

Speaking English Practices in Intercultural Communicative Competence Framework

Perwi Darmajanti
Politeknik Perkapalan
perwi@ppns.ac.id

Abstract

The mastery of speaking skill is usually on the top priority of the language learners' target. Communicative competence has become an essential skill in this 21th century, and English has been a central language for global communication. Communicative language teaching (CLT) which is derived from communicative competence theory has been widely used for years too, but the problems in mastering oral language competency still persists in until today. Currently foreign language learning involves culture to increase communicativeness since language is always used in cultural context. This research studied the use of English by Indonesian learners and the underlying reasons. It studied contexts when English is used in daily life. It was conducted qualitatively to explore driving motives and willingness to communicate. The result also indicated learners' intercultural communicative competence which potentially influenced language learning.

A. Introduction

The mastery of speaking skill is usually on the top priority of the language learners' target. Many learners traditionally believe that mastering second-language or foreign language is proven by the ability performing the spoken language. It is understandable since language is regarded as a mean of communication which is usually conducted orally for social and professional activities. Related to language as a mean of communication, the participants are required to have a competence to

communicate which is what so called as communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 1980) which also implies that ability to communicate needs not only linguistic competence but also other competences in language like sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences.

The need of excellent communicative skills in foreign language is urgent in the contemporary age of high professional requirements. Even now communicative competence has become an essential skill in this 21th century, and English has been a

central language for global communication. Therefore, students need to use English fluently to fit with international communication (Poolsawad, Kanjanawasee, Wudthayagorn, 2015).

Language is more than communication means which it also represents the expression of thought, social behaviour and cultural background (Bachman, 1990; Byrne, 1980). Therefore, communication in human interaction using language cannot be separated from some cultural assumption related to the purposes and outcomes (Shumin, 1997). Consequently, learners of a language need to equip themselves with knowledge of culture to possibly them to use language properly in social interaction (Shumin, 2002). Specifically, learners of a foreign language cannot avoid the issues of intercultural understanding which are embedded in communication with cultural diversity (Shumin, 2004). Hence, the lack of cultural knowledge is potential to cause problems of communicative competence development when the learners are not able to use language appropriately

in different sociocultural context (Bachman, 1990; Hymes, 1972; Kasper, 1997). Refers to Indonesian context, it was reported that one of the reasons of students' problems while making interviews with foreigners using English as a target language is that the students had little understanding of the targeted culture, especially which covered politeness and topics of "small talk" (Agussalim: 2009).

Ideally, learners are expected to practice the language as communicative language teaching approach dictated, developed such interaction between the learner and users of the language and pursuing creatively meaningful and purposeful interaction through language where teachers functioned as facilitator of learning process (Richards, 2005). However, as Richmond (2007) cited from (Ng, 2001), that "passive education" is deeply set in Asian culture which is contradictory with the basics of "communicative language teaching". Traditionally, rather than developing meaningful and purposeful interaction, the Asian learners tends to be "psychologically

dependent on the in-group, and conforms to it instead of following the wishes and desires of his own heart”. Therefore, they will prioritize social order and harmony along with high respect to “group social rules and norms” more than expressing personal opinion. This learner dependence is not in accordance with communicative language teaching principles.

Meanwhile, the current target of foreign language learning is not only to equip the learners with linguistic competence, but also to prepare them to understand the foreign language culture and successfully communicate with their representatives (Kusiak-Pisowacka, 2018). The target leads to the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), a dimension of sociocultural awareness that is an integral part of communicative competence (Galante, 2015). The implementation of ICC in language learning varies which are not only in the form of cultural topics and discussions of target language, but also in the form of integrating local culture and expressing local

identity while engaging in meaningful interaction during foreign language learning process. The representation of one’s identity is highlighted due to positive impact to language and cultural learning (Norton, 2013). Furthermore, studies proved that involvement of ICC in foreign language learning brings benefits to strengthen speaking skill development (Galante, 2015) and to increase motivation to speak (Basalama, 2018).

Understanding how Indonesian learners learnt English needed a comprehensive check on how they performed oral communication which certainly induced by the underlying culture of learners’ and their ICC. Most students in Indonesia still showed what Richmond (2007) said that they seemed reluctant in expressing personal opinion. In abrupt observations, it can be said that only seven until eleven of thirty or forty students in the classroom who voluntarily joined the class discussions. It did not mean that the rest could not speak or did not have something to say, but they were

waiting for “invitation” or “order” to speak. The condition triggered a curiosity to find out how Indonesian learners willingness to express opinion or asking questions using English which can be interpreted as representation of learners’ ICC, especially in term of engaging in meaningful interaction using foreign language.

B. Literature Review

Cultural Aspects in Language Use Related to culture as the background of language, Brown (2007) stated that culture is a way of life which the statement was elaborated more by Hofstede & Minkov (2010) in which including patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting that were learned throughout the person’s lifetime, so it may influence the member of the culture to think, feel and relate to each other. It implies that the communication activity in form of language use is also influenced by culture. A culture establishes a context of cognitive and affective behavior, therefore the meaningful universe of human existence is not a

universal reality. It emphasized that cultural variables cannot be separated from second language acquisition and communication because culture is an integral part of the interaction between language and thought (Brown, 2007). In places where teaching foreign languages take place, the learning activities may encourage the learners to involve into different cultural background and communicate directly or indirectly, at least between native culture of the learner and the target language’s culture. In such context, people are demonstrating intercultural communication (Bennett, 1998; Pinto, 2000; Samovar et al., 2014) or cross-cultural communication (Angelelli, 2004; Warren, 2015). On the other hand, the term of intercultural competence is also acknowledged by other terms, such as “multicultural competence”, “cross-cultural awareness”, “cultural intelligence”, and “global citizenship” (Deardorff, 2011), which specify interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds. The interactions are

potential to affect negative feelings and miscommunication due different perception. These problems may arise because of different value orientation across cultural groups in terms of time conceptions, power relations, communication styles, task focus, concepts of universality, and feelings of individuality (Bickley et al., 2014).

Related to communication and language learning, Byram (1997) stated that the term of intercultural competence is an element of intercultural communicative competence which consists of three components (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and is complemented by five values (the *savoirs*): (i) “intercultural attitudes” (*savoir être*) which implies inclination to defer distrust concerning other cultures, curiosity, and directness, and belief about the individual’s native culture; (ii) “knowledge” (*savoirs*) which refers to the knowledge of societal groups and their productions and performances in their ownor their interlocutor's country, and of the common procedures of individual

and social communication; (iii) “skills of interpreting and relating” (*savoir comprendre*) which comprises the ability of interpreting an event or document from foreign culture, explaining it and relating it to those from the individuals' native culture; (iv) “skills of discovery and interaction” (*savoir apprendre/faire*) which is concerned with the ability to obtain new understanding regarding a culture, its practices and the ability to activate those outlooks, knowledge and skills under the constrictions of real-life communication; and (v) “critical cultural awareness”/“political education” (*savoir s'engager*) which encompasses the ability of conducting crucial evaluation on the basis of clear principles, practices, standpoints and products in their native or foreign language cultures and countries.

On the other hand, Galante (2015) elaborated the term ICC as a dimension of sociocultural awareness that is an integral part of communicative competence. The term awareness implies to cover the three components of ICC (Byram,

1997), namely knowledge, skills and attitudes. Furthermore, he also mention the applications which covered mentioning cultural topics, discussion of the foreign language, integrating cultures, and engaging in an interaction using the target language which might represent the values of Byram's theory.

Willingness to communicate Originally, the WTC was a part of first language which refers to an individual motivation to initiate communication with others (McCroskey, 1997). In the foreign language context, the concept was developed from "a readiness to enter into discourse using second language at a particular time with a specific person or persons" (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 1999) to "volitional engagement in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables" (Kang, 2005). Different focuses of engagement motivation distinguish them both.

The use of second or foreign language and the interaction using the language which is being learned are widely recognized as prerequisites for successful L2 acquisition (Gass & Mackey, 2014). But the absence of learners' desire to engage in language production makes either the use of the language or the interaction hardly to occur. The desire is then called as "willingness to communicate" (WTC). MacIntyre et al., (2003) explained that it is an "overwhelming communication personality construct" which enters every facet of an individual's life and strongly influence to the social, educational, and organizational achievements of the individual'. This is the factor which is responsible to students' engagement in communication activities. Learners' WTC could vary depending on the situation where the learners were engaged in a communication task (Cao & Philp, 2006; Noels, 2001). Factors that are possible to influence the WTC are to the interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables' (Kang, 2005). The other

factors which are called as situational variables are anxiety and perceived competence (MacIntyre et al., 1999), communication confidence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), classroom conditions, group cohesiveness and topic relevance (Aubrey, 2011).

C. Method

The participants of this research were students of non-English Department of tertiary level education institution in Surabaya. They were informed about the research. Different majors of participants are covered to minimized bias of language knowledge due to academic background. Majority of the participants has not any experience studying abroad, except several weeks of short course and holiday visits. The participants are randomly selected without considering the age, gender and proficiency at preliminary stage. The age ranged from 17 to 22 years old to represent adult learners of English.

The first step in data collection was observations which were conducted in four discussion

sessions. Note of observation equipped the activity documented all phenomena. Following the observations, the second step, an interview was conducted using open-ended questions, and close-ended questions which the interview protocol was developed following some adjustment from the Abbasian & Shad (2016) questionnaires on willingness to communicate. Some modifications were also taken to suit Indonesian learners' condition. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian and following some adequacy consideration.

Collecting data of willingness to communicate needed to be taken in the real situation where the willingness which was in mental state had been implemented into action of speaking as an implementation of communication. Respondents were engaged into discussions which could be run involving all members of the class or only several students in a group. Consideration on the number of participants in a discussion was carefully designed to find out scope of "society" which might be involved to influence

respondents' willingness to communicate. Others were determined by the teacher.

Not only the size of the discussion, the topics of discussions were deliberately taken into account which might influence conceptualization and formulation process of speaking. Various topics were presented which some of them were chosen by the learners and the

The data taken from interview with open-ended questions were interpreted before coding and grouping were applied.

Table 1 Sample of Data Analysis from Open-Ended Question

Emergent Theme	Data	Source
Willing	<p><i>"Tidak. Karena mencoba untuk speaking English merupakan bentuk practice agar skill speaking kita bisa lebih lancar dan paham dengan perkataan orang lain"</i></p> <p><i>No. (I think) practicing to speak English (in class) was to improve fluency and comprehension (while involving in a conversation)</i></p>	Open-ended question: "Do you feel forced to practice speaking English?"
Unwilling	<p><i>"Jika yang dimaksud adalah speaking di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggris, maka jawabannya adalah ya. Karena saya biasanya menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam suasana santai."</i></p> <p><i>If it refers to speaking practice during English class, so (my answer is) yes. I used to speak English in informal situation.</i></p>	

The data taken from interview with close-ended questions were coded and grouped. The grouping was designed to find out the most favorable context when English was used.

Table 2 Sample of Data Analysis with Frequency

Respondent	Question	Frequent	Less Frequent
#1	In what situation do you speak English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatting in social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving opinion in class discussion • Giving question in class discussion • Giving question small group discussion • Giving further explanation in class discussion • Speaking with foreigner
#2		-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Speaking with friend in informal situation out class</i> ➤ <i>Giving opinion in class discussion</i> ➤ <i>Giving question in class discussion</i> ➤ <i>Giving question small group discussion</i> ➤ <i>Giving further explanation in class discussion</i> ➤ <i>Writing diary</i>

D. Finding and Discussion

The first finding was about students' willingness to participate in class discussion. Result of observation found that most students tended to give less participation in class discussion although they might be more active in small group one, as they admitted in closed-ended interview. There were about 20% until 30% of students in the class who were actively involved in class discussions. It indicated that there were more students who were passive in a class activity which require active engagement. This finding may support Richmond's (2007) statement that Asian learners tended reluctant in

voicing personal opinion. On the other hand, low engagement in target language activity also suggested low intercultural communicative competence. Indonesian learners still influenced more by the local culture compare to the culture of the target language that was being learned.

The second finding refers to learners' willingness to practice speaking in classroom context. After learning English for more than six years in high school, some respondent, in fact, still felt obliged to speak English. There was about 30% of total respondents who admitted to feel forced when they were asked to speak English. Of course, this brought

uncomfortable feeling which in turn hindered them to increase their intercultural communicative competence. The reasons underlying the feeling of being forced varied such as the fact that English was not used in their everyday life, strong negative motive that somebody would never be able to speak English, and low interest to speak English in formal context. These facts also led to learners' low intercultural communicative competence. However, there were 70% of total respondents who had willingness to speak English, which in turn it also showed their high ICC. Furthermore, reasons underlying their willingness supported their competence. Almost a third of them mentioned their strong motivation to practice speaking English. This was regarded to show some values of ICC (Byram, 1997) since it covered positive attitude towards the target language, integrating cultures, and engaging in interaction in foreign language. The rest of them mentioned why they practiced speaking English was supported by some extrinsic motivations which were developed in

their social life, that people with English competence would get better opportunity to work.

The third finding revealed contexts where respondents use English both orally and written. There were three popular situations that made them use English, namely chatting in social media, participating in class discussion, and speaking informally. They wrote in their social media to express their opinion and feeling through giving comment or presenting "status". They admitted that English could represent the message that they wanted to share, as well as give social status. Unfortunately, there were less than 1% of respondents who said that they rarely used English. There were less than 50% of them acknowledged to use English frequently. Mostly, they use English in situation such as giving opinion in class discussion, giving question in class discussion, giving question small group discussion, giving further explanation in class discussion, speaking with foreigner, etc. The interesting finding in this part was that small group discussion less successful to make respondents to

speak. For example, respondent #1 who used English frequently for chatting in social media, but use English in relatively lower frequency for giving opinion in class discussion, giving question in class discussion, giving question small group discussion, giving further explanation in class discussion, and speaking with foreigner.

The last finding related to the first and the third ones. The first finding showed that the number of active participant in class discussion was about a third of them, meanwhile, the third finding showed that class discussion was more favorable than small group discussion. It seemed that lack of participation in class discussion was due to lack of motivation to express opinion and feeling in front of big number of audience. But, in fact, class discussion which has more participants than small group discussion was favored more as the situation to practice speaking. Those findings seem contradictory. But result of interview might solve the conflicting result. It was revealed that respondents might not speak

voluntarily in class discussion, but they were ready to participate, to engage in the interaction. This also seemed to support Richmond (2007) statement that learners tends to be “psychologically dependent on the ingroup more than the desire for expressing individual opinion.

E. Conclusion

Indonesian learners had been characterized by high intercultural communicative competence which was shown by their motivation to practice speaking. Although there were some learners who were still less than expectancy, but majority had reasons to push them to practice speaking English both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. The high ICC might be a valuable factor to increase language proficiency.

References

- Berns, Margie. (1990). Contexts of Competence: Social and Cultural Considerations in Communicative Language Teaching, New York: Springer Science+Business Media
- Byram, Michael. (1997). Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence.

- Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Canale, M and Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. *Applied Linguistics*
- Hymes, D. (1971). Competence and Performance in Linguistic Theory. In R. Huxley & E. Ingram (Eds.), *Language acquisition: Models and methods* (p. 3-28). London: Academic Press.
- Jabeen, Shazi Shah, Implementation of Communicative Approach in English Language Teaching Vol. 7 No. 8, 2014, E-ISSN 1916-4750, Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education
- Luo, Feng. (2006). *Developing Adults' Oral English Communicative Competence in an EFL Environment: Collaborative Studies of a Chinese EFL Teacher and Her Students*. Ph.D Thesis. The University of New Mexico.