

# KOLTA 2A

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## INTEGRATING CULTURE IN THE MATERIALS FOR EFL LEARNERS

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### Introduction

Learners expect and are expected to be able to use the language they are learning to communicate with other people and many approaches and methods have been invented to satisfy this need. According to Savignon, the famous one in the last quarter of the century is communicative language teaching or CLT (2001:13) which puts communication as the goal of language teaching. Following CLT, materials have been written to make learners able to engage themselves in communication and thus develop learners' communicative competence that actually consists of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence or sociocultural competence (Savignon, 2001: 17) and strategic competence. Under the label of CLT, materials used in teaching still often emphasize on grammatical competence. According to Savignon, these four components are related to each other and "an increase in one component interacts with other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence" (2001:17). Since one component cannot be separated from the other and an increase in one component will make learners communicate better, according to Hinkel, linguistic proficiency only is not enough and learners' sociocultural competence also needs to be developed (2001: 443).

To develop learner sociocultural competence, learners should be made aware of the new culture because culture influences language use. As Brown (2000:177) points out the importance of culture in language teaching, "a language is part of a culture and a culture is part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." This means that the learning of language should go hand in hand with the learning of the new culture.

### Who needs it?

Learners in both ESL and EFL context need to learn the new culture. ESL learners are in direct contact with the second culture. Therefore, culture is their immediate needs. EFL learners are not, but they need to know the new culture to raise their cultural awareness. Both adult and young learners need to learn the new culture, because both of them are expected to be engaged actively in communication. Besides, learning new culture makes people know that there are differences in expressing oneself.

### L1 or L2 culture

There might be an opinion that young learners do not need to learn the new culture, but in my opinion, even young learners need to learn the new culture, because "... behaviours remain predominantly first-culture bound, even for advanced and proficient learners" (Hinkel, 2001: 445). As Byram and Morgan (1994:43) say, "learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another," therefore, the second culture should be included in the materials. The learning of the new culture becomes even more necessary because what is acceptable, appropriate and expected in one culture might be different from, if not in conflict with, another.

### Culture and the teaching of language in language classroom.

As culture needs to be taught and that young learners need to become effective communicators, materials used for young learners also need to include culture. Culture covers a lot of domains in people's lives, from architecture and cooking to social norms and beliefs. Hinkel (2001) classifies the first two as visible culture and the latter invisible. The visible one can be discussed and explained relatively easily, but "most people are not aware of the invisible one." Usually the "unwritten law" has stronger force than the written one. Therefore, culture should be taken into consideration in developing materials for young learners. This is especially important in EFL context because young learners are not in direct contact with the foreign culture and they do not

have information about cultural differences and their effect. The only source of information they can depend on is the material.

One aspect of culture that can be included and can be used by young learners in communication is politeness. It is the only one that should be included, but it can be the first of the so many elements of culture that should be taken into consideration in developing materials. Politeness is important because in communicating with other people, politeness will determine whether relationship will continue well or not. Too much politeness or lack of politeness is both disastrous. Young learners should know how to talk to their peers and how to talk to their teachers, for example.

In interacting with their friends, too much politeness is also strange, while in communicating with their teachers lack of politeness will also determine their position in that small "society." When children talk with their peers using the formal grammatical sentences all the time, their friends will think that they are strange. This will influence their relationship with their friends. If they cannot use the polite forms to their teachers, the teachers will probably understand them, but teachers will like polite students better than the impolite one.

Politeness can include so many things, such as terms of address, body language and gesture or determining pragmatic force of expressions used in daily life. Examples concerning these things can be easily given. In the classroom, for example, if students want to ask questions, they need to raise their hands. In Western culture, it is perfectly alright to raise either the right or the left hand, as long as it is not the index finger, but in Indonesia raising the right index finger is perfect, but not the left hand. This is also the same with handing things. In one culture orders can be given in many forms, from imperative form or statement, for example "check your spelling," or "you might want to check your spelling again." Actually both are orders, but they are said in different ways. If one culture only uses the imperative form to give orders, students might not do the teacher's order when it is given in the form of statement. In teacher's term it is also not polite if students do not do what they say. Teachers might interpret that students are lazy or worse, they do it on purpose. In addressing people older than they are, in Indonesia people always use terms of address, such as "pak" or "bu," especially to teachers. In Indonesia children will not address people older than they are by first name only. In English the sentence "My teacher's name is Mr. Rano" sounds strange because "mr" is actually not necessary. These practical things about politeness, a part of culture, are really used in communicating with people. Therefore, it is worth including in materials for young learners.

### Conclusion

Young learners, besides adults, also need to know about the culture of the foreign language they are learning because they are also expected to use the language. In a foreign language teaching context, culture of the foreign language is a must because learners are not in direct contact with the foreign culture in daily life; therefore, the information about the foreign culture should be given in the materials. If learners, as outsiders, do not have the information about the culture of the language they are learning, they will apply the customs of their first language while using the foreign language. Meanwhile, ways of using language in different communities may vary to different extents.

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