

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: The objectives of this research are to identify the contribution of sociolinguistic competence in communicative language teaching. This research belongs to qualitative research with the type of library research. The researcher collected the theories of sociolinguistic competence and communicative language teaching from several books, journals, articles and web sites. The theories were then critically analyzed by explaining them on the second and third chapter. As the conclusion, the researcher made synthesis from those theories and answered the research problem. The result of the research shows the role of sociolinguistic competence within the communicative language teaching can already be seen from the nature of communication. As what experts explained, sociolinguistic competence is the key role in multicultural communication. In other words, to succeed in foreign language communication, the participants should be equipped with sociolinguistic abilities. It can be sum up that sociolinguistic competence has significant roles in communicative language teaching, that is to provides the understanding about the importance of having sociolinguistic competence in communication. This ability later is used by the teachers to identify the students' environment and cultural background to provide appropriate teaching and learning models to enhance the communicative language teaching.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistic competence, communicative language teaching, library research*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital attribute of human being. Language is being used in almost every aspects in daily activity. Hodge and Kress (1996, p.1) define language as an absolute precondition for nearly all of our social life, and it is the medium in which most organized thought and communication proceed. It is a key instrument in the socialization.

There is a strong relation between language and society. Chaika (1994) states that language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without another. There is no human society

that does not depend upon, is not shaped by, and does not itself shape language. Language is given to the individual by the society where he or she lives. Society is responsible for the creation and development of the language.

The existance of language in society has become the bridge of communication to connect the diversity of the idea of life, thought, and culture. Society is not something homogeny, it is heterogenic individuals and has different religion, race, ethnic, and background education. That heterogenic characteristic has raise a new branch of linguistics such as

sociolinguistics, psycholinguistic, neurolinguistics, antropinguistics, etc. Sociolinguistics as a branch of linguistics takes role in studying language and its relation to social life.

Chaika (1994) states sociolinguistics as the study of the ways people use language in social interactions of all kind, such as how people talk with their friends, families, and teachers, as well as to storekeepers, doctors, or enemies. It is not only about pronunciation differences, or vocabulary choices, or grammatical variations. It is a matter of social context, who can hear us, where we are talking, and how we are feeling. Holmes (1992, p.4) describes sociolinguistics as the study of the relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistics explain why we speak differently in different social contexts, and concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning. It can be concluded that sociolinguistics is study of the use of language in social interactions which is aimed to make a better understanding about the structure of language and how its functioned in society.

As a branch of linguistics that studies about language and its relation to society, sociolinguistics has so many impacts in social life. It also has contribution in education especially in language teaching whether it is first language, second language, or foreign language. Sociolinguistics is the foundation of language teaching because it examines the outside aspects of linguistic. Those aspects include the sociolinguistic applications and contributions in solving the problems in language teaching, such as determining the language variation, interferences that appear in teaching, cultural diversities lead to ethnography of

communication, or determining approaches in classroom.

One of language teaching approach is called communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching as also known as communicative approach, is best considered as an approach rather than a method (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.154). Savignon (2002, p.210) defines communicative language teaching as teaching method and she defines communicative language teaching as an approach that understands language to be inseparable from individual identity and social behaviour. In short, communicative language teaching regarded as an approach because the principles underlying it can be applied in many different ways.

A number of definitions of communicative language teaching have been proposed by several linguists. Richards (2006, p.2) states that communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. In addition, Savignon (2002, p.1) states that communicative language teaching refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. Nunan (2001, p.12) says that communicative language teaching is underpinned from the view that communication requires the knowledge of various grammatical rules and the ability to use the rules effectively and appropriately when communicating.

By the definitions above, the researcher conclude that communicative language teaching is an approach of teaching of second and foreign language that emphasizes the learners interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal in learning a target language.

Despite being one of the goal of communicative language teaching, sociolinguistic competence is also one of the requirements to the realization of good communicative teaching and learning process. Canale and Swain (1980) describe sociolinguistic competence as knowing and understanding how to speak given the circumstances you are in. When people speak in their native language, they do not have to think about whom they are talking to, or how they should say something. The words typically come naturally, and speakers do not even realize all the complexities that go into the process.

Freeman and Freeman (2004) describe the importance for student to have sociolinguistic competence. They say that second language learners must learn how to produce and understand language in different sociolinguistic contexts, taking into consideration such factors as the status of participants, the purposes of interactions, and the norms or conventions of interactions.

In line with explanation above, McKay (2003) emphasizes that English as the world language and that local and international culture must be represented in the teaching of English. Teacher of English must be aware that cultural dimensions of English are not the same as those of other languages. All cultures in the world play a role in the teaching of English. Bayyurt (2013, p.75) cites English teacher can teach English effectively when they integrate the local culture into their curriculum while also incorporating the broad picture of international use. In other words, both teacher and student with sociolinguistic competence apply their comprehension in the classroom in order to provide a good teaching and learning process.

This research aims to describe the contribution of sociolinguistics in communicative language teaching.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method that the researcher used in this paper was library research. Library research that is also called theoretical research is not a compilation of other researches or arguments, but a research that is conducted through critical analysis so that what is written can be justified. There are several steps that must be taken to conduct library research (Richards, Platt, dan Platt, 1993), namely: (1) Define the variables as clear as possible; (2) Choose the source of the data or theories that are relevant to the variables above and read it; (3) Describe every single theory; (4) Do critical analysis towards every theory above by explaining the strength and weakness of every theory (Kerlinger, 1990); (5) Do comparison analysis between theory to decide which theory has more strengths and which theory has more weaknesses; (6) Make conclusion, the researcher has two choices: choose one of the theories that are assumed to be the best theory, or make synthesis from many theories (Lemlit IKIP Jakarta, 1991).

After doing the steps above, the researcher makes the framework for every chosen variable. Basically, the framework is the rational explanation about the relationship between variables. The researcher relates the variables based on the concept from the theories by using the strength of his analysis. The step should be done perfectly to make the readers able to follow the explanation. This is also the step where the researcher shows his intelligent, skill, and style.

The framework is later become the foundation of the researcher to conduct hypothesis. Therefore, hypothesis does not come suddenly but through processes that

have been passed before. The accuracy of the hypothesis is determined by the critical framework, and critical thinking of the researcher is determined by his understanding of the concept from the theoretical review. As explained before, hypothesis is the estuary of the theoretical review. The hypothesis is then empirically tested in real condition.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are drawn by doing in-depth analysis in each variables. The researcher divides the discussion into three domains to find the contribution of sociolinguistics in communicative language teaching and the way each variables affect one and another.

Sociocultural Context in Communication

Language is the part of culture, thus cultural behaviors and cultural practices in some places affect the use of language. In the process, a language will always follow the culture in which the language is used. Moreover, when the foreign language is introduced to people in which has different culture, there will be an incompatibility and some other things that require adjustments between the language and the people. This cultural barrier is very common in communication. People who has different state of culture will have difficulties to adjust the diversity among other cultures when going abroad or having situation where there are many cultural diversities involved.

Mizne (1997, p.7) provides an example of the problems caused by the cultural differences. Asian people who largely known to have high politeness compared to European or American are often having problems talking to people abroad and vice versa. In Japanese culture,

ordinary common people tend to show their gratitude by apologizing profusely. They use the "I am so sorry" as an intense way of giving thanks. However, a direct translation of such utterance does not have any effect in native since English does not use apologies to express gratitude. When Japanese student in the United States shows his gratitude for someone older by apologizing, there will be misunderstanding of meaning. What then happens is a native who wonders why Japanese student apologize to him and Japanese student that is hurt because his gratitude is being ignored.

The problem occurs in the story as the Japanese student has his own understanding about expressing gratitude does not match the native cultural behavior. The Japanese student have his words well spoken and the story shows that natives understand the literal meaning of the words. However the speaker good intention is lost due to cultural differences.

The similar case even happen in praising someone. Exchange compliments are common way to familiarize people as certain society member. Westerners are often praising family members in front of them because, culture speak, westerns idea of compliments are good thing in any occasion. It is often we hear an American women praising someone's husband of how hardwork he is, or an American men praising someone about how beautiful his wife is. Things get a little problematic in China since it is unusual for Chinese people to praise family member in front of others (Yin, 2009, p.155). When compliments should be something that are expected to produce positive impression for both sides, due to cultural differences, misunderstanding occurred and lead to unnecessary conflict.

The thing that can be learned through the stories above is that grammar

and lexical meanings of words alone cannot give person the ability to express their meaning in foreign language. There are other factors that play important role in succesful communication and sociocultural understanding is one of them. Therefore, having sociolinguistic competence is essential to get clear and well delivered communication, especially in language teaching.

The Contribution of Sociolinguistic Competence in Communicative Language Teaching

As it discussed in the previous chapters, cultural diversities can become impediment in multilingual and multicultural communication. Such problems not only occur in daily communication, but also occur in the broad scope of education. The examples above are also the reflection of language teaching and learning process around us.

Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.162) point out the main purpose of the communicative language teaching is a well delivered communication. There is no misunderstanding or confusion for both parties, either to the speakers or to the listeners. Although it sounds simple but the application is much harder. Learning language require cultural adjustment. They cannot be separated one and another, and if they do there will be problems and failures in reaching the learning goal.

It can be seen from the essence of communicative competence that the researcher discussed in the earlier part above, sociolinguistic competence is one of competencies required to form the communicative competence (Hymes in Richard and Rodgers, 2001; Richard, 2006). Canale and Swain (1980, p.6) believe the study of sociolinguistic competence is as essential to the study of communicative

competence as is the study of grammatical competence. Furthermore, there are tangible roles of sociolinguistic competence in communicative language teaching.

To get to the main goal of communicative language teaching, the researcher assumes the first thing to do is to identify the type of language users in the place where the language is studied. Kachru (1986) in Hornberger and McKay (2010, p.89) divides three types of users of English: (1) The *Inner Circle* or the native users of English, (2) The *Outer Circle* or non-native users of English as second language, and (3) The *Expanded Circle* or the non-native users of English as foreign language.

If the teacher knows what the position of the language in the students' environment is, he or she might be able to place himself as moderator in communicative language teaching and creates techniques and teaching materials which are appropriate to the types of language users. The goal of learning English through communicative language teaching for non-native language speakers is as simple as mastering the basic communicative ability. As for the students in a country where English is second language, the personal expectations of the teachers enhanced by providing more intensive communicative materials and techniques.

These types of awareness does not just come to the surface, instead, through sociolinguistics study by knowing the students' environment and cultural background. If teachers neglect the language position toward language learners the communicative learning will not happen. Teachers' expectations are not aligned toward the language ability of the students, as result teachers do not tolerate the common grammar mistakes, wrong phrases, or inappropriate accent and pronunciation,

although the learners are, for example, part of rural society which perceive English as foreign language. This shows the importance of sociolinguistic competence. Teacher with poor sociolinguistic competency will put accuracy over fluency and ignores the main goal of communicative language teaching.

By understanding the social aspects, teachers are expected to be able to apply their sociolinguistic competence into their learning techniques, in which the students are easily understood. By mastering the aspects of sociolinguistics, such as code switching, teachers able to integrate them in teaching language for students with multicultural background. The use of code switching is often avoided since it is considered to reduce the English atmosphere in the classroom. However, what often goes unnoticed is that code switching is used for solving the students' comprehension problems rather than averting them (Acar and Robertson, 2009, p.9). The student comprehension is become the measurement for deciding whether or not the use of code switching is necessary. In addition, the English speakers in the expanding circle will make use of their own rules of appropriateness (p.21). Therefore, the use of code switching is considered to be a norm of teaching language in multicultural society.

In the narrowed discussion of learning language in school, the importance of sociolinguistic competence will be laid on how the participants understand their classroom. The classroom environment is one thing to be aware of. Language classroom can be seen as sociolinguistic environment and discourse communities in which interlocutors use various functions of language to establish a communication system, and the teacher-student interaction is believed to contribute on students'

language development (Consolo, 2006, p.34).

Understanding the classroom environment is important for language teaching and learning process. As Bowers says in Holliday (1994, p.15) that a classroom may be a special environment set for learning and teaching, yet somehow what happens within is a reflection of the world outside. Lo Castro (1996) in Tanaka (n.d., p.110), adds to the description and describes that classroom practises reflect attitudes and beliefs about language and language learning that are embedded in the sociocultural context.

One of the ways to overcome the problems is to select the area of the intended use of the language (Widdowson, 1978, p.15). The target language and students as target language users must have alignment in various ways. It is important to know whether the target language is foreign language or second language to the students' society, or whether there are specific purposes of learning the language. In its application, the teacher should attempt to associate the language they are teaching with the situations outside the classroom and allows the students to express their communicative competence through real life topics, such as family circumstances, the holiday experiences, sport interests, and so on.

By the explanation of the experts above, classroom environment is essential for both students and teacher. The diversity of the students, their English abilities, their cultural and background knowledge, even the way the students perceive English, all can be seen as a gift that should be utilized by teacher as a means of learning language. Therefore, any analysis of classroom practice must engage with the wider circumstances in which it is situated, that makes cultural and social structures are

central to the success of teaching and learning process.

Another benefit that can be derived from sociolinguistics to the communicative language teaching is the importance of having positive language attitude. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002, p.286) language attitude is define as follow: "the attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Language attitudes may have an effect on second language or foreign language learning. The measurement of language attitudes provides information which is useful in language teaching and language planning."

In line with the description above, Sumarsono and Partana (2002, p.363) define language attitude as a relatively long-term partial belief toward some object of language that gives a person a tendency to react in certain ways. Learning language can shape the learners to have a positive language attitudes and vice versa. These language attitudes will be the major contributor in whether the students learning the target language succesfully or not.

In the context of multicultural society, a person's language attitude is determined by several factors. Among them are topics of conversation (subject matter being discussed), social class of the language users, age, gender, and social issues. In teaching and learning language, teachers can certainly take advantages of their role as moderator to create factors above. Teachers can provide interesting

topics as well as responsible for making the classroom situation supportive towards the development of communicative learning process. Teachers can provide positive vibes about the target language, such as the importance of English in the world as international language, its significance in pop cultures, its interesting histories, the influences and similarities with the students' language, etc. If those can be done, the students will be able perform a positive attitude toward the target language and enhance their communicative competence.

Sociolinguistic Competence and Communicative Language Teaching in Indonesia

English language teaching and learning in Indonesia experiences an ostacles due to its differences with local languages and cultures. The language aspects: vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, all are very different from the language aspects of the learners' language. The other problems occur from the outside the linguistic aspects such as the limited amount of sources, and limited amount of fluent speakers in the daily life, etc. Moreover, the general opinion about the importance of English only as a lesson. The students' learning goal shifts to get good mark rather than to be able to use it in real communication. As the consequences, communicative language teaching will be difficult to achieve.

In this chapter, the researcher explains the application of communicative language teaching in Indonesia and analyses the contribution of sociolinguistics in the teaching and learning process. According to several researchers, communicative language teaching in Indonesia faces many problems. Among them comes from the teachers themselves. The role of teacher as facilitator fails to give example on how

using English as tool of communication. Teachers are still lack of confidence and enthusiasm in using English during the class. Many of them cannot speak fluently and communicatively. As a result, teachers are fail to encourage their students to be communicative in language learning and students become passive (Sholihah, 2012, p.11). They rarely expressing opinions and showing disinterest in activities. Students are considered to be afraid of making grammatical errors, fail to make correct pronunciation, or choosing inappropriate vocabulary when using the language.

The amount of students in classroom also where the problems is sometimes occur. The class size is usually consists of 40 or more students. It is considered as too big and teacher will face difficulties in managing big class size in term of having successful communicative activities. Moreover, the amount of time of English lesson is also considered to be very limited. Each class only earn 3 or 4 hours in a week. Due to its limited amount of time, it is difficult for the teacher to design a good communicative instructions (Sholihah, p.12).

Most importantly, the assesment system is still focuses on the grammatical ability. The questions are mostly multiple choices and several listening tests. The tests given to the students are mostly focus on syntax and grammatical items. Hence, with or without realising, these types of assessment shape students' mindset of learning English to focus on grammar as they think that it is the way to get a good mark and disregard the importance of using English communicatively (Musthafa, 2001, p.191; Sholihah, p.12).

However, in the Indonesian latest curriculum: *the 2013 curriculum*, English learning and teaching in Indonesia focused on improving the competence of learners to

achieve goals in various contexts. Moreover, the teaching materials are mostly text-based. The teaching and learning focuses on students' grammatical ability. Therefore, the communicative language teaching and the role of sociolinguistics are significance beyond the cognitive aspect. Those are the main discussion underlies in this chapter.

In the 2013 curriculum, one of the main issue is character building. Character building means an effort or endurance to improves or strengthens the students' character. Teacher helps building students' personality. This includes the way teachers behave that can be a positive example for the students, how teachers use their language or deliver materials, how teachers communicate with other people, and other related matters. Based on the design developed by Kemendiknas, the character building in all individuals is the work of all human potential (cognitive, affective, conative, and psychomotor) in the context of social cultural interaction and lasts for life. The development of individual characters can only be done within the social and cultural environment concerned. In short, character building can only be done in a system which not detach the learners and their social environment, society, and the culture of the nation (Haryati, n.d).

The technology development that increases rapidly makes the communication getting easier. However, it badly affects the learners personality. Students are getting away from the proper norms that should be. This give negative impacts on the students' language manners, and shape the way the use language toward their teachers as well as toward fellow pupils. Students experience the inability to understand the contexts in which to speak, inability to differenciate which phrase is considered good and appropriate, and lose propriety in communication.

This is where sociolinguistics plays role in the learners behaviors and character building. That is by giving explanation about the importance of politeness in communicating with others. Sociolinguistics as a field of study, examine these things and able to give a deep insight into the importance of understanding the circumstances of the surrounding cultures and the social appropriateness of using language. Therefore, the application in small things matters. As an example, teacher who pays more attention in avoiding imperative sentence and gives suggestion in language classroom rather than sentences of command, teacher who sees the important of giving compliments rather than critics, those are felt to be able to trigger students to develop their social awareness as part of character building in *the 2013 curriculum*.

Alongside the character building, the latest 2013 curriculum also encourages the importance of the students to have 21st century skills. These skills are the assets for the students that will be useful in the future. This is a collection of life skills that aim to form students to be mentally strong and capable to fight the challenges of the real world. The skills can be summarized by the 4Cs: *Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Collaboration*. Of the four aspects mentioned, the communication aspect plays a prominent role in facing the 21st century. Communication in 21st century is characterized by the nature of communication itself which tends to be more and more globalized. Communication is considered to be more open, interactive, and multidimensional. The increase is driven by several factors such as global trade, the media development, technological improvements, global tourism, and international education.

These factors encourage the cross-cultural communication to get easier to do.

Thus, the 21st century communication is become much more intensive and provides the potential for a global connection across the world. On the other hand, challenges are also occurred in many areas due to rapid changes and background diversities. It also means that multicultural intelligence is increasingly become significant and sociolinguistics role as the field of study that examines the area is increasingly needed.

The important point to be underlined is the English language which is seen as the language of international communication. English is progressively used in global scale, as an international language for both native and non-native speakers. English language has taken various forms as reflection of the linguistic and cultural background of its speakers. This means that the nature of communication in 21st century is not only complex in terms of linguistic aspects, but also rich of norms and cultural values (Acar and Robertson, 2009). Based on the above, the integration of communication as one of four aspects of 21st century skills in teaching and learning process becomes significant.

In addition, sociolinguistic competence is also important in the implementation of 21st century skills. By keep maintaining the sociolinguistic ability, such as recognising the right time to speak, behave and being polite in the certain conditions, students are able to collaborate with people with multicultural background. It also allows students to keep being open minded to different ideas and cultures, and use them to create ideas and innovation for better life.

CONCLUSSION, IMPLICATION, AND SUGGESTION

Based on the discussion above, there are several conclusions obtained. First, it can be concluded that the role of

sociolinguistics within the communicative language teaching can already be seen from the nature of communication; it cannot be separated with culture and society. This provides a basic idea that grammatical competence is not enough to create a good communication. Therefore, it is important for individual to understand the social and cultural aspects in the context of communication, which later called as sociolinguistic competence.

Second, sociolinguistic competence plays a decisive role in providing a different perspective in language communication. Teachers with sociolinguistic ability are able to identify the various things to support the communicative environment. One of them is by identify the language position toward the learners as non-native users of English and be able to make adjustment toward teaching models and learning materials. In addition, teachers are able to identify the classroom atmosphere and all aspects involved to support the creation of communicative classroom. Teachers with sociolinguistic competence can also take advantages of their role as moderator in communicative language teaching to make an appropriate techniques of teaching language and direct them to have positive language attitude toward English.

Third, sociolinguistic competence also plays a significance role in achieving the character building in the 2013 curriculum, by providing insight for both teachers and students toward the importance of appropriateness and politeness in a multi-cultural communication. Sociolinguistic competence also takes part in 4C's based language teaching as it is a field of study that examines the relations of society and language. It is very important to accomplish the sociolinguistic competence to face the challenges from real world. That is by integrating social awareness into teaching

and learning process so they are going to be triggered and practising their language use in society.

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