

Developing Sociolinguistic Awareness of Indonesian Learners Through Online Intercultural Exchange in Japanese Language Learning

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Abstract—This study reports the intercultural exchanges between Indonesian and Japanese students through online correspondence and presentation class. Electronic mails and video call group presentation were conducted over one semester of blended learning course. The study examined how online intercultural exchanges via correspondence in electronic mails (web 1.0 tool) and presentation via internet-mode video call (web2.0 tool) equip learners with intercultural communication competence through the experience to communicate with native speakers as an alternative of the interaction in sojourn. The result of this study showed that a technology-based distance collaborative learning by using e-mail and video call facilitated language learners to improve intercultural communicative competence, namely cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that develop the critical cultural awareness.

Keywords—*intercultural communicative competence, online intercultural exchange, blended learning, Japanese language*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1988, Byram has dedicated his efforts to the research of the integration of cultural dimension into language teaching. He claims that language teachers should foster the culture into the language learning process in order to build mutually-beneficial relationship among people from diverse cultural groups. The culture which was pointed out by Byram refers to the foreign language's cultures learned by the students and their own culture. He developed his research as a model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), namely 'Critical cultural Awareness' or 'savior s' engager' [1]. Furthermore, he introduced the idea of 'intercultural speaker' which meant a speaker who respected for individuals with multiple identities including their own identities. These speakers are expected to play a role as a means to prevent stereotyping and to promote equality of human rights. This intercultural communicative competence should be acquired through the cognitive and affective learning process [1].

Cultural awareness can be obtained through a direct interaction with other cultural values. In this context, *Sojourn*, including study abroad, is one of the ways of providing opportunities for intercultural interaction experiences with interlocutors from a different culture. The total immersion program along sojourn is expected to support language learners in gaining critical cultural

experiences as one of the key elements to develop their intercultural communicative competence. These experiences include 'curiosity' which is identified as part of 'attitude' component, one of the four components of intercultural communicative competence that developed by Byram [2]. Moreover, the critical cultural awareness that is gained through direct interaction along *sojourn* should be able to provide a measurable assessment and evaluation with various Intercultural Development/ ID Model [3],[4]. However, the availability of *sojourn* remains limited for language learners due to various reasons, i. e. economic, political.

In this context, the rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has benefited language learners and teachers in providing opportunities to engage mutually into intercultural communities by utilizing technology in cyberspace. This ICT is able to be optimized interactively either through websites or social media applications among teachers, learners, and learners-teachers [5]–[10]. The ICT development will enable people around the world to communicate in real time, regardless of time and location difference. Thus, such development may emerge as an alternative solution for learners who face some constraints to study abroad.

This study explores how the online intercultural exchanges provide learners some experiences of communication in intercultural competence with native speakers as an alternative to *sojourn*. These experiences along with distance interactions among learners with distinct cultural background are supposed to generate their critical cultural awareness and interlocutor's cultural background. Thus, such cultural awareness along with the interaction with different cultural groups is also expected to benefit participants in building a mutually-beneficial relationship.

II. METHOD

A. Participants

This study involved eight (8) Indonesian students, 4th semester, enrolling in Japanese language business communication class, and eight (8) Japanese students enrolling in presentation class. All of the discussion was held in the Japanese language. All of the Indonesian participants were having no experience of being resident in Japan before, yet all of them had three and half years of the experience learning the Japanese language and could be

considered as intermediate Japanese language learners since they had JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) certificate in level N3 (range from N1 to N5, the highest level to the lowest level). The Japanese participants were unable to communicate in Indonesian language unless limited greetings. Yet, according to all informants, both of the informant cultural parties used English as intermediate and advanced speakers in their daily life. Half of the Indonesian informants had experience interacting with Japanese people since they had Japanese native lecturer and Japanese exchange students, studying in short time at their university. However, a few of Japanese informants had experience interacting with Indonesian people. There was one Indonesian international staff in their university but they rarely made a conversation with her. Despite the majority of the informants were familiar with internet in their daily life, none had used Edmodo for online intercultural exchange prior to this project.

B. Data Collection Procedures

Indonesian and Japanese students were divided into four groups and matched one-to-one with cultural group. Each of the group was required to communicate with another cultural party group by using electronic mails under certain topics via *Edmodo* classroom assessment tool and required to perform presentation activities using video call internet mode.

The first interaction among respondents was the delivery of presentation and discussion on the topic: "introducing ourselves", "campus neighborhood" and "popular things among the youth", for 90 minutes. Following that activity, each Indonesian participant group was assigned to send an e-mail in particular topics via *Edmodo*. In regards to such e-mails, each Japanese student group would then deliver their comments and impression based on similarities and differences of cultural perspectives. In this activity, the Indonesian students are allowed to reconfirm or explain the misunderstood issues. It was noted that all e-mail topics were available: firstly, "queries on required documents on job application", secondly "appreciation e-mail as the reply for the queries" and lastly "apologizing on declining an employment offering". In the last session, each group presented the conclusion of their awareness over differences and similarities between Indonesian and Japanese cultures, particularly in the use of e-mail and presentation.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

First was about the improving of intercultural 'knowledge' among participants (here, "I" represents Indonesian participant and "J" represents Japanese participants). In order to discover participant's intercultural knowledge before the process, at first presentation each participant was requested to explained about their intercultural knowledge through interacting with people from Japan (for I participants) or Indonesia (for J participants) before the program. Half of the Indonesian informants had the self-confidence to interact with their Japanese counterparts since they have knowledge of Japanese people through interacting with them. Some Indonesian respondents mentioned,

Two of my lecturers are native Japanese speakers, so I am getting used to speaking with Japanese people (I2).

Every year we have international students from Japan who come for studying in short course program. After the program completed, we still keep contact each other through social media (I1)

I have joined summer study in Japan for one month and I'm getting used to communicating with Japanese people (I3).

Those experiences were more or less implicated to their general knowledge of their interlocutor's background, especially to Indonesian respondents who were learning not only Japanese language but also Japanese culture as their major.

Yet, after doing the online intercultural exchange, particularly interacting with E-mails, all of the Indonesian respondents realized that the honorific expressions in business communication with Japanese people were a must, despite the difficulties of Japanese honorific expressions. One of the Indonesian respondents clearly stated,

Finally, I realized how important the honorific expressions in the context of business communication with Japanese people. My Japanese partners consistently using those expressions while communicating with my group, particularly in E-mails sentences. (I5)

On the other hand, a few of Japanese respondent stated ,

I have ever lived in Jakarta for three years in my childhood, but I forgot it at all (J5)

One of our international staff university is Indonesian, but I seldom make conversation with her (J2).

The rest of Japanese respondents had no experiences interacting with Indonesian before the program. One of the Japanese respondents said,

We are worried about speaking the language (J6).

Those statements could be interpreted that Japanese informants had less knowledge about their Indonesian interlocutors considering fewer experiences of the interaction with Indonesian people.

Secondly was about the intercultural 'attitude' and 'skills'. Post activities impressions show that either Indonesian or Japanese informants had 'attitude' and 'skills' as intercultural speakers and mediators as Byram explained [1], [12]. Through e-mail and video call activities, they exposed their 'curiosity and openness'. Each respondents group interacted with another cultural party group, using their intercultural skills to interpret, compare and discover their own cultural awareness as well as another cultural party group. As the result, their self-confidence of interaction and using Japanese honorific expressions improved.

Thirdly was about respondent's critical cultural awareness and another cultural party group, as Byram mentioned it as 'value [12]. Figure 1 displayed respondent's cultural awareness of their own values and other cultural party group's values that they compared and discovered after using e-mail in a selected topic related to business

communication. Those similarities and differences could be explained in detail above.

In fact, either Indonesian respondents or Japanese respondents only found one similarity among the Indonesian and Japanese people group in the context of business communication in this project. It was "the use of the formal expression" (in the Japanese language it was called 'honorific expression'), both in writing and oral business communication. Actually, interaction through e-mails among Indonesian and Japanese cultural group as the data were collected using Japanese language as lingua franca, i.e., when one of the Japanese respondents inquired to Indonesian respondents whether Indonesians used formal expression either in writing or oral business communication or not, one of Indonesian respondents explained in detail that Indonesian also used formal expression either in writing or oral business communication, yet it was not so complicated as Japanese language formal expression.

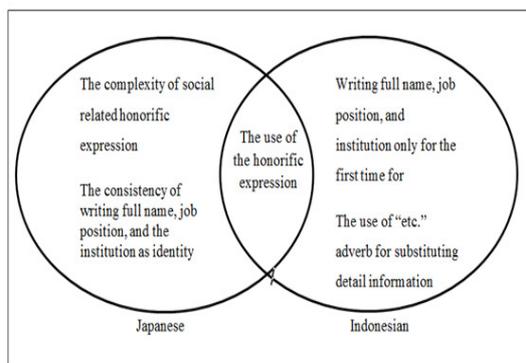


Fig. 1. Informants' Intercultural Awareness among Indonesian and Japanese people in Business Communication.

Moreover, she explained that characteristic of formal expression in the Indonesian language was determined by diction, not by complicated grammatical forms or sociolinguistics terms as the Japanese language was. Afterward, other Japanese respondents mentioned those complicated Japanese language honorific expressions were related to Japan's political history.

Furthermore, both Indonesian respondents and Japanese respondents discovered that there was a difference in writing full name in business communication letters such as e-mails between Indonesian and Japanese people. Some Japanese respondents found out that there was inconsistency in writing full name and institution's name when Indonesia respondents delivered e-mails to them. They stated that some of the Indonesian respondents wrote their nickname below their e-mails. Besides, they found institution's name which Indonesian respondents belong to was not always written in the body e-mails. On the contrary, some Indonesian respondents were aware that all Japanese respondents consistently wrote their full name and institution's name in the body e-mails they delivered. Regarding this noticeable distinction, through reconfirming each other, both Indonesian and Japanese respondents finally realized that this distinction was related to the concept of social groups and sociolinguistic perspective.

Finally, Japanese respondents discovered that there was a

tendency among Indonesian respondents to write "nado" (the meaning was "etc") where they should explain in detail. Some Indonesian respondents stated that while they wrote "etc" as an adverb of a statement, it meant that perhaps there would be additional information later. In contrast, in Japanese respondent's side, the use of "etc" stimulated misunderstanding of content itself. Instead of writing "etc", they preferred to state information clearly and write additional information if there was in next e-mails.

These findings suggested that distance collaborative learning using technology such as e-mail and video call provides learners experiences of communication in intercultural competence perspective is conceivable as clarified in the previous research [7], [8], [13].

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The result of this study shows that the participants are aware of the similarity between Indonesian and Japanese cultures in the use of e-mails and presentation in terms of the use of written formal expressions. Yet, the participants are also aware of their differences in writing full name and institution name, the use of "etc" in detail information, and the complexity of written formal expressions due to differences in Indonesian and Japanese culture. This study is expected that participants can take the advantage of that sociolinguistics awareness while they interact through online intercultural exchange with other cultural groups to build a mutually-beneficial relationship. Furthermore, it is also expected that foreign language teachers can engage intercultural competency in language learning curriculum.

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