

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE: A CASE STUDY OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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### Abstract

This research tried to fulfill the gap in exploring how international tutors learn about the Indonesian language as well as to examine their personal perspectives on the influence of Indonesian culture towards its language. The qualitative descriptive method used as the research design since, in the analysis of the data, someone cannot truly learn about certain languages without learning about its culture and its society. Learning, knowing, and understanding about the local culture means that someone can practically easier teach language to its society. Overall, all international tutors feel fascinated by how Indonesian people think, speak, and act, which influenced by the culture of its society. They also conclude that Indonesian people are expressing and using their language based on their experience with their own culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is considered to be one of the essential subjects in the English Department, especially for students who are taking linguistics as their major. In terms of linguistics study, there are several sub majors to be chosen from syntax, semantics, morphology, phonology, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. This research focused more on sociolinguistics study, especially in analyzing the influence of language and culture in the multicultural society of the English language course. The main focus of this research is about the personal perspectives of the international tutors who are working in EF Language Course Plaza Surabaya about learning Indonesian grammar and about finding out how the Indonesian language influences its culture from the perspective of those tutors.

Talking about sociolinguistics means that we are talking about the close relationship between the language and the society. The definition of sociolinguistics is varied lots. [Wijana \(2006:7\)](#) stated that sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics which tends to see the relationship between the language and the society who are using those languages. Meanwhile, [Fasold \(1993\)](#) stated that the core of sociolinguistics depends on two facts. The first is the variation of languages. It tends to have a relation with the choice of languages for those who are using languages. The second is the language that has been used as a media to send information, and someone's point of view to other people out there.

The writer conducts this research because of the unbreakable relationship between the language and the society. The relation also happens between the language and the culture of the society. Moreover, it can also be said that it is clear to have such a phenomenon about how the language used in certain societies can influence the culture of its society, and the culture of a certain society can also influence the language they have used. This kind of phenomenon is considered to be quite suitable for theory from a famous sociolinguist, Ronald Wardhaugh. [Wardhaugh \(2006\)](#), through his book entitled "An Introduction to Sociolinguistics" said that cultures from a group of people can be stated as a reflection from language they have used and on the other hand, it is also said that language can also be used as a media for the society to be able to interpret certain culture.

At least, there are several variations of the relationship between words or language which tend to be uttered by someone or a group of people and the cultural background of those people when it comes to interacting with other people from different cultural backgrounds. In other words, it can be seen from the example where someone from eastern culture tends to be more polite and beware of the words spoken to other people than those who are coming from western culture. This kind of phenomenon is mostly influenced by the cultural background of

those people where western culture is generally associated with the tradition in speaking directly to other people. If they feel insecure or uncomfortable, they will say it directly.

It means that in our everyday life, it is not unusual that we are all also living and growing with people with similar perspectives with us. At least, we have such experience to work or work together with some people who have the same training with us, such as those who come from similar schools or college. For instance, when we applied in the same English class, we have all been trained and taught by the same teacher in the same way. Nevertheless, there are still so many things which seem so far away from us, such as from what culture they are all coming from, and how they see the whole world through their experience and culture. In other words, what we have learned might be similar, but we may produce a lot of different mental images, perspectives, and points of view. Then, at last, they will end up with a certain conclusion about taking an idea, which is drastically different when it comes to an understanding of how to 'be' something or someone. It is also possible that something that looks natural and normal in perspective from someone who comes from certain culture might not look normal if it is being seen from the other perspectives of people from the different cultural backgrounds.

So, when it comes to an understanding about other cultures, someone must become more flexible so that they do not only understand well about the cultures, but they also need to understand about its language, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship, tradition, and any other things related to cultural understanding development. When someone meets other people from different cultural background, he or she needs to know and understand about how to understand other people personally and generally. Knowing and understanding about oneself can also become important in order to know well about their own cultures and what is on their mind.

The analysis of the close relationship between language, culture, and society is becoming the focus of this research. This research pays more attention to the society of the international tutors in English First (EF) Language Course in dealing with Indonesian language and culture through their experiences in communicating with the local people as well as through their time in learning the Indonesian language. All those international tutors come from different English-speaking countries like England, Canada, America, and Australia. Furthermore, in order to be able to become a tutor in EF, they must master the Indonesian language so that they will not have such big problems in communicating with other local tutors, students, and parents as well as in understanding more about the richness of the Indonesian cultures.

There are several problems that they need to solve concerning learn more about Indonesian grammar, which is slightly different from English grammar. Besides that, there is also a wide array of things the tutors need to know when it comes to an understanding of how the Indonesian language can influence the way its people think and their attitude towards other people. Based on that kind of phenomenon, the writer thus conducts this research.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An American linguist, [William Labov \(2005\)](#), stated that sociolinguistics could also be called secular linguistics, in reaction to the contention among many linguists working in such broadly Chomskyan framework. The basic premise of sociolinguistics study is about the way people use language in different social situations. As a result, language is not constant because it is always changing in so many different ways. People will tend to adjust the way they talk, depending on certain social situations and interactions. For instance, someone will tend to speak very differently to a child than he or she will talk to their teacher or parents. This kind of socio-situational variation is often called register. A register does not only depend on the relationship between the participants and the occasion, but also their ethnicity, age, gender, socio-economic status, and region.

Moreover, the scientific study of language is generally called linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky are famously known as some major figures in linguistics study. From thousands of years ago, natural languages are those that are being spoken or signed, while any language can be encoded into secondary media through visual, auditory, or even stimuli such as signed language, whistling, and braille.

Human language has the properties of productivity and displacement as well as only relies entirely on such social learning and convention. Language has also had such a complex structure with a wider range of expressions. It can be said that one language must have a different structure to another language, and there are no other language that is considered to be similar, whether in its structure, word choices, expressions, and many more aspects, including the culture.

The Center of Advance Research on Language Acquisition stated that culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people. They tend to encompass the language, cuisine, social habits, religion, music, and arts. Culture can also be defined as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions which are learned and understood by socialization. An anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London, [Cristina De Rossi \(2013\)](#) told that culture encompasses food, religion, what we wear, how we wear it,

marriage, music, language, what we believe, how we greet the visitors, how we sit at the chair, how we behave, and a million other things.

[Kramsch \(2009\)](#) said that language socially creates shared cultures and realities. Moreover, this statement can also be concluded that language is not only used as a tool for the exchange of information but also can be referred to as a symbolic system with the power to create and shape such symbolic realities, including perceptions, values, and identities through discourses. [Risager \(2016\)](#) explored language and culture as a communicative event, which also refers to a cultural event. She made the new term “*languaculture*” becoming popular throughout the world.

Risager also stated that the relationship between language and culture could be seen through three different perspectives: psychological, sociological, and linguistics. Psychological perspective needs language and culture to be inseparable because individual carries all the cultural experience within oneself. Furthermore, for the sociological perspective, language and culture can be separable because a language can create or express different cultures. The last perspective is only valid and suitable in the practice of linguistics study, where the language is being analyzed outside its cultural context.

Several previous studies have been done in the field of sociolinguistics study, especially the ones which focused on language and culture. First, there is a study done by [Lanza and Golden \(2011\)](#). This research focused on the multiculturalism and multilingualism happened as the consequences of immigration to Norway. Lanza and Golden analyzed more about the phenomenon of how those different cultural and linguistic groups can generally contribute to the development of symbolic expressions of identities. With the main objectives of analyzing how those groups and individual identities can be influenced by language (through metaphors, loan words, language use) and culture (ritual performances and material culture). The result of this research is proven to have usefulness and relevance to the entire society in Norway during the migration process.

Then, the second study is conducted by [Mujib \(2009\)](#) aiming to know more about the relationship between the language and the culture based on the sociolinguistics perspective. With the perspective theories, this relationship can be divided into two main categories: the subordinate relationship and the coordinate relationship. The subordinate relationship correlates with the perspective that culture is regarded to be the main system, while the language has become the subsystem. Furthermore, the coordinate relationship is based on the understanding that language and culture are becoming two different systems which are adopted by a human being.

Moreover, the last research is conducted by [Saddhono and Rohmadi \(2014\)](#). This study focused on primary schools in grade 1, 2, and 3 in Surakarta and belonged to descriptive qualitative research. The main result of the study stated that the use of the Javanese language is still dominant in the learning process at primary schools in Surakarta. Some factors are detected on the dominant use of Javanese language: the Javanese language can make the learners easier to understand the material, teachers' habits to speak Javanese, as well as drawing learners' attention.

From all those previous studies, the first and the third ones are collecting the data from the informants, events, and documents. The second study is analyzing the relationship between language and culture in general and more focus on the categories on the relationship between language and culture. Moreover, this study has tried to fulfill the gap in exploring how international tutors learn about Indonesian language and grammar as well as to examine their perspectives on the influence of the Indonesian language towards its culture. Some studies above had shown that there is no study yet which focused on the way foreigners see about Indonesian language and culture towards their language and culture. This is what makes this research is different from those previous researches and any other researches.

## **METHODS**

This research used qualitative descriptive method as the research design since, in the analysis of the data, the researcher tends to use the narrative descriptive technique in order to explain more on how international tutors need to learn about the Indonesian language as well as how the Indonesian language can effect on the development of culture of its society. The data were collected through four steps.

First, the writer prepares the questionnaires about the tutors' opinions about the Indonesian language related to the culture of its society. After that, the writer started to distribute the questionnaires at the beginning of the research. The writer also conducted some interviews to get more detailed data from the respondents.

After collecting the data, the writer started to analyze these four steps:

1. Calculating the scores of the answers on the questionnaires.
2. Changing the data on the questionnaire into a more descriptive analysis.
3. Analyzing the interviews by listening again and making some transcripts.
4. Correlating the result of the questionnaires and the interviews' transcription with the main theory.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### International Tutors Learning about the Indonesian Language

Two out of five international tutors in EF have stated that they felt easier to learn about the Indonesian language, especially the grammar when they come to interact directly with some Indonesian people, including their colleagues in EF. These two international tutors who are coming from England and Canada found that it was beneficial for them to interact in such intimate conversations or personal communication with their colleagues as well as with some groups of the local people.

In general, they consider that the Indonesian language is quite simple and easier to understand than English. There is no present, past, and future tense in the Indonesian language. Indonesian people say the same thing, whether it is in the past, now, or in the future. The only difference they found is about when it comes to saying something happens in the future, Indonesian people add the word '*akan*' or '*mau*' in front of the verb. For instance, Indonesian people say: "*Aku mau pergi ke pasar besok*" in order to state about "I will go to the market tomorrow." This kind of tense is just like adding the word 'will' for such a future sentence.

Furthermore, based on the statement from these two tutors, they said that speaking is a kind of simple activity which can be helpful for them to understand quickly about what the local people are going to say. When they make mistakes or grammatical errors, the local people tend to correct their mistakes quickly and they will fix their mistakes directly by saying it again and pronouncing the word or phrase or sentences directly. Thus, by speaking activity, they think that they are not only able to know about the correct grammar of the Indonesian language but also about how to pronounce every single word correctly. This way, they do not need to do the lessons about practicing the correct pronunciation and correcting the grammatical error separately because they can learn about it altogether. The most important thing is that local people can understand what they said, and they can ensure that the meaning is accepted and understood.

On the other hand, three of their international colleagues who are coming from America and Australia tend to have such difficulties in learning directly through speaking and conversation. Those three international tutors prefer learning about Indonesian language and grammar through written text. For example, an American tutor said that he was easier to understand step by step on the lesson about Indonesian grammar by reading and writing when he came to Surabaya about four years ago. At first, he was routinely trying to understand Indonesian by reading the dictionary and some other books.

He had already had knowledge and experience of learning Indonesian before he decided to teach English in Indonesia. He learned the Indonesian language while he was studying in the USA. He thought that he was ready for teaching English in Indonesia, but he knew that he was wrong when he felt confused on what the local people said to him. At that time, he knew for sure that he needed to increase his knowledge of grammar and pronunciation.

He learned Indonesian on his own, and when he faced some difficulties with the grammar, and he does not know how to answer some questions in Indonesian, he will go to his colleague, whom also a professional tutor in EF. He will ask her about the lessons and everything he needs to know until he can actively interact with the local people easily.

However, these two Australian tutors had the same feeling when it comes to communicating with the local people: confused and stressful. Luckily, they made friends with a student in a college who lives in the same apartment. That student always teaches them to understand Indonesian correctly, to listen to someone speaking Indonesian, even mixing it with Javanese, as well as about how to communicate with the local people by inviting them to meet his family and friends. One of those Australian tutors even had one great experience when his local friend took him to the local market and forced him to speak in Indonesian with the seller. Even though it was awful at first, but he can make it since the seller can understand well about what he said and gave him what he needs.

Since then, they feel interested in learning more about the Indonesian language, which is truly fascinating. At least, the tutors consider that the Indonesian language is not that simple since there are also various dialects and accents in one similar country. Sometimes, different local people pronounce some words differently, just because they come from different regions. Now, they can even freely guess from the dialect of someone, from which region he or she comes. As Wardhaugh said, that one can speak one language with some other dialects and/or accents. When it comes to dialects or accents, it does not mean that someone can only master in just one dialect or one accent. It is possible that he or she can speak more than one dialect or accent, depending on where is his/her culture.

From what they have learned above, it is really useful to help them when they start teaching their students about English. The working language is still being delivered in English, but sometimes the tutors need to use the Indonesian language in order to make their interaction with the students become more closely. At least for the introduction, the tutors will use the Indonesian language in order to evoke their students' spirit and willingness to learn.

Thus, it can be stated that generally, there are so many things that can be done by those international tutors in order to be able to master the Indonesian language along with grammar



and pronunciation. They can learn about it through reading a dictionary or books, writing some phrases or sentences while practicing to spell and pronounce it, listening to the local people, as well as to learn to communicate with the local people through speaking. The most important thing is knowing that someone cannot truly learn about certain languages without learning about its culture and society. Learning, knowing, and understanding about the local culture means that someone can get practically easier to teach about the language to its society. They can give new perspectives and horizon through the local identity which come from the culture itself. In the future, it helps them to be fully accepted easier by society.

### **International Tutors' Personal Perspectives on the Influence of Indonesian Culture Towards Its Language**

Overall, all of these international tutors have agreed that the Indonesian language played a crucial role in affecting its culture as well as influencing the way Indonesian people think, speak, and act. It is understandable that in every aspect of life, there will always be a big relation between language, culture, and society. As [Wardhaugh \(2016\)](#) said, 'There should be some relationship between the sounds, words, and syntax of a language and how speakers of that language experience the world and behave in it seems so obvious as to be a truism.'

Language and culture cannot be separated from each other when it comes to discussing the role of society. The language will influence the culture of a certain society, and so will the culture, which will play a crucial role in affecting someone's language. Practically, language is formed by culture, while culture is impacted and influenced by the language. Whorf's idea stated that someone's language controls their 'world-view,' speakers of different languages will, therefore, have different world-views. For example, one tutor who is coming from London (as downtown in England) sees almost everything in his life as discrete, countable, measurable, as well as recurrent. When he describes the waves, he will say it out loud for its countable thing, just like when he pronounces pens and pencils.

This statement is in line with what Whorf said before that he found the differences between speakers who are living close to rural areas in England tend to pronounce the 'wave' without 's' instead of the 'waves' like the downtown people said. The different languages have different grammatical categories. In the Whorfian perspective, it can be stated that language determines how the speakers perceive and organize the world around them, both for the natural world and for the social world.

Another example can be taken from the international tutors when they say about the word 'mistletoe' when some tutors in EF tend to discuss the Christmas celebration. It is a tradition in EF that they tend to celebrate every single National Day in Indonesia, as well as some of

the public holidays that happened in their countries such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, Independence Day of America, Labor Day, and many more celebrations. Practically, some of the local tutors are hardly finding out about what Indonesian called this ‘mistletoe.’ Those local tutors know for sure what ‘mistletoe’ is when it comes to the Christmas celebration. All they know is that people under the mistletoe should have the kissing scene, and it is like a tradition in some of those Western cultures. Indonesian people do not have the concept of that kind of leaves. Thus, if someone does not have any knowledge or experience about the ‘mistletoe’ itself, he or she will face such difficulty in understanding the culture.

Wardhaugh (2015) said that if language A has a certain word for a particular concept, it would be pretty easier for speakers of language A to refer to that concept and understand it than speakers of language B who lack such a word. Indonesian people might translate the word ‘mistletoe’ into such a leathery-leaved parasitic plant that grows on apple or oak, and that is true, but they still lack the ‘magical’ context of English connotations.

The fact said that all those five international tutors in EF who are voluntarily offering to become respondents in this research stated that the Indonesian language does influence the way its people interpret the local culture. They said that the Indonesian language for expressing something plural tends to repeat the word itself, such as *orang-orang*, *barang-barang*, *buku-buku*, *botol-botol*, and many more expressions. They consider relating it with the habit of most Indonesian people who tend to act and speak a little bit slowly and tend to be pleonastic if they were compared to the Western people. Sometimes some people tend to see this kind of pleonastic habit as good manners, but sometimes it can also become an attitude of having chit-chat for hours. Most Western people do not like it since they appreciate the time. Western people consider that time is money, and they do not want to spend too much time on something like having chit-chat. They even said that having a chit-chat with friends or colleagues is something useless. It is truly explained about Western culture on being on time as well as being practice on their use of language.

Moreover, all those international tutors in EF tend to teach their students by using some Indonesian teaching style, which means that they often use the emphasis on using ‘verbs.’ For instance, a tutor from America is often simply using a sentence like “Clarice, the bus is coming to you. What do you do next?” From that sentence, the tutor is emphasizing the verb of ‘coming’ in order to gain his student’s attention.

Sometimes, the tutor also gives a lesson to the students about the way they see something. What is done by the tutor from Canada in the following conversation can be a good example.

Tutor : “Hey, Sarah, can you please look at this picture?”

Sarah : “Yes, of course.”

Tutor : “Good. I want you to look closely at this picture, observe it, and tell me what things you see?”

Sarah : “Ehm..em...I see a boy riding a horse. And I see there are many people playing in the livestock. And..and..that’s it.”

Tutor : “Ok. Good answer, Sarah. You do great!”

Discussed in the conversation above is a picture of scenery from the livestock. There are many things there: horse, grass, mountain, fence, kids, parents, sun, clouds, rainbow, plants, flowers, ranch house, and the road. From that conversation, we can conclude that most Eastern people see the ‘verb’ rather than the ‘noun.’ It emphasizes that those international tutors tend to explain the lessons by stressing on the verb in order to make sure that their students can understand more quickly and easily since the culture of those Eastern people mostly sees the verb first.

Thus, it is very clear that Western sees the ‘noun’ and Eastern see the ‘verb’ as [Wardhaugh \(2015\)](#) stated, ‘language can be seen as two different aspects for Western and Eastern where the ancient Greek language often focuses on nouns, and some language varieties in China look the verbs.’ If those tutors insist on using the emphasis on the use of the ‘noun’ when they teach their students, they might have different results with their students’ ability. From the picture above, it can give different results when it is questioned to students with a Western background. It is already proven when the picture is being sent to one of another international tutors. The result concluded that Western see the livestock with a beautiful mountain view or he sees the flowers are shining as the sun goes down behind the mountain.

There is also another example of the expression of taboo language in Eastern countries like in Indonesia. Tutor from Australia said that she felt embarrassed when her students consider her words as the taboo words in their culture. At that time, she uses the word ‘penis’ and ‘vagina’ to describe man and woman’s genital related to gender and sexualities. She did not know that saying those words mean something taboos in the Indonesian culture. Related to Wardhaugh said that it is true about certain things are not said, not because they cannot be, but because ‘people do not talk about those things.’ In a certain society such as in Indonesia, it is believed that using the taboo words would cause people embarrassment, anxiety, or shame. Indonesian people seem to consider everything related to ‘sex’ and ‘bodily functions’ as taboo. In Indonesian, someone or a group of people who are breaking linguistic taboo can

take such severe penalty, just like what happened when someone was talking about religious matters and ended up in jail for the sake of blasphemy.

Besides the linguistic taboo, it is quite interesting to pay more attention to the tutors' teaching style. Their Western culture in teaching influences most of the way they taught the Asian students. Sometimes, when it comes to discussing the teaching style, all of those international tutors are more likely to use a teaching method that focused on student-centered learning so that the students can be more active and participate well during the lessons. However, sometimes, with most of the students coming from Chinese ethnic backgrounds in which they often refuse to accept this kind of informal discussion style of teaching due to their anxiety of making mistakes or their shame, the tutors need to be more innovative as well as creative.

One great way that tutors often do is by allowing their students to talk and interact with them as much as they possibly can. Tutors can help the students feel interested in the materials by raising the contact and interaction between students and teachers in the class and outside the class. Gradually, when the students have already felt interested in the open interaction, then they will be easier to be taught by using the student-centered learning method. Overall, this kind of teaching style is proved to be the most beneficial for the students with the increasing of their grade point average. So, it is quite crucial to understand first about their culture and language before the tutors can go deep on the implications for language teaching.

In some cases above, it can be easily concluded that some concepts might be more labeled, which is easier to express in some languages than in others. [Wardhaugh \(2015\)](#) stated that 'a society's culture consists of whatever it is someone has to know or believe in order to operate in such an acceptable manner to its members.' Thus, it can be clearly said though that in order to be able to be accepted in a certain society, then someone or a group of people need to know about its culture along with learning its language so that they can get through the task of daily living in that country. The tutors need to respect the culture in which they are located. Even though they have a different point of view or perspective, they need to share it with its people where they live or teach, but they still need to adapt well with the new local culture.

Overall, all of the international tutors feel fascinated by how Indonesian people think, speak, and act, which is influenced by the culture of its society. They also conclude that Indonesian people are expressing and using their language based on their experience with their own culture.

## CONCLUSION

Sociolinguistics is considered to be a branch of linguistics study which explores more about the close relationship between language, culture, and society. It is clear to have such a phenomenon about how the language used in certain societies can influence the culture of its society, and the culture of a certain society can also influence the language they have used. The cultures from a group of people can be stated as a reflection from the language they have used, and on the other hand, it is also said that language can also be used as a media for the society to be able to interpret certain cultures.

Language can be viewed as a verbal expression of culture. It is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. The language provides us with many categories used to express our thoughts. Therefore, it is natural to assume that someone's thoughts are influenced by the language we use. The values and customs in the country we grow up in shape how we think to a certain extent. Cultures are hiding in languages, just like the link between the Indonesian language and culture.

This research is focused more on analyzing how international tutors in EF Language Course Plaza Surabaya dealing with the Indonesian language. Before they are allowed to teach English as a native speaker in Indonesia, of course, they must master the Indonesian language first. EF (English First) is widely known as one of the biggest English language courses throughout the world. Thus, the management always tries to do their best in order to maintain the quality of its tutors, whether for the international tutors or for the local tutors. All those tutors need to have certain training in order to be able to teach English well as well as to be able to teach about some Western (European) cultures related to the Indonesian cultures to the students.

Through this research, it is hoped that other researchers can use this research as their references to do something more related to how foreign people look at Indonesian language and culture or about how Indonesian people look at those certain English-speaking countries following their culture and language. This way, the research in the area of sociolinguistics study can be better and more holistic than before.

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