

# THE FUNCTION OF CULTURE AND LITERARY WORKS IN ELT

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## **Abstract**

A great numbers of high school leavers even the university graduates in Indonesia hardly communicate sufficiently in English, In fact they have learned English at least for 6 or 8 years. Even the curriculum for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia had been developed several times. The question is do the teachers have competence in using language contextually and mastering how to provide up to date learning material for students?. The students need the model how people actually use language in social context so that they are able to apply it outside what they learned in the class. Surely using language can not be separated from its culture. Wardaugh (2002) says language can not be separated from culture since its value determines the way people use language. The examples of using language in social context can be found in literary works. Onuckwusi (2013) states that Literary works is any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral or written. Then Thejirika (2014) mentions that language theories, concept and styles are put into function in the creation of literary texts. Literary text is rich with authentic language: how people really use language based on culture such as its function and purpose. Those literary works has big contribution for teaching- learning material, can develop the four skills of language as well. These are what the paper is going to discuss.

**Keys words : Culture, Literary work , teaching –learning material.**

## **Introduction**

Many experts and scholars have discussed both language and culture or literature and language teaching. However this paper discusses the function of Culture and literary works in teaching English as a Foreign language. As a teacher of language he/she should realize that the material for teaching should be authentic, since language is not just a knowledge that can be memorized. It is going to be used for communication. Lewis says (2018) that when people learn another language, it helps them to learn about the world. Learning a language is therefore learning the behaviour of a given society and its cultural customs. Thus the students should not only learn rule of a language, but also the function and purpose based on its culture. They learn it at the same time so that they understand and have ability how to use it for communication in the class as well as outside in a society. The excellent way for learning foreign language is from the native speakers so that they can be role model as well. However it is not so easy to get the native speakers for a teacher. At least the material for language teaching is the one which is really used in reality, authentic. The authentic material according to the expert/scholars is any material which are not designed for teaching. The source of authentic language here is literary works. Thejirika (2014) in his article mentions that Literature is language in practice, in which language theories, concepts and style are put into function in the creation of literary text. This is going to help teachers in providing material for teaching new language since literary works is the mirror of the people life in reality. Today it is easier for the teachers to find the source since the literary works are available in printed and electronic. They can be use for teaching component of language and the skills itself.

This paper is going to discuss two points, first is about the function of the culture in ELT. The second is to discuss the function of Literary works ( digital and printed) in the ELT.

## **Research Methodology**

The aim of the research is to analyse the language used in the literary works both digital and printed. The content and the meaning were analyzed so that the sentences and phrases can be collected for providing the language teaching material. It was selected best on the function and purposed. They are authentic material where students can grab linguistic as well as cultural competence. Therefore the design of the research is Content analysis based on Kassarjian (1977). In a line with Jabrohim (2014) in his book explains that the

research is used to analyze the document in order to find out the content and the meaning of it. Those documents may consist of book, newspaper, literary works, graphic, painting, photography, film, drama even diary. In this research, the object analysis was literary works ( short stories, novel and drama) both printed and digital including the animation movie. The analysis is focused on the language used such as certain words or phrases even utterances. It was analyzed why the characters choose them, in what situation and condition including the feeling that influence the choice. Then the data were classified into several categories that can be used for teaching elements of language and the skills ( reading, writing, listening and speaking).

### **The Function of Culture in ELT**

Learning language implicitly means learning a culture. In fact, language is used to communicate among the members of its society. Hall in his book explained by Farrow (2004) mentions that language as a social practice. The society knows how to formulate structurally feasible and socially acceptable utterance. Furthermore Hantrais quoted by Leveridge (2010.p.1) states that Culture is the beliefs and practices that govern the way of society life where a particular language is used as the vehicle to express their idea. Thus language is the product of their thought and behaviour which develop among their own society. Therefore when people learn a new language they indirectly learn the culture of the language, not only the structure or pronunciation but also how to use the language exactly so that the idea can be obtained and misunderstanding can be avoided.

This should be considered by the teachers as the one who have responsibility in preparing the material for teaching. The materials should help learners to be ready in using language outside of the class. It is the language used by people to communicate in reality, not the text book language. Therefore the teachers have to provide the learners with the communicative competence. Hall in Farrow (2004) mentions that the notion of communicative competence helps the learners see that the language use involves both knowledge and ability of language forms, as well as the knowledge and ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural context. When people interact each other they consciously pay attention to the norm, belief and value in a society: such as what topic they talk, to whom, when, how and why they speak. This involves the choice of words and arrange them into acceptable utterance. The bad communication may occur when the speakers do not care in choosing the word, phrases, even gesture which is not suitable to the social context.

Lets see the example below:

Sam : Coming for a drink ?

Andy : Sorry, I can't. My doctor won't let me

Sam : What's wrong with you? ( Kecskes in Mathew & Kurnia 2017.p 92)

When people come from the same culture hearing this conversation, they will understand that Sam and Andy are close friend and going out to have an alcoholic drink is common. Eventhough Sam's utterance "What's wrong with you? " is ambiguous. It could mean that Sam is asking Andy a medical (are You sick ?), a psychological (do you have an alcohol addiction problem?) or just a social question (can't you go out with your friend?). However they can understand each other since they are in the same context. Unfortunately this conversation is really confused for Indonesian students since a word "drink" is never refer to an alcohol. Thus they may think how could a doctor not allow people to drink. What kind of disease is it?. They are not in context and they even come from different culture.

Here is another example in choosing the word to express. This conversation is taken from the script of Animation movie *Lillo and Strike* (2004). Lillo, the small girl, has a friend ( Alien). Though her mother does not like Strike, but she keeps it in her room under the bed. When Lillo went home after the school, she found her room were messy. It was Strike who did it. She really got angry. Let see what she said.

Lillo : I hate You. You are not my friend anymore. ( the script 2004)

These utterances prove that the word *hate* is used to emphasis that what Strike did can not be tolerated by Lillo. She was really angry at Strike. That is why she used the word *hate*. It is supported by the following utterance *You are not my friend anymore*. Thus choosing the words for expression is influenced by feeling of the speaker and the context. The speakers do not just express the utterance as they like but it has a function and purpose. Moreover Hall quoted by Farrow (2004) states that culture takes place in activities of society not in individual mind therefore any study of language is surely a study of culture. Englebert quoted by Leveridge (2008 p2.) describes that to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture and it is crucial to consider it. In a line with Lewis (2018) suggests that the teachers and the students should understand that the knowledge of grammatical systems should be complemented by cultural-specific meanings. This relationship is the central to the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competency. The learners should learn these. Thus language teachers are implicitly the teachers of culture as well.

Today many English words are recruited and used in communication, however the meaning of the words are not the same. There is distortion in using it. It is common now in Indonesia using the word ‘cafe’ where the meaning is not the same with *Cafe* in the west. In Indonesian context, If their friends invite them to cafe, they are glad since they can order many kinds of food like: *fried rice, noodle, gado-gado, even fried chicken* and beverage such as: *soft drink, juice, ice cream and milk shake* etc. Besides they can come anytime, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. While for foreigners it is confused since *Cafe* means just for *coffee, or tea and cake*, where the customers come for socializing. People come around 10- AM , before lunch time. Even the word *Cafe* looks the same but the meaning is different since the culture where the word is used is really different. This problem is going to be handicap when people who communicate come from different culture.

Furthermore, the form of language in English is also influenced by the time. Lewis (2018, p.2) even suggests that the culture have an huge influenced on how people communicate and manipulate the time. The tense and time in English is like a coin, it is one with two faces. It works together, that makes it really be different from Indonesian. This is also the handicap for the students that should be considered by the teachers. The teachers must aware about the culture of language in providing the material for ELT so that the students hopefully use learnt language appropriately in suitable cultural context in order not to ruin the communication.

### **The Function of literary works in ELT**

Many teachers avoid to use literary text in the class since they think it is difficult for students, they even think that the text is ungrammatically like in a Poem. Thus the text is assumed to make trouble in learning especially foreign language. This paper is not going to discuss how to teach literature but how the language in the literary works can be applied in teaching foreign language. Onuekwusi quoted by Thejirika ( 2014 p.86) says:

“.....literature is any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral and written..... Language is its basic raw material with which literature is manufactured. In other words Literature is language in practice.”

Thus language in literary text can be applied for the material of language teaching as the model how people use the language they learn in reality. The students can understand the way people use language in a real communication. Ayo in Thejirika ( 2014.p 86) mentions that literature helps the students’ linguistic performance develop since it arouses their zeal and keeps in them an ever- ready inclination to read. Moreover it helps the students develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is read. As what Collie and Slater (1987) state literature provides valuable authentic material so that the students can grab the cultural as well as language enrichment. While Lazar ( 1993.p 15-19) gives 5 reasons for using Literature in ELT: a. Motivating materials, b. Encouraging language acquisition, c. Expanding student’s language awareness, d. Developing students’ interpretative abilities, e. Educating the whole person. Briefly the language in Literary works can be very useful for students in developing their competence both linguistics and culture. Here some examples from Novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (2007):

“ I think we **need** to chat. Erica has told you about her history, yes?” I nodded. “Well”, she went on, “ her condition has come back. It’s serious. What she **needs** right now is stability. No emotional upheavals, you get me? I can see you’re a nice young man. And I know she cares about you. But you have to understand that she’s a sick girl at the moment. She doesn’t **need** a boyfriend, She **needs** a friend. “ she looked at me beseechingly. ....”

The simple script is quite easy for students to follow and grab. The text provides the situation and the position of the speakers. The different position will influence the way people interact. She is the mother of Erica while he is a friend. It is simple language, easy to imitate and practice based on the situation. Besides the word *Need* occurs four times however the meaning are different. The first *need* means obligation, but the others *Need* means *necessity*. The students implicitly understand the same word can be different meaning depend on the context where it is used as what people express when they are interact. The students also can understand when people interact they do not just focus on one type of tense. Here they can see several tenses were used to achieve the goal of interaction. Moreover the students get so many vocabularies commonly used in doing interaction that they can not get from the textbook.

The second example was taken from Drama *Disgrace* written by Ayad Akhtar (2013). This condition is when Isaac came to Emily’s house. She offered him a drink

Emily : Can I get you some coffee, tea?  
 Isaac : Sure. Coffee'd be great.  
 Emily : Milk? Sugar?  
 Isaac : Black is fine

By glance, the dialogue is very simple that seems nothing is very valuable in it. In fact, it is rich of cultural context. This is called language use, not language usage. This short dialogue shows that Emily and Isaac are close friend. That is why she did not use the formal language, Emily is offering the beverage for Isaac as a guest in her house. This is the culture in English when they have guests in the house, they even offer the choice. The guests may choose what they prefer based on the offering. It is really different from Indonesian where people just give the beverage (usually tea) without asking the guest first. It means there is no offering in Indonesian culture for the guest. The utterance *Coffee'd be great* shows that the guest ( Isaac) has already decided what he needed. While the words *Milk? Sugar?* is used as questions informally. It should be *Would you like to have milk or sugar in your coffee??* This complete sentence is available in the text book and used by the teacher in teaching. However during the interaction is not all questions with the complete sentence. It depends on the relationship of the speakers and context. The utterance *Black is fine* means the guest does not like sugar. The students surely can grab dialogue and it is easy for them to remember the expression. The good lesson is when the students still use the expression they learn outside the class.

The example below is narrative, that is also interesting to bring into the class. This is from the Short Story. *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros (1998).

“ Whose is this?”Mrs price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see. “Whose?, it’s been sitting in the coatroom for a month”. “ Not mine, “ says everybody. “ Not Me”  
 “ It has to belong to somebody, “ Mrs Price keeps saying, but nobody can remember. It’s an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use them for a jump rope. It’s maybe a thousand years old and even if it belong to me I wouldn’t say so.  
 Maybe because I’m skinny, maybe because she doesn’t like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldiar ssays, “ I think it belong to Rachel”. An ugly sweater like that, all raggedy and old, but Mrs price believes her: Mrs price takes the sweater and puts it right on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing comes out.  
 “That’s not, I don’t you ‘re not..... Not mine, I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I was four.  
 “ Of course it’s your”, Mrs price says. “ I remember you are wearing it once”. she’s older and the teacher, and I ‘m not.

(p,1-2)

The text above shows how the little girl, Rachel, tell us her bad experience one day in the class. Most of the utterances show how she felt at that time. That day was her Birthday to be eleven. Ironically she was put in the corner by her friend especially her teacher without having proof she has the old ugly sweater. The utterance *Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me*, is the expression of her emotion and view towards the circumstance in her class. She was very upset when there was no chance to explain that it was not hers. In her eyes the teacher is the one who is full of authorities, without any consideration. The teacher is careless in which she had made the wrong decision. It is supported by the utterance *Mrs Price believes her*. But let see how Rachel think of her through this utterance *she's older and the teacher, and I 'm not*. Rachel is really angry but did not have power to fight. This commonly occurs in a society where the voice of young people is ignored.

There are two important points here. First, those expressions reflect that language is not just the arrangement of the words with the rule, but it is an expression of understanding, feeling, even the way to view the circumstance when the interaction takes place. The text helps the students to recognise various tenses in English within cultural context. Furthermore it is the good example of narrative or recount text that they have to learn according to curriculum. Here they can learn how to write their experience. The students need the model before they write. At least the text gives them inspiration how to write what they feel, face or experience when they are in the class room. Then it can move to their experience in their life. The text is very inspirative that prompts the readers to express what they have in their mind. It can be used to teach the four skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening. It does not only develop the cognitive competence but also the affective one. Second, the text is full of cultural value. The value affects what the people do and how they do it. In other words the text show how people think and act through language. Here, the teacher seems to

dominate the interaction. There is a hierarchy here, where the teacher is the one in a high position and has authority. Rachel is really inferior as a student where she did not get the chance to explain even to express her feeling. In fact, the teacher is adult, mature and could be wise in treating her/his students. Here Mrs Price has already made unreasonable and unsensible decision. The text teaches the norm and value exists in society that is required to build the students' characters. As what Ayo in Thejirika ( 2014.p 86) says that the utilities of Literature could be educational, cultural, moral, recreational and socio –political. Moreover the text can fulfil the need of the basic Competence in The 13th Curriculum of Indonesian for the school in which the teachers are required to develop the language competence: linguistics and cultural.

## Conclusion

This paper has already discussed the function of culture and Literary works in English Language Teaching. The discussion has proved many advantages that the language from literary works is rich with social-cultural context. Nobody uses language without context. The language has function to represent the real one where it can not be separated from social-cultural context. These are that can not be fulfilled by the textbook. Even the text is an imaginative creation but the language the writer use in the text is the representative of what people use in a society. It can provide the students with various tenses at the same time since people use language with a purpose and function. The choice of vocabulary and tenses also represents the feeling, value and norm of the culture of the language. It is called language use which really exists in society life. Therefore Culture and Literary works have important function in ELT. Thus when the language is brought into the classroom, it may help the students to understand the culture of the society how and why the language is used. Besides literary works can help the students to build the characters. However the teacher should aware how to apply in the classroom for each skills.

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