

Teaching Intercultural Knowings through Texts, a paper for ‘Language in the Online and Offline World 3: the Transformation?’ a National Conference, May 29-30, 2012, Petra Christian University.

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Abstract

Integrating culture in the teaching of language is an integral part (Atkinson, 1999). This might stem from the idea that cultural knowledge is essential for L2 learners to avoid the possible problems in the interaction process with the target language speakers (Liddicoat, 2004), as they might become more open to the differences (Knutson, 2006). In this regard, learning language does not merely aim at achieving communicative competence but also intercultural competence (Corbet, 2003). This concept is known as Intercultural Language Education, the content of which are considered as the most appropriate answer to globalisation (Gundara & Potera 2008 cited in Harbon 2010). To make the concepts of intercultural clear for students, the aspects of *intercultural knowings* (knowing about, knowing how, knowing why, and knowing oneself) are explored in this paper through the study of texts under the principles proposed by Moran (2001).

Key words: *Intercultural language education, intercultural knowings, intercultural third space, value laden words, emic and ethic perspectives.*

Introduction

The integration of culture in language teaching has gained growing recognition. Byram (2001 cited in Harbon, 2006) mention that Intercultural Language Education which ‘underpins the school curriculum is in an increasing number of countries in the world’ (p.28). This might be because cultural knowledge, as has been argued, essential for language learners aside from than just communicative competence (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000c; Liddicoat, 2004; Scarino, 2000), or in other words, they need ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (Corbet, 2003, p.30). This rationale also might be based on the basic tenet that if not given cultural knowledge, language learners might create ‘uninformed and unanalysed assumption derived from L1 culture’ which may create problems when they interact with the speakers of the target language (Liddicoat, 2004, p.18) and the fact that ‘language learning and teaching and culture are mutually implicated’ (Atkinson, 1999, p. 647), as well as the notion that ‘language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality’ (Kramsch, 1998a cited in Risager, 2006, p.14). Therefore, having cultural knowledge of target language is necessary to avoid the problems (Liddicoat, 2004), as they might become more open to the differences (Knutson, 2006). Hence, it is perhaps not exaggerated that, Gundara & Potera (2008, cited in Harbon 2010) argued that “intercultural education is the most appropriate answer to globalisation” (p.1).

Stemming from this above understanding, thus intercultural education is expected to project ‘understanding and valuing all languages and cultures, one’s own language(s) and culture(s), target language(s) and culture(s), how to mediate among languages and cultures as well as developing intercultural sensitivity (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

One of ways of implementing intercultural education is by examining written texts used in the classroom. The ways in which these are utilised inter-culturally, so that these texts can

facilitate student's intercultural awareness. The three texts chosen in this assignment can be classified as homely texts (Johns, 1993), texts which are available in daily life encounters. Accordingly, analysing these would enable the language learners to 'view academic discourses as socially constructed' (p.39). Following this, the assignment will discuss them and suggest the ways in which 'both teachers and students are engaged in a creative process of learning' (Crozet and Liddicoat, 1999, p. 123). Prior to the discussion, the profile of the learners are described.

The profile of the learners

I am assuming that the learners would be adult Australian learners in the upper intermediate or early advanced. Furthermore, I am assuming that these students have inter-culturally been at the *acceptance stage* along the line of *ethno relative stage* (Bernett and Allen, 2003). This assumption is based on the nature of the topic of the three texts presented which indicate that those would be appropriate utilised in acceptance stage level with the criteria such as the fact that students become the difference seekers, in which they approximately get used to this statements: "How can I learn more about Mexican culture before my trip?", "When my host family talks like that I'm not really not sure what they mean but it will surely be interesting to try and figure this out!". "I know how the Taiwanese do this, is it different in Hongkong or Singapore?" (Bernett and Allen, 2003) (p.262). Pedagogically, the texts would be utilised to teach the same group of learners in the same class.

Discussion

The first text is about the concept of seasons and what people usually do in the season. (See, White, 1990: 8-9). It is very simple in that it has got two pictures, a man ploughing rice field, and the picture of peoples harvesting rice. A short description on each text is given. Those are about seasons and what people do in Indonesia. Additionally, two cultural notes are provided. The text uses the 'third person' such as Pak Suyanto, Dewi Sri Etc. These are appropriate to teach inter-culture as the concept of seasons, gotong royong, Dewi Sri are 'value laden' especially for the farmers living in the village. However, there are some words which are inappropriately used in the cultural notes in which the writer of the book find difficulty in using the words 'bekerjasama', 'bergotong royong' in appropriate contexts. Even though, they share similar meaning, but can not be used interchangeably, for example they can not say "Awat hati-hati! Kalau ujian di kelas jangan gotong royong!" (p.9). The word "gotong royong" in this sentence should be replaced by "kerjasama". Furthermore, it is better to exemplify more examples on the use of words "gotong royong" and "kerjasama" rather than directly provide their use in the text.

In teaching the text, teachers may ask the students to see the pictures and the text in the pictures as well as the words having "value laden". If available, teachers can play the video on it. These activities denote *knowing about* stage. Then teacher pause the activity for a moment. After that the teacher ask about rice harvesting time based on the text and video played, as well as how do the people harvest the rice. Teachers may have the students do in pairs or group. Then the teacher let the students explore their ideas and answer the question either individually or in group. Then teacher can lead the class to discuss "value laden" words such as "gotong royong", "Dewi Sri" etc in Indonesia. If the students do not understand it, the teacher can explain it. This stage students and the teachers explore *knowing why*, why 'gotong royong' (mutual cooperation), 'Dewi Sri' happen in Indonesia and why the peoples perceive them as good things (emic perspective) and how other society value these concepts (ethic perspective) (Moran, 2001). To reinforce the concept, teachers can have

students read again or re-watch the video. Then the teachers get the students to compare with harvesting system in Australia and whether or not the belief about 'Dewi Sri' occurs so that they know two perspectives. The last step is teacher asks the students' opinion or perception about the concept. This is to reveal students' oneself (knowing one-self). (See the appendix Text I, for teacher's exploration of knowing about, why, and oneself)

The second text is about wedding invitation (White, 1990, p.116). This might be very insightful to let students know about the usual form and content of wedding invitation. The text is also 'value laden' as it denotes cultural values such as the use of 'Arabic language' such as 'Bismillahirrahmanirrahiimi', 'Assalamu 'a laikum Wr. Wb', in the opening which indicate that the invitation is from Moslem. The use of academic titles such as 'Ir. Suharmayanti & Drs. Ahmad Hidayat' also shows that the married couples are from 'intellectual family' in which may indicate from middle-up status. This part is usually in the middle of the invitation Furthermore, the citation of the name of the family in the bottom part (e.g. keluarga Moh K Soekirman, keluarga Ruhanda), is the usual feature of wedding invitation in the last or bottom part. All these are interculturally representative for the classroom material.

In presenting this text, the teachers may ask the students to examine the feature of the texts, including the opening of the text, the contents of the texts, which is who marry to whom, when, where etc, the expectation of the hosts (inviter) as well as the opening (for knowing about). The also can ask the students in which part of the texts which is 'value laden bound'. These activities signal *knowing about*. Then the teacher pause it, and let the students examine the text carefully. After that, the teacher gets students to answer the questions. All responses from all students should be accounted to whether their answers complement each other. If there are necessary aspects that they do not understand, in which it is most likely to happen, about the genre of this invitation and the cultural value embedded, teachers should explain it.

Furthermore, teachers can elaborate more by explaining that the invitation is common in Javanese Culture especially those Moslem and how those Islamic values and Javanese culture influence the way the wedding invitation is shaped, which constitutes *knowing why*. Moreover, in order to provide more insights, teachers can play a video on this marriage. And the students can question then after the play. After that teachers ask the students to compare about the tradition of marriage in their own culture, starting from the invitation, when, where, who can marry to whom etc, the procession of the marriage, religious values governing the marriage, etc. This comparison involves *emic and ethic perspective* about marriage in Javanese. For *knowing how*, teacher can get the students to write similar wedding invitation so that they experience how to structure the invitation in the target language. Then teachers ask the students about their opinion about Javanese-Islamic value on marriage tradition compared to their own. This at which they explore about their intercultural stance (*knowing one-self*). (Further elaboration of teacher's activities to explore knowing about, how, why and one-self is in the appendix text II).

The last text in this assignment is 'asking about map and brochures' in Bali (White, 1990, p.131-133). This text is quite common text telling about where usually people can obtain map and brochures in the local tourist info office. The possible value laden is about the tourist resorts on the map, for example how these places associated with Hindu's view for example Pura Besakih, Garuda Wisnu Kencana, etc.

First of all, teachers get students to examine the conversations and the Bali map there. Teachers may inform the students what kinds of phrases used to use to ask about map, ask for

direction in Bahasa Indonesia, the usual topics to talk and what is usually not to talk, etc and yet, it is also beneficial to let them know about the most famous places for tourist in that map and Hindu's culture as well, because the majority of Bali's people are Hindu's e.g. 'Pura Besakih', 'Banjar' etc, these in which students are exposed in *knowing about*. After that, students may ask about cultural concept of Hindus, the life of people, public transport, beautiful places there etc. Then, teachers can have students role play about how to ask for direction in Bahasa Indonesia so that they '*know how*' to get to the spot they plan to go. Providing students with special Bali website is also insightful for students to get the visual understanding. Next, teachers can ask the students to compare with their own way of expressing directions, the relation between tourist resort and religious teaching in Bali and compare it tourist resort in Australia, whether or not such relationship exist in their own country so that they *know why* whether or not those concepts occur in a particular society as well as the impact that they have. These would also involve emic (insider) and ethic (outsider) perspectives of the concepts. In *knowing one-self*, then the students are asked about their opinion the concept of asking direction in Australia and Indonesia, the concept of religious teaching and tourism heritage in Bali to that of those in Australian context. These all stuffs would enrich and develop their intercultural knowledge. (See, appendix text III for further exploration on knowing about, how, why and one-self).

In summary, by teaching those three pieces of texts above, teachers and students can explore the concept and the practice of inter-culture such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), seasons, wedding invitation, asking direction, as well as Bali's religious and tourism heritage. These would most likely help them prepare to know more, or may be visit Bali, Java someday. It is also an advantage that the students can foster their cultural understanding, aside from comprehending three texts above, to conduct ethnographic interview in Java, Bali etc to get broader and deeper understanding about the content of those three texts (Knutson, 2006; Cunico, 2005; Roberts et al, 2001 in Byram & Feng, 2006).

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