

# LEARNING ENGLISH: CULTURALLY CONTEXTUAL LITERACY BASED

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## LEARNING ENGLISH: Culturally-Contextual Literacy Based

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### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at understanding 1) what factors hindering the Indonesian learners of English, 2) how the culturally- literacy based is implemented. The method used was descriptive qualitative. The data collecting technique was carried by doing a library technique, in depth interview and recording. The library research was done to seek the materials to both the linguistic and non linguistic differences between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. The interviewing and recording techniques are used interview related to the learning difficulties faced by the learners. The technique of data analysis was done by using the identity and distributional methods. The validity of the data was implemented by using triangulation technique. Based on the result, it can be concluded that there were factors hindering the Indonesian learners of English. The linguistic difference includes phrase and clause structures, tense system, as well as singular and plural forms, whereas the non linguistic difference covers the cultural context found both in *Bahasa Indonesia* as well as English. The expression of “*Where are you going?*”, for example is very commonly expressed in the Indonesian cultural setting whereas this is not appropriately found in the English because this will be regarded as knowing one’s business.

**Keywords:** linguistic difference, culturally-contextually literacy, English, *bahasa Indonesia*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English is a foreign language in Indonesia. Having been observed, not many Indonesian students, either actively or passively master the English language. Those wanting to master it have to attend the English courses and those who do not, their mastery of English is just at the threshold level to answer the examination problems. This leads to the idea that English is difficult to learn.

The above situation arises questions on the factors influencing those difficulties. Is it the curriculum, the teaching materials, methods, media, and teachers that cause the students to be less motivated (Hotimah, 2010; Harmer, 2013). There has been a lot of changes of curricula in Indonesia (Wiyono, 2017). Those changes are among others, Students Active Learning (CBSA), Competency-based Curriculum (KBK), School-based Curriculum and 2013 Curriculum). The result of the first three curricula above are not yet satisfactory, whereas the 2013 curriculum is in still in a process of being implemented. The learning materials have also been changing in accordance with the curriculum implemented. There has also been various applications in relation to methods. The learning media, in the digital era, is also applied, yet, once again, the results are still far from being satisfying.

Various surveys have been done by teachers and the result was discussed at the forum of class-teachers’ assembly MGMP. This organization is created to develop the teachers’ profession in relation to the students’ constraints in learning English. A lot of classroom action researches have also been carried out to increase the teachers’ performances, yet, the students’ mastery of the four skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing has not been satisfactory (Hermayawati, 2010; Madya, 2013; Hersulastuti, 2015; Ratminingsih, 2016).

There is an opinion stating that the English learning is focused on the grammatical rules. This idea is based on language usage rather than language use. This causes a lack of students’ skills

on using the language in real life situation as the teachers are busy explaining the rules. The students are made to memorize the formulas such as tenses, pluralization and so forth. The newest approach was the English language teaching based on texts. The focus of this teaching was that the learners were directed to master the above four skills,- listening, speaking, reading and writing (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007, Parrott, 2010; Wiyono, 2012).

Certainly, language teaching may, inevitably not be related to rules of the language itself as they were created as general characteristics of the language. The rules are intended that the speakers may not make mistakes when they use it to communicate. Those rules are for example, tense system in English, which is not found in Bahasa Indonesia. Factors affecting the difficulties of L2 learners will be the focus of this study. The questions that arise from the above description are: 1) what factors hindering the Indonesian learners of English 2) how the culturally-contextual literacy based is implemented?

The grammar rules, which cover phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, are important in L2 learning. The four components should be well understood whenever one wants to master the grammar of a language (Alwi, 2000; Setiyadi, 2011, Verhaar, 2012). Phonology, for example, which studies phonetics and phonology, place an important role in sound systems, segmental and supra segmental voices, speech organ producing voices, variations and differences of phonemes and so forth.

In the field of morphology,;-- the study of word structure, there is a relation of words and word forms, word variation, and type of words, and so on. In the English tenses, for example, the irregular verbs change according to the tense system of the language. Morpheme variations are related to singular and plural forms and types of verbs have a close connection to verbs, nouns, adjectives, together with their own characteristics.

Syntax studies the structure among words in the sentence. Functions of sentences occupying certain category will constitute knowledge of functions and structures of sentences. For example, the function of a predicate is always occupied by a verb in English whereas in Bahasa Indonesia the position of a predicate can be occupied by a noun, adjective or verb. In Bahasa Indonesia, the form of *Ia guru* is acceptable, yet, in English, this form cannot be regarded as true since the to be form *is* is needed to make the sentence meaningful

Semantics which studies meaning is important as it relates to choice of words. This also includes differences of meanings, intentions, signs and symbols, sense relations including synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, ambiguity, and semantic field, and so forth.

The above studies are necessary in language teaching, but they are not directly taught to students of either elementary or secondary schools. However, those aspects need to be understood by teachers. If they are taught, the suitable method should be chosen as they are not integrated in the curriculum as those belong the studies about the language and not studies of skills.

The knowledge of cultural contexts of the nation whose language are learned plays a very significant role. This is to know the habit of L2 speakers besides comparing the culture of L1 and L2 that should also be taken into account. The habit of the Indonesians to be hospitable and friendly to those who have been acquainted is usual but this may not be common for other speakers, such as English native speakers. In learning English, the learners need to understand of other cultures as the cultural contacts of two or more cultures may create certain problems. The understanding of other cultures may be done by reading literary texts reflecting the regional cultures as Indonesia is a multicultural country. Therefore, the English language teaching need to be based on literacy which includes linguistic literacy, readers, writers, texts, cultural contexts and so on (Kern, 2012; Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014; Nurrahman, 2016; Aubrey, 2016).

## 2. METHOD

1 The method used was descriptive qualitative. The data collecting technique was carried out by doing a document technique, in depth interview, and recording (Subroto, 2007). The document research was done to seek the materials related to both the linguistic and non linguistic differences between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. The interviewing and recording techniques are used interview related to the learning difficulties faced by the learners. The validity of the data was implemented by using triangulation technique. The validity is examined by triangulation of the data, researcher, methodology as well as theory. The data from the books and other materials together with data obtained from the informants were collected by, respectively, a document study and interview. The researcher also compared the research results aspek-aspek linguistik dan nonlinguistik. The technique of data analysis was done by using the identity and distributional methods (Sudaryanto, 2015). The identity methods were used to analyze identities of phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in a language. The distributional methods were used to analyze elements forming words, phrases, clauses and sentences by using deletion, substitution, expansion, interruption, permutation paraphrase, and repetition techniques.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Findings

From the gathered data, the findings related factors affecting the hindrances of the Indonesian learners of English are the teachers' lack of literacy on linguistic and non linguistic aspects;-- the understanding of cultural aspects of English and *Bahasa Indonesia*, whereas the linguistic aspects include syntax, phonology and semantics.

Teachers are expected to know the difference between the Indonesian and English phrase as well as clause structures. The phrase *buku ini*, in *Bahasa Indonesia*, is structured by noun before the adjective whereas in English the phrase is structured that the adjective precedes the noun *this book*. The controversial pattern may cause a problem for the Indonesian learners of English. Tense system is another problem of the learners. It needs a long time to master of the change of irregular verb forms for example, the present tense *see*, the past tense form *saw* and the past participle form *seen*. In *Bahasa Indonesia*, the change of verb forms does not exist though it the event took place in the past, or is taking place at the present moment or has just taken place. They all use the same verb forms. If the learners do not know the changes of verb forms, they will get difficulties in communication using English as verbs have significant roles in getting the meaning across. The learners need to memorize a certain number of verb forms in order to get the exact dictions.

5 There also exist the differences between singular and plural forms in English and in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Singular and plural forms in English also contribute difficulties for the learners. In *Bahasa Indonesia*, the plural form is only shown by pluralizing the number before the noun. The expression of "*Ada sepuluh buku di meja*" for instance, the word *buku* is not necessarily to be pluralized since the word *sepuluh* has already shown the plural form, whereas in English besides the *number*, the word *book* should also be pluralized to be *books*. The translation of "*Ada sepuluh buku di meja*" is "*There are ten books on the table*" in which the singular form is "*There is a or (one) book on the table*". The plural form can also be seen in the "be" form of *is* in the singular form which becomes *are* in the plural form. There are also other morphemic variants in the plural forms such as *box- boxes*, *watch-watches*, and so forth.

The understanding of word category may lead to precise word choices in a speech. In each category there is a certain characteristic which can be easily known. A noun for example, may occupy a position of either a subject or object of a sentence whereas verb always take the position of a predicate;-- though the forms may be changed according to its tense. The verb



form may also be occupied by *to be* form for certain reasons. An adjective modifies a noun while an adverb may modify either a verb or an adjective.

Meaning, as it is studied in semantics, may occupy a vital role in communication, in a multicultural setting as each region may have the same word but it bears a very different meaning in another region. The word *amis*, for instance, in a Sundanese language means *sweet* for persons, but it has the meaning of *bad smell* for fish in Javanese. The word *dhahar* is regarded as an impolite and rude word eating in Sundanese society, while this word is very polite in the Javanese cultural setting. The synonymous words may not always be interchangeable even if they are communicated in one language. The expression of “*Penjahat itu tewas ditembak polisi karena melawan ketika akan ditangkap*”. The word *tewas* cannot be changed into *gugur* (though they are synonymous) because the word *gugur* should be used for a hero.

Indonesian vowels are differently pronounced as compared to those of English. The phoneme /a/ is pronounced [a] in Bahasa Indonesia, whereas English has varied pronunciations like /a/ in the word “*hard*” is pronounced long [a:] and in “*that*”, phoneme /a/ is pronounced [æ], and in “*make*” the vowel /a/ is pronounced [ei]. The phonemes of /k/, /t/, /p/ in initial positions should be differently pronounced from their middle positions in which in the initial position they are aspirated while in their middle position, they are not.

What is meant by non linguistic factors include the cultural factor existing in tern Indonesia in which it is very different from the western, in this case, English culture. The greeting of “*Selamat pagi*” is used with the time range from midnight up to 10.00 in the morning, and after that (10.00 o'clock) the greeting is “*Selamat siang*”, whereas “*Good morning*” may range from midnight until 12.00 noon, Good afternoon is expressed after 12.00 noon. The expression of “*Good night*” may mean not mean *Selamat malam* but it means *selamat tidur*, yet, in Bahasa Indonesia the expression of *Selamat malam* never means *Selamat tidur*. instead it is just a greeting that takes place in the evening. Another example of being hospitable and friendly in the Indonesian cultural context is “*Mau kemana?*” (Where are you going?); -- to those who are especially well acquainted, is very commonly expressed in the Indonesian cultural setting whereas this is not appropriately found in the English because this will be regarded as knowing one's business. In the multicultural society like Indonesia, people speak *Bahasa Indonesia* with various accents and this may create interferences. The people from Batak, Sulawesi, Timor, Papua ethnics, in which in their dialects, the phoneme [ə] might cause interferences at the beginning level.

The diction used by Javanese is affected by politeness in their daily speech even when they speak *Bahasa Indonesia*. This can be shown in the expression of “*Nanti sore saya akan sowan ke rumah Bapak*”. The word *sowan* is regarded as more polite when speaking to the older people in Javanese cultural setting.

### 3.2 Discussion

In L2 teaching, especially English teachers have to literate both linguistic and non linguistic factors (Brown, 2000; Verhaar, 2012; Burn & Richard, 2012; Harmer, 2013). A teacher is expected to know and explain either the linguistic and non linguistic differences by not only giving assignments but also practicing in the literacy of English rules that is by integrating them to both spoken and written exercises (Hermayawati, 2010; Yusuf, 2012; Rusdi, 2016; Sugeng, 2016). By so doing motivated, learners are greatly motivated in using English. The similar things might happen in the case of English literature. The literacy on literary works will help learners on vocabulary mastery, as well as cultural knowledge (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014; Novianti, 2016)

The literacy to the culture of L2 user should also be done. The cultural dissimilarity of L1 and L2 frequently cause a problem for the Indonesian learners of English. The various ethnic groups in Indonesia, in relation to English language teaching, should also be taken into account (Nurrahman, 2014, Aubrey, 2016, Oranje & Smith, 2017). The learners should be

made aware of the cultural differences between L1 and L2, besides being aware of the learners' own culture. They should also be asked to practice their English as if they were in the English or American cultural setting such as way of thinking, way of behaving, way of interacting and so forth (Kern, 2012; Bui & Huang, 2016).

The linguistic aspects, in English language teaching, are sometimes neglected, whereas actually the learners' lack of language use is sometimes caused by their lack knowledge about language. Therefore, the teaching-learning materials should also involve the linguists' participation so that the linguistic, non linguistic and skill aspects are integrated in the curriculum (Kern, 2012; Harmer, 2013, Aubrey, 2016; Oranje & Smith, 2017).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

A conclusion can be drawn that there were factors hindering the Indonesian learners of English. The linguistic difference includes phrase and clause structures, tense system, as well as singular and plural forms, category of words, especially word forms determined by tenses in morpho syntactic field. The correctness of meaning of a speech is categorized in semantics. Meaning plays an important role in communication It is also related to the contexts. Phonology has its role on sound system. It also determines the meaning of a speech as an exact speech sound represents exact information. The non linguistic difference covers the cultural context found both in *Bahasa Indonesia* as well as English. The expression of "Mau kemana?" or "Where are you going?" is very commonly expressed in the Indonesian cultural setting, yet, thus may not be acceptable in the European or American cultural contexts as this is not appropriately found in the English because this will be regarded as knowing one's business. Therefore, linguistic and cultural aspects in a multicultural setting are badly required in communication using L2.

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