

# What Is Culture

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## INTRODUCTION

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In this module we will discuss culture and its relation to language and studying a foreign language. This module will be divided into two units;

Unit one: Language and culture

In this unit you will learn about the definition of culture, and its relation with a language spoken by its society.

Unit two: Culture and foreign language teaching.

After you know about the relation between language and culture, you will also learn about the importance of knowing that relation in studying a foreign language.

This module also provides some exercises to enhance your understanding on the topic being discussed.

## UNIT 1

## Language and Culture

After reading this unit you are expected to be able to define culture, give examples of culture, and also give examples of how culture influences the language.

*Language (is) a symbolic guide to culture. Vocabulary is a very sensitive index of the culture of a people.* (Edward Sapir taken from Wierzbicka, 1997: p1)

Edward Sapir, as seen in the above quotation, claimed that there is a close relationship between culture and language. It will be difficult to understand other people's culture without having the knowledge of the language and vice versa. Benjamin Lee Whorf, one of Sapir's students, extended Sapir's idea by stating that there is a connection between cultural norms and linguistics pattern. According to him the way people see the world is reflected by the structure of the language used by them.

Before we discussed this relationship between language and culture, let us discuss first what we meant by culture.

### What is culture?

There are many definitions of culture; experts define it from many points of view.

Gurito stated that:

Culture indicates all aspects that members of a group share together. Children learn ways of doing things, ways of talking, smiling, laughing, liking and disliking things. Culture determines people's action, their social relationship and their morality (Gurito, 2003: p 1).

Dwyer proposed another definition of culture:

Culture is that which the language learner needs to know in order to understand the meaning of the message in another

language other than the formal properties of the language code (syntax, morphology and phonology) (Dwyer, 1996: p.3).

What about dictionary? How is culture defined in a dictionary? The Collins Dictionary defined culture as

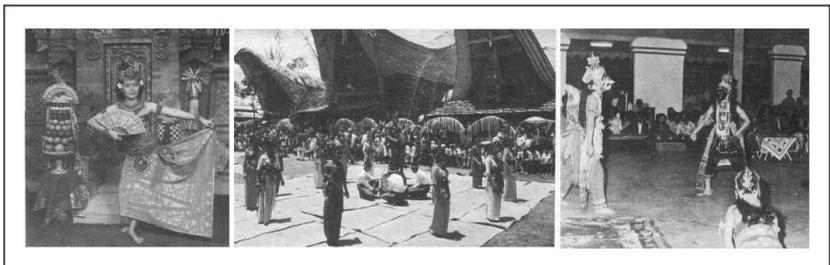
- ❑ the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge which constitute the shared bases of social activities. It also provides with the other words which have similar meaning like: custom, life style, way of life and society.
- ❑ The artistic and social pursuits expression, and taste valued by the society or class.

(The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1989: p.237)

From these definitions, we can get some ideas about culture. You might even have one definition of your own about culture, well do not be ashamed, write it down and see whether it fits with the explanation in this module.

Okay, now let us start with our basic knowledge of culture. People usually relate culture with traditional dancing, traditional ceremonies, and arts. Now let us see the following pictures and try to identify which pictures are the examples of Indonesian and American culture, give your reason based on the above definitions.

### Traditional dances



## Rodeo



## Halloween



## Karapan Sapi

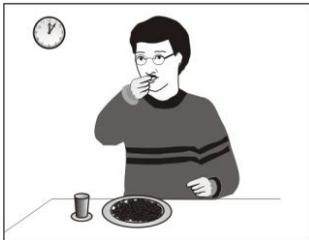


So, what is your answer? Check the following explanation and see whether it is similar to your answer.

- ❑ Most people will consider traditional dances as one reflection of their culture. Based on the definition in the dictionary, we can include all these activities as the representations of a culture.
- ❑ Karapan sapi as one of celebration in Madura can also be considered as a representation of Madura's culture.
- ❑ Rodeo is sometimes considered as representation of American culture, whereas Halloween is considered as western culture (not only American but also British culture).

Those are the most common representation of culture. If we look back to Gurito's definition, we can see that there are other kinds of representations of culture. Actually, in our daily life what ever we do is the representation of

our culture. The way we speak to our friends, to our parents, teacher or even strangers represents our culture. The way we dress, cook, eat, drink, etc are also representations of our culture. Take for example the way the western people eat which uses knife and fork is different from the way we eat, which uses our hands and also different from the way the Chinese people eat, which uses chopstick.



So you see, there are many kinds of representations of our culture in our daily life that probably we do not even realize it. In the following text you will read another example of culture.

My mother says I'm becoming 'English'. This hurts me, because I know she means I'm becoming cold. I'm no colder than I've been, but I'm learning to be less demonstrative. I learn this from a teacher who, after contemplating the gesticulations with which I help myself describe the digestive system of a frog, tells me to "sit on my hands and then try talking". I learn my new reserve from people who take a step back when talk, because I'm standing too close, crowding them. Cultural distances are different, I later learn in a sociology class, but

I know it already. I learn restraint from Penny, who looks offended when I shake her by the arm in excitement, as if my gesture had been one of aggression instead of friendliness. I learn it from a girl who pulls away when I hook my arm through hers as we walk down the street- this movement of friendly intimacy is an embarrassment to her.

Perhaps my mother is right, after all; perhaps I'm becoming colder. After a while, emotion follows action, response grows warmer or cooler according to gesture. I'm more careful about what I say, how I loud I laugh, whether I give vent to grief. (Hoffman, 1989: pp 146-147)

The writer is an American writer who comes from a Polish family. She and her family emigrated to America when she was a teenager. She found that everything she did is considered strange and created some misunderstanding. She probably comes from culture that is very demonstrative in expressing emotion or feeling. Whereas the English people are very reserved people who do not show their emotion or feeling demonstratively. What can you learn from this excerpt? Yes that's true, culture involves almost everything in our life. As you can see from that excerpt, the girl finds that what is 'normal or appropriate' for her is not always 'normal or appropriate' for other people. In her culture it is common to stand close to the speaker when you have a conversation with other people, but this is not 'normal' for English people. They tend to stand not too close when they talk to other people. They will not shake your arms in excitement, they will not laugh loudly when they hear something funny or when they are happy.

Related to the concept of culture, we have also the concepts of cultural values and cultural norms. What is meant by those terms?

Gurito stated that:

A value is the importance that we attach to something. For instance a house may have some values, either in term of money or in term of the usage of it. We might have a happy family life by living in that house. Value is also concerned with what is 'good' and 'desirable' and what is 'bad' and 'undesirable'. For instance, Americans highly value

independence and self-reliance. So independence and self-reliance are important values for American culture. (Gurito, 2003: p.4)

Norms are standard rules and they are accepted by the members of the community. Norms consist of folkways and mores. Folkways, are the way of the people, the customs of the community which, when broken, do not have fatal consequences. Mores are concerned with behaviors of vital importance in the community and represent the basic moral values of a community. Bigamy is unacceptable in the American culture, so is neglecting a husband's duty as the provider and the breadwinner for his wife and children. The norms concerned are actively enforced by the community, either through a legal action or a social sanction. (Gurito, 2003: p. 5)

If we apply these definitions to Indonesian context, we have some examples of Indonesian values. We, Indonesians, highly value our family and the community. We tend to live and do things together with our family and our neighbor. We live with or near our family, parents, grandparents, uncle and aunts, we know our neighbors and also their family. We visit each other often. If something bad to our neighbor then we and other neighbors will come to help. The people in Indonesia, especially those who live in small cities, usually keep their door open to show that they are welcoming people to come and visit them. Unlike us, Americans highly value personal privacy, they prefer to live and do things by their own. They usually keep their door close.

What about Indonesian cultural norms? Usually our norms are a mix between culture and religion. For example, In Indonesia it is against the norms for two unmarried people, man and woman, to live together. Whereas this phenomenon is common in western countries since it is not against their norms.

The following is an example of cultural norm and value described by Wierzbicka (1994).

..... and American culture is one of those cultures that value and encourage the 'social smile'. Again the American social smile must be distinguished from the social smile, which may be used as a cover for bad and painful feelings. The American social smile has a different function: It projects a positive image, causing

people to think something good about the smiler, and it expresses the experiencer's conscious or semiconscious effort to get rid of bad feelings and to generate in oneself genuine good feelings. The American social smile is also different from the obligatory Balinese smile, as analyzed by Wikan (1989). The most striking difference between the two has to do with different attitudes toward self – analysis. In Balinese culture, people are constantly enjoined to forget their troubles, to not think, and to become cheerful and smiling as a result of this strategy. By contrast, in American culture, one is enjoined to achieve a similar result by taking the opposite route.

Balinese route: If I feel something bad,  
 it is good not to think about it  
 if I don't think about it,  
 I will not feel like this  
 I can then feel something good.

American route: If I feel something bad,  
 it is good to think about it  
 if I think about it,  
 I will not feel like this  
 I can then feel something good

That is another example of how culture differentiates the meaning of the 'same' emotional expression, in this case *smiling*. Can you see the difference between Balinese smile and American smile? Can you give another example from your own region?

Let us go back to our discussion of cultural value and norm. Renwick (1980) differentiates between American and Australian cultural attitudes:

Americans need to be liked ... Australians are less concerned than Americans about what others think of them; they are not as interested in whether someone likes them or not. Therefore, they do not try as hard as Americans to influence other people's opinion of them.

The cultural importance of positive feelings in American society is reflected in linguistics routine such as the common greeting routine, with as expected positive reply:

How are you?

I'm fine/very well, thank you/etc

The fact that in Australian culture the prevailing greeting routine is less positive highlights the difference in cultural attitudes to emotion in these two different traditions:

How are you?

Not bad/ not too bad/can't complain/etc

(Wierzbicka, 1994)

This excerpt shows you how culture influences our reaction linguistically.

### Activity 1

- ❑ From the definitions mentioned earlier, can you give some examples of culture? Discuss this with your friends.
- ❑ Look around and see whether there are differences in the way you do things with the way your friends from other regions, do it.
- ❑ Give some examples of cultural values and cultural norms that exist in your region.
- ❑ You might know a certain word or words in your region that have a special meaning to the society. Write it down and give explanation why it is so special.

### Language and Culture

Now that you know the definitions of culture, at least the one that we use in this module, let us move to discuss the relation between culture and language. At the beginning of this unit we have Sapir's opinion on the close relation between language and culture. Many people share his believe, including Ronald wardhaugh, Imam Suyitno, Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard and of course his student, Whorf. We will discuss their idea one by one.

Read the following short conversations:

Ani (Indonesian) : Wah, bajunya bagus sekali.

Nina (Indonesian): Ah, ini baju jelek dan murah kok (blushing).

Susan (American): Wow, your dress is very beautiful.

Mary (American): Thank you. (smiling)

Can you see the difference? Yes, in the conversation done by the two Indonesian women, Nina's reaction to Ani's complement is by denying it. In Indonesian culture, it is common for people to be humble. Nina will be considered to be arrogant if she agrees to Ani's complement. By denying it she tries to be humble. In contrast to this custom, in American culture it is common to give and accept compliment. You will not be considered arrogant when you accept a compliment. Can you give other example? Write it down and discuss it with your friend.

If we apply Whorf's idea about language and culture, we can see that the way people see things is indeed reflected in their language. For example, in Indonesia we have many words to represent rice. In our culture rice is very important, that is why we have many words to represent each form of it. We have the word 'padi' for the form of rice in the field, 'gabah' for its form after being harvested, 'beras' for the form before being cooked, and finally 'nasi' for the form after being cooked. In America, where rice is not considered as important as in Indonesia, there is only one word for it that is rice.

Wardhaugh (1998) discussed some examples of the relation between language and culture. One of them is the kinship system. For Americans, they have *uncle* for their father's or mother's brother and *aunt* for their father's or mother's sister. Americans do not differentiate between younger or older brother/sister. For Javanese people, they have more names for their father's or mother's brother and sister. They have 'Pakde' for their father/mother older brother and 'Bude' for their father/mother sister. 'Pakle' and 'Bule' are used for younger ones.

Color terminology is also an example of the relationship between language and culture (Wardhaugh, 1998: p. 230). Sometimes it is not easy to translate directly a certain color terminology in one language to another language. 'Blond' is one of the English color terminology that does not have exact translation to any of Indonesian color terminology. The English and American people need this terminology for their 'special hair color' that does not exist in Indonesian people hair color.

He also mentioned about taboo and euphemism are also good examples of the relation between language and culture. What is meant by taboo and euphemism?

Taboo is the prohibitions or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause the anxiety, embarrassment, or shame and euphemism is to avoid mentioning certain matters directly (Wardhaugh, 1998: p. 234).

Some words or objects are considered to be taboo in one society but not in other society. The same goes to euphemism. Taboo and euphemism are usually related to the standards and norms in a society (remember the cultural norms?).

One thing that should be remembered is the fact that taboo and euphemism can change form time to time. For example, the English word ‘damn’ was considered as a taboo word in the past, but not anymore, well at least not as strong as before.

Can you give examples of tabooed subjects in your place?

Now let us see what Imam Suyitno says about language and culture.

Imam Suyitno Stated;

*Bahasa adalah bagian integral dari budaya suatu kelompok. Karena itu unsur-unsur budaya seperti aturan, kebiasaan, dan cara hidup kelompok dapat diekspresikan melalui bahasa. Budaya yang dimiliki oleh bangsa-bangsa di dunia dicerminkan dalam bahasanya sehingga menimbulkan berbagai macam gaya berbahasa yang menjadi ciri penanda masyarakatnya.*

(Suyitno, 2000, p.147)

Suyitno wrote that there are many ways to express ‘no’, to reject, or to decline an offer or a request. Here are some of the ways people from various cultural background say ‘no’

- ❑ In Japan and Korea, people offer food and drink by using negative expression, like “Wouldn’t you like some more tea?” If the answer for this offer is ‘no’ then it means the offer is accepted.
- ❑ In France, the answer for that kind of offer is ‘Merci’ which means ‘Thanks’. But in this context ‘merci’ means ‘No, thanks’ which in American would be meant ‘Yes please’

(Suyitno, 2000: p. 154)

Suyitno also mentioned about the way people rejecting something that have a very close relation with their cultural background. In American culture, people tend to be direct when they are rejecting a request or an offer. They will use an explicit words to express their rejection, such as :

- ❑ A : Can you help me taking these chairs to my room?"  
B: "I am sorry I can't"
- ❑ A: "Can I help you?"  
B: " No, thank you. I can manage by myself"
- ❑ A: "Would you like something to drink?"  
B: " No, thanks"

Unlike the Americans who are straightforward in expressing their rejection, the Javanese tend to avoid expressing their rejection openly. It is related to their culture in which it is considered impolite to say 'no'. Here are some expressions that are commonly used by Javanese people to reject a request or an offer:

- ❑ A: Shandi, apa Anda bisa menuliskan surat ini?  
B: Tulisan Susan lebih bagus, Pak
- ❑ A: Mila, apa Anda bisa mengantarkan saya ke Bandara nanti?  
B: Wah, pukul 12.00 nanti saya ada kuliah
- ❑ A: Anda mau minum apa? Kopi?  
B: Saya tidak minum kopi karena saya sakit mag.
- ❑ A: Pak, ada tamu.  
B: Katakan, saya sedang tidur
- ❑ A: Apakah Bapak bisa datang ke pesta pernikahan kami?  
B: Insy Allah
- ❑ A: Bagaimana menurut Anda gagasan Pak Rahmat tentang jam kerja?  
B: Itu gagasan yang bagus, tetapi ma'af saya kurang setuju.

(Adapted from Suyitno, 2000: p.156)

What is your comment on these examples? Yes, The Javanese are trying very hard to avoid saying ‘no’ when they are trying to reject a request or an offer. Their culture prevents them to express it directly. What about in your culture, can you say ‘no’ directly to a person who offers you something or who asks you to do something? Discuss it with your friends and write it down so that you know that you understand Suyitno’s idea about the relation between language and culture.

Now, let us see what Anna Wierzbicka says about the relation between language and culture. Anna Wierzbicka conducted a comprehensive study on the influence of culture toward a language, especially to its vocabulary. She believes that there is a very close link between the life of a society and the lexicon of the language spoken by it. (Wierzbicka, 1997, p.1). She found many words in one language that are difficult to be translated into other language due to its strong cultural value. She did some studies on the relation between emotion words and culture. According to her, different culture encourages different attitudes towards emotions, and these different attitudes are reflected in the lexicon and the grammar of the language associated with the culture. (Wierzbicka, 1994)

A study on the Ifaluk language of Micronesia was done by Lutz (taken from Wierzbicka, 1994). According to Lutz, this language does not have a word for a concept of anger. Ifaluk people have a word with a concept of ‘song’ . What they mean by ‘song’ is quite different from the concept of anger in English. Below is Wierzbicka’s explanation of Lutz study on these two words;

Song is less aggressive feeling than anger, a feeling that is less likely to lead to physical violence. Typically, song manifests itself in reprimands, in refusal to eat, or in a pout. What is more, in some cases, song can lead to suicide or to attempted suicide. The hidden goal of song is to change the situation by altering the behavior of the offending person, but the actions caused by song are often directed toward oneself rather than toward the guilty person (for example, an attempted suicide rather than an attempted murder).

Lutz (Wierzbicka, 1994) states that although both Ifaluku and Americans may have the goal of avoiding violence, roles of physical aggression in the two societies and beliefs about those roles are in dramatic contrast, in part due to cultural differences in the importance attached to that goal. (Wierzbicka, 1994)

So, you see that culture does influence the language. It will be a bit difficult to translate ‘song’ into English. As we know that ‘angry’ is not really capture the real meaning of ‘song’. What about the word ‘marah’ in Indonesian, do you think it can capture the meaning of ‘angry’, in other word is it the exact translation of it? How can you answer this question? Analyze the reaction of people who get angry and who are ‘marah’. Describe your emotion when you are ‘marah’ and see whether it is the same as the American people who are angry. It is not that difficult, is it?

Another example is the Javanese word ‘isin’. Can you translate this word into English? Write down the English word or words that you think have the same concept as ‘isin’. ‘Isin’ is not really the same as embarrassment, ashamed or shy. If you put this word in the context of Javanese culture, those English words do not have the same concept with the one in ‘isin’. We will not find an exact translation for this word. In Javanese culture, ‘isin’ is not something bad. You don’t have to do something ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ to feel ‘isin’. This is not really the same with its English counterparts that have negative meaning.

Cliff Goddard also did some studies on the relation between culture and language, in particular emotion words. The following is his explanation on two English ‘surprise words’, ‘*surprised and amazed*’, and compared them with the Malay and Indonesian ‘surprise words’.

Surprised is a feeling one has in response to something immediate and unexpected. Amazed is a stronger kind of surprise. If we try to translate these two words into Malay, we might use one of these words *hairan*, *terkejut*, or *terperanjat* or in Indonesian *heran*, *terkejut*, and *terperanjat*. If we look up in a bilingual dictionary, we might find these words or one of these words as the translation for surprised and or amazed. According to Goddard, these three Malay and Indonesian words cannot really capture the real meaning of the words ‘surprised’ and ‘amazed’. *Hairan and heran*, according to Boucher, has a slightly different connotation, it is closer to the connotation of the English word ‘astonishment’. McAndrew offered the word ‘*terkejut*’ to translate these two words, but then ‘*terkejut*’ has a ‘negative tone’ whereas ‘surprise’ does not have that. (Goddard, 1997, p. 172). According to Goddard, if these two English words are words that express emotion, which should be universal, that is everybody in this world can experience it and therefore there should be a word/words to express it in any language. So how come there is no exact translation for these two words in either Malay or Indonesian language? Heider proposed an answer to this problem. According

to him, this problem is related to the cultural differences between Indonesian/Malay and American. Do you agree with him? Of course it is easy to 'blame' every 'unsolved' problem to the culture, isn't it? Some people might not agree with Heider, but the most important is you have to be able to see each problem related to the language and culture objectively and try to analyze from many points of views. Not all 'unsolved' problem related to a language is related to the culture.

### Activity 2

- 1) Find some examples that show the relation between your native language and your culture.
- 2) Find some examples of words or objects that are taboo in your society.



### SUMMARY

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In this unit, you have learnt about some definitions of culture, cultural values, and cultural norms. Besides that you also have learnt about the close relation between language and culture. Many researchers found that there are many words or expressions that have strong relation with the culture of the people who use those words and expressions.



### FORMATIVE TEST 1

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Choose the right answer by crossing A,B,C or D

- 1) The followings are examples of culture, except.....
  - A. Traditional dance
  - B. Wedding ceremony
  - C. School system
  - D. Kinship system
- 2) Which of the followings is the example of cultural value in Indonesia?
  - A. Family
  - B. Personal privacy

- C. Independence
  - D. Self reliance
- 3) What is cultural Norms?
- A. Something that is considered very important by somebody
  - B. Rules that are applied and accepted in a community
  - C. Rules set by the Government in a certain country
  - D. Standardized rules which are applied to certain people
- 4) What would the Indonesians reject this offer “ Wouldn’t you like coffee?”
- A. Yes, I would like coffee
  - B. No, I wouldn’t like coffee
  - C. Yes, I would like coffee
  - D. No, I would like tea, please
- 5) What would the Japanese accept this offer “ Wouldn’t you like coffee?”
- A. Thank you
  - B. Yes
  - C. No
  - D. Sorry
- 6) The followings are people who conducted studies on language and culture, except....
- A. Wierrzbicka
  - B. Goddard
  - C. Suyitno
  - D. Gurito
- 7) What would the French people reject this offer “ Would you like something to drink?”
- A. Thank you
  - B. No, thank you
  - C. No, please
  - D. No, but thank you
- 8) Which of these Indonesians words does not have an exact English translation?
- A. Paman
  - B. Sepupu
  - C. Beras
  - D. Cantik

- 9) Which of these English words does not have an exact Indonesian translation?
- Christmas
  - Thanksgiving
  - Smile
  - Dance
- 10) Which of these short conversations shows cultural misunderstanding?
- + : You have a beautiful eyes  
- : Thank you
  - + : Wouldn't you like some cookies?  
- : Yes, thank you (take the cookies)
  - + : Can you meet me after lunch?  
- : I can't!
  - + : What do you think of his idea?  
- : It's the worse idea I've ever heard!

If you have finished doing the formative test, you may check your answers with the key to the formative test at the end of this module. Then evaluate your answers. When you get at least 80 % right, you can continue to the other unit; however, if you do not, you have to read over the discussion and the examples. Then, do the formative test once more. The following is how to evaluate your test.

Formula:

$$\text{Level of mastery} = \frac{\text{The number of the right answers}}{\text{The number of the items}} \times 100\%$$

Level of mastery:

90%	-	100%	=	very good
80%	-	89%	=	good
70%	-	79%	=	sufficient
<		70%	=	insufficient

## UNIT 2

## Culture and Foreign Language Teaching

After studying this unit, you are expected to be able to state the importance of understanding culture in teaching a foreign language, and to give examples of cultural studies in teaching a foreign language, especially in teaching English.

In Unit one, you have already learnt the relation between language and culture. Now you know that it is important to know the culture of the target language when you are teaching and or studying a foreign language. Can you give the reason or reasons why it is important to know the relation between language and culture when studying a foreign language? Write down your answer, it will help you understand this unit more easily.

Dwyer (1996) states about the incorporation of culture into the Foreign Language Curriculum.

Language teachers have been at the business of incorporating cultural information into their foreign language classes, long before it became popular to do so. While these teachers may not have used the term culture, they are certainly aware of the fact that one does not communicate in a foreign language by grammar and vocabulary alone. Yet now that experts are suggesting that teachers add 'culture' to their language classrooms the situation becomes problematic because it is not really clear what this means in practice. (Dwyer, 1996)

According to Dwyer, the problem with incorporating culture into foreign language teaching is that there are many disagreements about the meaning of language and the meaning of culture. What does he mean by that statement? Yes, that's true, it is difficult to find the exact definition of language and culture. Now if you have to define 'language' and 'culture', each one of you might give different definitions for these two words. As we have already learnt in the first unit, there are some definitions for the word 'culture'. Which definition you use will affect your materials in teaching the target language. The same thing goes to your definition of language. What is language? If you define it as a code: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation

(Dwyer, 1996) then your main concern in teaching it is those three language components and do not really concern with the culture. But if you define it as a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings etc, by the use of spoken sounds or conventional symbols (The Collins Dictionary. P. 563), then culture is really important in the teaching and learning process. So you see, it is important to have a clear definition of those two words before you teach.

Byram mentions three reasons to consider the cultural study in teaching a foreign language.

First, there is a growing concern within foreign language teaching (FLT) with the ways in which language learning is related to cultural learning, indicated by phrases such as ‘cultural awareness’ and ‘intercultural learning’. Yet this concern has not been explicitly related to the development in cultural studies (Kramersch, 1993). On the other hand, those who define and discuss cultural studies rarely show any awareness of how the study of cultures, for many learners, is a study of foreign cultures through the medium of foreign languages, the learners in question being essentially language learners.

A second issue is that Cultural Studies in some cases is taught as part of a course for teachers of foreign languages, either at the beginning of their career or as part of their further professional development in mid-career. The study of British cultures is often part of the training of teachers of English as a foreign language. For these students the relationship between Cultural studies and language teaching is important not only as part of their own learning process but with respect to their methods of teaching language and culture to others.

A third issue raised by the link with FLT is the question of different stages or levels of learning. Foreign students of British cultures may be at quite different levels in language acquisition; they may also have quite different purposes and opportunities for learning – from professional contacts in Britain on a regular basis to a certainty that they will never visit Britain during or after their course of study. (Byram, 1997: p. 53-54)

What can you conclude from this excerpt? Right, there is a close relation between cultural study and foreign language teaching or learning. In his first issue, Byram mentions that there is a cross interest between the students who study culture and the students who study a foreign language. Those who study foreign culture should use the language spoken by the society of that culture to be able to understand the culture. On the other hand, those who study a foreign language should also know the culture of the society in which the language is spoken. Byram also mentions the importance of teaching culture for English teachers that can help them in teaching English to their students.

As indicated before, you must have a clear picture of the meaning of language and the meaning of culture when you teach or learn a foreign language. Then, based on your definition of these two words, you decide your objective in teaching a foreign language or in learning a foreign language. Let us say that your main objective of teaching a foreign language is to enable learners to communicate using a foreign language, in different ways and with native and non - native speakers. (Byram 1997: p. 60). If this is your main objective, then you have to be aware that culture can and will influence people when they involve in a conversation with native or non-native speakers. Do you still remember our examples of two conversations in unit one? Let us see again those two conversations.

Ani (Indonesian) : Wah, bajunya bagus sekali.

Nina (Indonesian): Ah, ini baju jelek dan murah kok (blushing).

Susan (American): Wow, your dress is very beautiful.

Mary (American): Thank you. (smiling)

Now, these conversations can run smoothly because the people involve in the conversation come from the same cultural background, the first conversation is between two Indonesian women, and the second conversation is between two American women. What if the conversation is between an Indonesian and an American woman? Now let us see what happens.

Susan (American): Wow, your dress is very beautiful

Nina (Indonesian): Ah, this is ugly and very cheap. (tersipu-sipu).

Well, now you can see the problem of cross-cultural misunderstanding. In that conversation, the American woman might feel offended because the dress that she thought beautiful is considered to be ugly by the owner. You might feel awkward when you know that your response is hurting other people's feeling. You do not want you or your students in that kind of situation, do you? Let see another example of a conversation that might confuse you.

A: Smith went for seven in a double header yesterday.

B: Must have been a left-handed pitcher then.

(Dwyer, 1996)

Can you guess the topic in that conversation? The topic of this conversation is about baseball. Baseball is very popular in America. The American people are very fond of this sport, they watch it, talk about it, and they collect everything related to this sport. It becomes part of their culture. To understand the above conversation you have to know the game first.

If we go back to our main objective in teaching a foreign language mentioned above, then we cannot teach the language out of context. The question is which context should we use? Is it the learners' context or the target language context? Should we ignore the learners' cultural background when we teach a foreign language? Should we introduce both cultures? Those questions should be considered before you teach your students. It is easier for language teachers to choose a teaching method if they are aware of those questions. Nowadays, we are introduced by a teaching method that puts stress on using the learners' cultural background in delivering the teaching materials. The materials used when using this method should be related to the learners' context. For example, if you teach English to Indonesian students, you have to use teaching materials related to Indonesian context. The text should be about Indonesia, the name of the people in your examples of dialogs should be Indonesian names, etc. The experts who support this method believe that the students can learn the target language faster and easier when they are familiar with the materials. It is true that the students might learn faster when they are familiar with the context in the lesson, but it is difficult to 'create' materials that can be as natural as authentic material. Read the following examples;

Liam and Noldi live in a small town, Tomohon, in North Sulawesi. It is thirty kilometers from the beach. They are SLTP students but they are not in the same school. Lian is studying at SLTP Don Bosco and Noldi is studying at SLTP negeri Tomohon. Lian likes cycling and Noldi does too. Noldi prefers swimming to cycling but Lian prefers cycling to swimming.

One day Noldi and Liam went to the beach, 'karang Ria' Manado. They spent five hours to go there. It was Sunday morning. They carried their bags with a camera, binoculars, and some biscuits.

When they arrived on the beach, a lot of people had been there. Some were swimming and some were sailing. Grown-up people were lying on the sand. Old people were sitting and enjoying the beautiful beach. Children were playing beach volley and the others were playing chess. Noldi was taking pictures and Lian was too. The sun shone brightly then. The weather was very hot so that most of the children drank soft drinks, such as coca cola, fanta, aqua."The botol', pepsi-cola, greenspot. And the like.

In fact, Noldi and Lian wanted to sail but they realize that they were too young to sail. They saw two foreigners enjoyed the sailing. They used their binoculars to see them, they looked very near.

(Adapted from Mingkid and Sudradjat, 1995: p.105-106)

Well, what is your comment about this example? Yes, it is not natural. Most of the non-authentic materials are made to fit certain purposes. For example, when the teacher wants to teach Simple Past, he/she will use a text that has many examples of sentences using Simple past. Sometimes if the teacher is not careful, then he/she will use a text that is not natural. Then the students might not learn the language, they only learn the pattern of the language. As the result, they will have a problem when they have to communicate with the English native speakers. In the example above, most of the sentences are using Past tense, it makes the story becomes monotonous and uninteresting.

Other experts believe that the students should get authentic materials when they are learning a foreign language. What they mean by authentic

materials are materials from authentic resources like newspapers, TV, books, magazines etcetera. Dwyer defines the meaning of ‘authentic materials’ as a text created by a fluent (native) speaker of a language for communication with other fluent speakers of that language. Non-authentic texts are produced by nonfluent speakers of the language or by fluent speakers of the language for purposes other than communication with first language users (Dwyer, 1987: p. 8). By using these authentic materials, both the teacher and the students are exposed by the culture of the target language. According to Dwyer culture has always been transmitted in the language classroom, though we may not have been aware of it. (Dwyer, 1996: p. 7). How does this happen? Okay, let us try to picture the situation in your classroom when you teach English. You want to teach your students reading comprehension, so you ask your students to read a passage on ‘Thanksgiving’. When you and your students discuss the content of the passage, you also introduce the American culture, in this case a special day to express your gratitude to God. In this special day, people usually gather together with their family and have dinner. They usually have turkey as their main dishes. So you see, in the process of teaching and learning a language you and your students also learn about the culture. Can you give another example to show how culture is transmitted in language classroom? You can give an example of your own culture and how this culture can be transmitted in the process of teaching and learning a language.

The target language cultural background can be exposed to you and your students not only through reading texts but also through authentic dialogs. What is meant by authentic dialog? If we refer to Dwyer’s definition of authentic material, then authentic dialog is a dialog spoken by native speakers in a real situation. By using this authentic dialog, we will get an example of actual usage of certain expressions. Another important point that we can get from authentic dialog is we will get information on the cultural background of the speakers. Read the following dialog and see whether you can get the cultural background of the speakers.

Susan : Can I see you for a minute?  
 Prof John : Sure, what’s up?  
 Susan : I need more time to write my paper. Can I have one week extension?

- Prof John : Sure, but not more than one week. You have to put your paper in my mail box by four next week.
- Susan : Okay, Thanks.

Now, what can we say about this dialog? From this dialog, we can see that in western culture the language used between a student and a lecturer is informal language. In English language, the word 'I' and 'you' can refer to anybody. For example, when you talk to your friend, you use the word 'I' to refer to yourself and 'you' to refer to your friend. 'I' and 'you' are also use when you talk to your boss, your parents, your teacher or even to strangers. What do you think about it? Is there any relation with the culture of the native English speakers? Yes, in a way, it is related to the cultural background of the people who use the English language, that is western people.

What about in Indonesian language? As we know, In Indonesian language, we have several words to refer to the speaker and the addressee, they are 'saya', 'aku', or 'gue'<sup>1</sup> to refer to the speaker, and 'kamu', 'anda', 'saudara', 'kau', 'lu'<sup>2</sup> or 'Bapak/ibu' to refer to the addressee. Each of those words is used depending on the relation between the speaker and the person the speaker is talking to (the addressee). For example, when you talk to your friend, you might choose to use the word 'aku' or 'gue', to refer to yourself, and use the word 'kamu' to refer to your friend. But when you talk to the head master in your school, you will choose 'saya' to refer to yourself and 'bapak/ibu' to the head master. Can you explain why you have to change? Is it related to Indonesian culture? Discuss this with your colleagues at school.

As you can see from the explanation above, your knowledge of either your students' cultural background or the target language cultural background is very important in teaching a foreign language.

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<sup>1</sup> Gue is a word from Betawi's dialect, but nowadays it is used by many Indonesian people in their daily conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Look the explanation for 'gue'

### Activity 1

- 1) Give an example of teaching English by using your students' cultural back ground
- 2) Read these excerpts:

#### Excerpt one

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

'My dear Mr. Bennet', said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?'

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

'But it is,' returned she; 'for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.'

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently.

'You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it'

This was invitation enough.

'Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of a large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.'

'What is his name?'

'Bingley.'

'Is he married or single?'

'Oh single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of a large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!'

'How so? How can it affect them?'

'My dear Mr. Bennet,' replied his wife, 'how can you be so tiresome? You must know that I am thinking of marrying one of them.'

'Is that his design in settling here?'

'Design? Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.'

'I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better; for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you best of the party.'

'But my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr Bingley when he comes into neighborhood.'

'It is more than I engage for, I assure you.'

'But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account; for in general, you know, the visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not.'

(Austen, 1987: p.111-12)

### Excerpt two

*Euis: My grandfa bought me a small aquarium the day before yesterday, then I place it somewhere in my room.*

*Susi: Well. Do you like keeping fish, Euis?*

*Euis: Yes I do. I like fish very much because they are really funny. I have yellow, red, black, white, green, blue, and pink fish in my aquarium. They are very, very beautiful.*

*Susi: You're right. They are funny to see. Nowadays many people like to keep fish in aquariums. They do it just for fun.*

*Euis: By the way, do you keep pets at home, Susi?*

*Susi: Yes, I do. I have a few rabbits at home. They are very nice and funny, too. I like to play with them.*

*Euis: Oh. But I really hate the rabbits*

*Susi: Really? Can you tell me why you don't like them?*

*Euis: I don't like the rabbits because they look so dirty.*

*Susi: Er ... Em... Do you keep birds, Euis?*

*Euis: Yes. I do. My elder brother, Cecep and I have three parrots in their cages. What about your younger brother, Kebayan. What does he like to keep, Susi?*

*Susi: Cock. He has a cock. Its name is Jago. He often plays with it. It has a little house somewhere in my garden. My father keeps geese, ducks, goats, hens, and horses. They have their own stables. The stables are somewhere in my garden, too.*

(Mingkid and Sudradjat, 1995: p 157)

## Activity 2

- 1) Write any information on the cultural background of this story.
- 2) Do you think there is any similarity between the culture in the first story and the culture in your place? Explain your answer.
- 3) What is your comment for the second excerpt?

Okay, now that you know that cultural knowledge is very important for language teacher, you can learn more about the cultural background of the target language, that is English, in this module.



## SUMMARY

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It is important for language teachers to learn about the culture of the people who use the language. By understanding the culture, it will be easier for the language teachers to understand the language and to teach the language to their students. Some materials are easier to be explained by relating them to culture. Some experts believe that it is better to use the students' cultural context when teaching a foreign language. They believe that it is easier for the students to learn the language when they are familiar with the context. Others believe that it is better to use the target language cultural context so that they can learn the language in its natural settings.



## FORMATIVE TEST 2 \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Read this text and answer the questions.

“Mother, can I go to the movie this afternoon?” Euis asked her mother after school.

“Of course, but you must do your homework before going there”, answered her mother.

“Right, mother. I will” Euis said and then she entered the dining room to have lunch.

In the afternoon Euis went to Susi’s house. Susi is Euis’ classmate.

“Susi, do you have a plan to do anything this afternoon?” Euis asked Susi.

“Well, would you like any help, Euis?” Susi asked Euis, too.

“Can you go to the movie with me this afternoon, Susi?” asked Euis. “There is a good film at Buaran Theatre. It is the secretary. It’s a very good film I know”. said Euis.

“I am sorry Euis. I’d love to but I’m afraid I can’t”, answered Susi. “My mother, father, and I will attend my cousin’s birthday party this afternoon.

“All right. Let me go home now, Susi”, said Euis.

“Why are you so in a hurry, Euis?” asked Susi.

“I should do my homework before going to the movie. Good bye. Susi” said Euis.

“Good bye, Euis” said Susi.

Mingkid and Sudradjat, 1995: p.182-183)

- 1) Is this text an authentic material? Give your reason for your answer.
- 2) Do you think the text contains information about culture? Give your reason.
- 3) What is your comment on this text?
- 4) If you want to use this text as your teaching material, what topic are you going to teach that will fit the text?

### II. Choose the right answer by crossing A, B, C or D

- 1) What is one of the weaknesses of using non-authentic materials?
  - A. It is too long
  - B. It is too short
  - C. It is not natural
  - D. It is easy to get

- 2) A: Do you mind if I sit next to you?  
What might the English native speaker answer this request?
- A. Thank you
  - B. No, thank you
  - C. Yes, I don't mind
  - D. No, I don't mind.
- 3) What might the Indonesian answer the request in number 2?
- A. Thank you
  - B. No, thank you
  - C. Yes, I don't mind
  - D. No, I don't mind
- 4) What might the reason for the Indonesian to answer like that?
- A. They have different cultural way in responding to a request
  - B. They don't know the right grammar
  - C. They know the culture so they can give the right answer.
  - D. They know the right structure but not the vocabulary.
- 5) Which of these materials is an authentic material?
- A. A guided conversation made for teaching grammar
  - B. A text from a news paper.
  - C. A student's writing in English class.
  - D. A Taylor made text to teach reading.
- 6) A: I've just had a baby!  
Which of these replies is an example of cross cultural misunderstanding?
- A. Congratulation! When did you get married?
  - B. Really? That's great, congratulation.
  - C. Congratulation! Is it a boy or a girl?
  - D. Oh, I am so happy for you, congratulation!

If you have finished doing the formative test, you may check your answers with the key to the formative test at the end of this module. Then evaluate your answers. When you get at least 80 % right, you can continue to the other unit; however, if you do not, you have to read over the discussion and the examples. Then, do the formative test once more. The following is how to evaluate your test.

Formula:

$$\text{Level of mastery} = \frac{\text{The number of the right answers}}{\text{The number of the items}} \times 100\%$$

Level of mastery:

90%	-	100%	=	very good
80%	-	89%	=	good
70%	-	79%	=	sufficient
<		70%	=	insufficient

## Key to Activities

### *Unit 1*

#### *Activity 1*

The answer for this activity depends on your understanding of the definitions of culture.

Your answer might be about the way people in your region celebrate a wedding, Lebaran or Christmas, the way people doing things, or the traditional dance or other kinds of arts. Remember! There is no right or wrong in your answer, the most important thing is that you know what culture is.

#### *Activity 2*

Your answer can be varied depend on your knowledge of the words or expressions that are related to your culture.

### *Unit 2*

#### *Activity 1*

- 1) The answer for this question can be varied. For example you could teach reading by using a passage on traditional wedding ceremony in your region, Lebaran, or a passage on any other occasions that related to your culture.

#### *Activity 2*

- 1) In this story, we can see several information on the speaker's cultural background, such as;
  - In the speaker's culture it is considered to be impolite for a woman, in this case a young and single woman, to visit a man's house before her father comes and introduces himself to the man.
  - There are certain formalities for introducing one's daughter to a man.
  - The wife uses a formal language when she talks to her husband. In this case she uses her husband last name and title (Mr. Bennet) to refer to her husband when she talks to him.
  - Gossiping is common among the women.

- 2) Your answer depends on your own opinion whether there is any similarities between your culture and the culture in the story.
- 3) Your answer depends on your understanding of the difference between authentic and non-authentic materials. As you can see, the second excerpt is not an authentic material. It is written for a specific purpose, i.e. to teach English. It is not natural so it sounds 'weird'. You probably will not see some of the expressions in that text in 'the real English text'..

## Key to the Formative Tests

### *Formative test 1*

- 1) C
- 2) A
- 3) B
- 4) A
- 5) C
- 6) D
- 7) A
- 8) B
- 9) C
- 10) B

### *Formative test 2*

I.

- 1) Your answer should be no, because the text is designed for teaching reading comprehension. It has a local context and it is not natural.
- 2) Your answer depends on your understanding of the meaning of culture
- 3) Your answer depends on your opinion on the text
- 4) You might use the text to teach :
  - Modal auxiliary
  - Future TenseCan you find other topic?

II.

- 1) C
- 2) D
- 3) C
- 4) A
- 5) B
- 6) A

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