mostly pointed by utterance meaning due to their linguistic backgrounds; and consequently, this issue was indicated by the students' best recommendation studying linguistics in EFL teaching context. Cooperative principle was relatively chosen, but the least was vowel-consonant sound production. The students considered the best recommendation proposed should culturally be involved in EFL context, followed by the study of linguistics, and socio-pragmatic aspects. The micro linguistic, Phonology, was relatively similar chosen by sociolinguistics.

6. Conclusion

The students felt sensitized by a culturally-bound teaching-learning orientation. This presence has been explored the students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a variety of nations. The students, at least, tend to be aware of both the study on culture and linguistics into an integrated fashion. Otherwise, teaching-learning language becomes a part of issues in EFL/ESL context.

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