

Implementation of a Culture in Malay Language Teaching: A Case Study of International Students in UNITEN

Mardian Shah Omar^{*a}, Yusfarina Mohd Yussof^b

^aUniversity Tenaga Nasional,
Jalan Ikram-Uniten, Kajang Selangor, Malaysia,

^bInstitut Pendidikan Guru,
Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: dian@uniten.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Knowledge of language and culture of ASEAN communities are not easily understood by foreign speakers if it is taught only through theoretical teaching in the classroom or visually guided textbook. Thus, this study attempts to apply an interactive approach in teaching Malay language and culture to foreign students. This study examines how well this interactive approach of culture helps international Middle Eastern students to improve their language abilities and understand the Malay world itself. This study was conducted on the Middle Eastern students who attend the Malay language classes at University Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN). Data for this study was obtained through interviews, observation and research related documents. This study also investigates the improvement in language abilities amongst the foreign students, especially in terms of writing as opposed to the interactive teaching sessions without the application of these cultures. Results from this study indicates that this culture interactive approach was found to be very effective and suitable to be applied to students of engineering and IT.

Keywords: Culture, international, interaction, Middle East, writing, effectiveness

Introduction

There is a strong relationship between cultural aspect and language teaching, particularly in teaching foreign language to foreign speaker (Hardley 2001: 346). Galloway (1980) and Lafayette & Strasheim (1981) informs students are able to benefit from learning a language if cultural aspect of the language is taken into consideration in language teaching which includes acquisition of knowledge of humanity, language abilities and cultural sensitivity, economic stability (Hardley 2001: 346). In fact, teaching languages to non-native speakers can be improved through the integration of cultural elements. These elements can be used as spices and flavoring to learning a language. Bridging these elements in language teaching are not only interesting but will eventually improve the students' understanding of the vocabulary in context and the usage of the language.

Language teaching becomes more interesting through the infusion of cultural elements of the language. This method will surely help students to learn politeness of the language thus be better able to practice conversing in the target language. Therefore, this paper attempts to show how the cultural interactive activities that can be applied in the teaching of Malay language (ML) so that it can be used as an attraction for foreign students to study ML.

Research Objectives

1. To identify whether culture of interactive methods can be practiced in the teaching Malay language as a foreign language.
2. To identify the suitability of this method in aiding foreign learners to improve their BM proficiency.
3. To identify the appropriate aspects of Malay culture to be associated with language teaching.

Problem Statements

There are insufficient studies discussing on cultural element associated with learning a foreign language or even cultural activities related to teaching of foreign language. In the context of teaching Malay language to foreign speaker, there are also less studies carried out discussing suitable cultural aspect that could be related in the teaching of foreign language. For example “Teaching of Malay Language for Foreign Speakers” discusses only generally on teaching methods and teaching experiences of educators in their teaching institutions; however this book lacks in sharing insights on applying activities related to the mentioned methods of teaching

It is essential for teachers to be informed of the guidelines in applying these mentioned method into their teaching to ensure interesting, effective and attractive lessons for foreign learner as they learn the language and its culture. The concept of culture discussed in this study is based on the BF Skinner’s theoretical framework that links teaching to the concept of stimulus and response. Therefore, the aspect of culture introduce in the lessons acts as a stimulus to the students while the response are indicated through students’ use of language. W.M Rivers (1964) informs that word meaning can be learned through its usage in daily life thus this is an effective way to learn meaning of words that is through the context of usage

Research Methodology

The researcher of this study only tries to identify cultural activities that could be applied and its relation to the teaching of Malay language as a foreign language. Therefore, data obtained from this study are as a whole and does not follows the stages in learning a language. The data of this study is obtained through interviewing teachers as language instructors, students enrolled in the language course as well as written documents such as syllabus, instructors’ lesson plans, teaching materials and all related documents. The data were also obtained through observations and the researcher’s experience while in teaching class in University Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN); the location of the current study.

The various method used in this study are based on the study by Burgess (1984: 53-55) who states that in a social science research method, the selection of method of studies are not limited to any particular method but various method could be applied in accordance to the objective and hypothesis of the study.

Findings

The data of this study is presented as a whole and not in accordance to the specific stages of teaching. The findings of this study is divided into several sections according to the grammatical aspect or topic. Currently, the teaching of Malay language in UNTEN has been extended into two levels (previously there was only one level) that is MALB 103- Malay Language for International students and the second level is known as MALB 203 – Malay for foreign speakers (elective subject). In the current study, the researcher realize that the teaching of Malay language utilizes few aspects of culture such as;

Greetings (*Aspek Sapaan*)

Once the teacher had taught and introduced to the students different greetings styles, students are asked to apply these greetings every time they enter the class before the lesson starts and after the lesson ends. This is carried out when the teacher opens the classroom door and waits at the door while the students enter greeting their teacher with the correct greeting alongside with the appropriate intonations.

For example:

“Selamat pagi Encik Arif. Apa khabar?”

At the same time, the teacher should appropriate response to their greeting. After ending the lesson, the teacher should once again wait at the door and ask each of the students to greet their teacher with the right greeting as they leave the class.

For example

“Terima kasih Encik Arif. Jumpa lagi.”

This action will be repeated each class time. This is done with the purpose of enhancing the lesson taught in class. The teacher should be more patient and help in maintaining the interaction with the students. Students are also encouraged to greet their teacher out of class time. Bonus marks are awarded to students who greet their teachers out of class time. This method encourages students to apply learned lesson.

Besides greetings, students will also be supplemented with adverb of time. In UNITEN, adverb of time are taught alongside with the numbering system.

For example:

“Terima kasih Encik Arif. Jumpa lagi minggu depan.”

These interactive method could enhance the students familiarity with the use of vocabulary by strengthening it every class time.

Use of Noun in Culture (NiC)

In order to improve the use of vocabulary NiC, the teacher will introduce traditional attires, games and food. For example

- a. Traditional Attire (*Pakaian Tradisional*)
 - Baju Melayu
 - Baju kurung
 - Songkok
 - Samping
- b. Traditional Games and Musical Instruments (*Permainan dan Alat Muzik Tradisional*)
 - Sepak raga
 - Congkak
 - Kompang
- c. Malay Food (*Makanan Melayu*)
 - Ketupat
 - Rendang
 - Dodol
 - Nasi lemak

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

These UNITEN students are not only introduced to the vocabularies but are asked to identify themselves the words by finding its image through google image and were asked to show to their teacher their findings as evidence. Though this method, students are able to see for themselves the words before the teacher visualizes the words to the students. All these words that are taught to these students are later apply in practice.

To consolidate and test the acquisition of a cultural lesson, Middle Eastern students are tested through a short essay that are based on cultural phrases listed to make a complete sentence.



Figure 1. The students are given the opportunity to play the *komping* and also shake hands with local students on cultural day

In this practical session students are given the opportunity to re-use the words that have been studied which includes nouns, verbs or adjectives. The researchers found that in UNITEN trainers using structured methods in the construction of paragraph (Mardian Shah, 2015). In short, the teaching lessons in UNITEN are closely linked to the teaching syllabus that has been prepared.

- Examples:
- a. memasak ----- rendang ----- sedap
 - b. memukul ----- komping ----- kuat
 - c. memakai ----- baju ----- cantik



Figure 2: Students are given the opportunity to identify with ingredients and method of cooking *rendang*

In UNITEN, the lessons are reinforced with activities such as oral test that is singing Malay songs to help in improving their vocabulary and enhancing their knowledge in using these words. These Middle Eastern students are also given the opportunities to showcase their

ability in singing Malay songs through competitions. Besides, these students also join in trips to Melaka, Rumah Inap Haji Dorani in Tanjung Karang and Penang.

Use of Adjectives in Culture (AiC)

Middle Eastern students in UNITEN comprises students who are pursuing Engineering and Information Technology courses. These students are required to take basic Malay course. However, they are not required to take this course in their first semester or first year. Researchers have found teaching adjectives AiC in UNITEN is based on the division of AiC as in *Tatabahasa Dewan* (1997: 211), which includes AiC nature or condition, color, size, shape, time, distance, ways, feelings and senses. The data obtained showed that the teaching of BM to foreign speakers from the Middle East involves things such as;

- a. Makanan (foods)
- b. Buah-buahan tempatan (local fruits)
- c. Keluarga (family)
- d. Kampung (hometown)
- e. Kain pakaian (clothings)

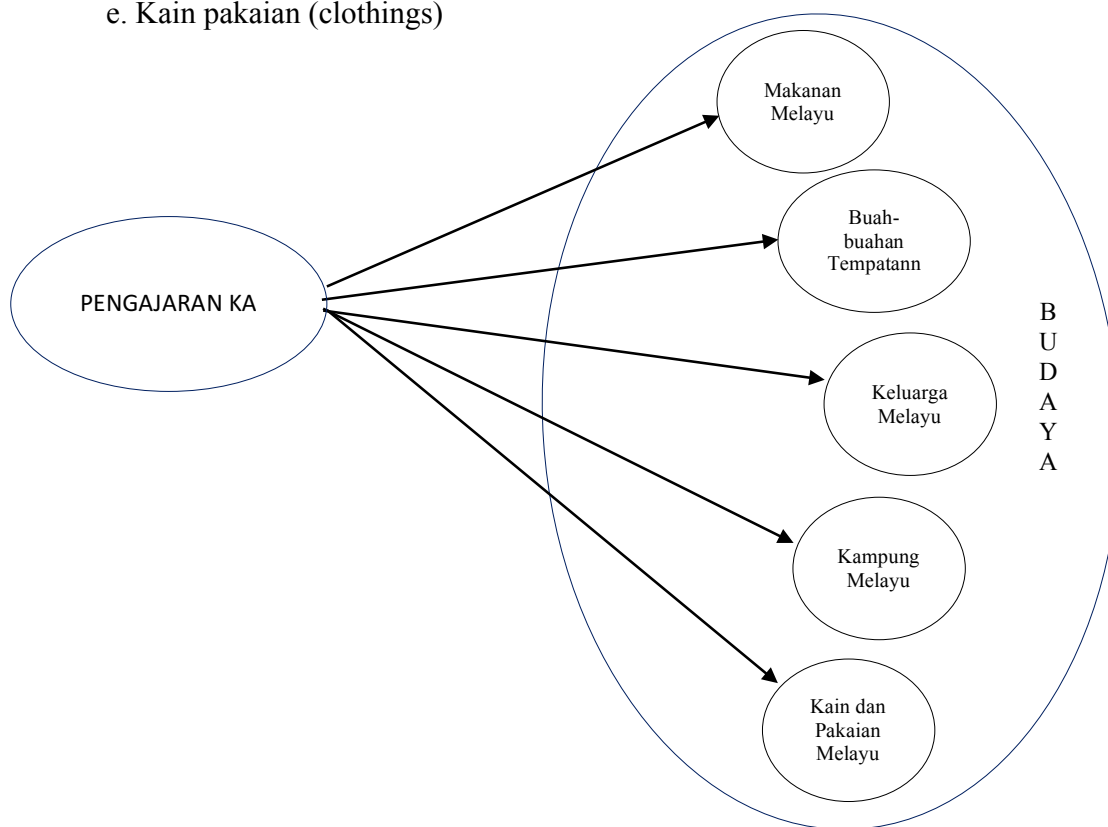


Figure 3. Relationship between Malay culture and teaching of adjectives

Malay Food

Teaching of adjectives such as tastes of sweet, sour, salty, spicy, fat and others are introduced through Malay food. The descriptions of these foods are based on the time. For example; breakfast, teachers introduce students to the *nasi lemak*, *roti canai*, fried rice, noodles, rice noodles and types of cakes. Lunch, the teacher explains the white rice, side dishes, salads and so on. Afternoon tea; the teacher introduces the bananas fritters, porridge, *cendul*, fruit salad and alike. The advantage of UNITEN are there Malay food stalls at the

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

entrance of the university. So it's easy for teachers to ask or bring students to recognize different types of foods. It also allows students to gain knowledge informally during practical activities undertaken. However, this method can only be applied if the number of students in a class does not exceed 20 students. If too many students, the teacher will inevitably face difficulty in controlling the students. This will give an opportunity for students to practice their learned lesson in a leisurely manner guided by the teacher. Some examples of food-related explanations are as follows;

Contoh	Bahan	Rasa	Alasan
a.	Nasi	rasanya lemak	ada santan kelapa
b.	Sambal	rasanya pedas	ada cili (cili kering)
c.	Ayam	rasanya sedap	goreng rempah

Contoh	Jenis Makanan	Rasa	Asal
a.	Asam pedas	rasanya masam dan pedas	masakan orang Melaka
b.	Masak lemak cili api	rasanya lemak dan pedas	masakan orang Negeri Sembilan
c.	Rendang ayam atau daging	rasanya berempah	masakan utama hari raya
d.	Tomyam	rasanya pedas	asal masakan orang Thailand

Local Friuts

Students are also introduced with fruit seasons and types of fruits. Teacher brought in few different types of fruits to class such as watermelon, mangos teen, rose apple, rambutan, sugarcane, lime and others for the students to taste while teaching adjectives. Not only did the teacher introduce the types of local fruit but the teacher also did introduce the fruit juices to the students for them to taste and identify the difference in taste. Through this method, the students will be able to apply all the words learned. As students taste the fruits, they are also asked to describe the features of the fruits.



Figure 4: Features of Rambutan

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

Through this feature, students can imagine any kind of fruit even though they just showed only with pictures. In UNITEN this teaching method is often applied when teaching in the classroom. However the application of this culture continues by bringing these students to the market or *pasar malam*. This method could be continued by bringing these students to the fruit orchard to taste and experience the atmosphere of fruit season. This teaching method is regarded as authentic by Kramsch (2001: 177-179). To further enhance their adjective exercise, the Middle Eastern students were asked to describe the experience or feeling they experienced when they were in the orchard or in the night market.

Malay Village

When the students were taken to the villages, they learn about the environment in the village. At the same time the teacher compares the atmosphere in the village with the atmosphere of the city. In teaching grammar, the teacher will provide opposite words or antonym for the students which is shown as in the diagram below:

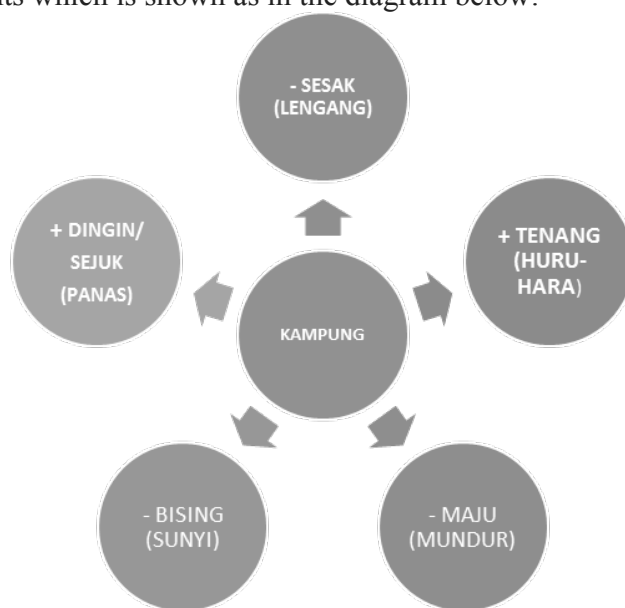


Figure 5: Features of a Malay Village

Clothing

Malay clothing and fabrics such as songket, batik painting, batik cop, embroidered fabrics, etc. are introduced in the classroom. In addition, teachers also show students how to use the material and its application. In explaining adjectives, teachers brings the cloths into the classroom, and ask for students to use their sense of touch (hand) to explain the nature of the fabrics.

Example:

1. Kain songket dapat mewakili KA;
Cantik, mahal, kasar, berat, keras
2. Kain batik dapat mewakili KA;
Lembut, sejuk, murah, warna-warni

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

In addition, students are also given the opportunity to try these clothes in class or while in a cultural workshop.



Figure 6: Students are given the opportunity to learn batik making process and learn the techniques to Malay cultural dance



Figure 7: Students learn the method of *ketupat* weaving and method of playing *congkak*

Discussion

The study found that in interactive cultural teaching, teachers need to be able to explain to students accurately on the use of vocabulary in context. Students might get confused when they are influenced with English translations or their native language while using the words taught. Confusion may occur when students are influenced by English translation or their native language in the application of the use of vocabulary that has been taught. Therefore, authentic teaching method are effective because students are able to experience and understand the real context of usage of the learned words in the context of Malay errors that may occur can be shown as follows;

<i>hot</i>	– pedas, panas
<i>thick</i>	– tebal, pekat
<i>thin</i>	– kurus, nipis
<i>beautiful</i>	– cantik, indah
<i>old</i>	– lama, tua

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

The study found interactive cultural activities conducted in and outside the classroom is successfully applied in UNITEN. Serious involvement shown by the students illustrates their deep interest in understanding and learning the language and culture. The small number of students allows the teachers to apply these methods more effectively. If the classroom is near to the cafeteria it eases the teaching sessions. Some of the constrain factors of language class in UNITEN are the constantly changing class size and environment and the large number of students who are forced to take this subject because it is compulsory. Furthermore, the ever changing classroom environments for every semester does not help that in the teaching of this course.

Based on these findings, the researchers found that students' understanding of the language being taught improves with the culturally interactive activities. The improvement were also seen in their writing abilities (Mardian Shah, 2015). Not only that, these activities can increase student interest to learn the language and culture of the ASEAN thus use them in the local community. Indeed, the methods used can be applied by any other institution who wish to implement the cultural aspect in teaching.

Conclusion

Promoting culture and ASEAN languages through interactive activities is indeed very effective in teaching languages to foreign speakers. In the teaching of this language, Yet Lange (1999) in Hardley (2001) argues "culture still remain a superficial aspect of language learning." Similarly, Walker & Stains (2000) in Hardley (2001), who argued that "in the study of language, nothing has been more and discuss with less effect than the relationship between language and culture". So to attract foreigners to learn Malay, culture certainly can be a catalyst for language teaching. The approach of teaching Malay to foreign speakers based interactive culture could be easily applied if the feature or the type of class that corresponds to the number of students are adequate for teaching.

Teaching is difficult as it is applied in large classes and not fixed. The concept of class is filled with cultural materials is suitable and effective for the students to see these things every day. Hence teaching methods such as this is absolutely meet the terms of the Skinner's (1957) framework, which implements aspects of the stimulus and response; one of the aspects culture and students. I agree with Cook (2001), Marton (1988) and Richards & Rogers (1986) who states that the language teaching techniques can be through a variety of methods, what is important is the strategy and the delivery method of the teacher in delivering the lessons.

Bibliography

- Atiah Hj. Mohd Salleh & Ramlah Muhamad (Penyelenggara) (2003) *Pengajaran Bahasa Melayu Untuk Penutur Asing*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Burgess, R. 1984. *In The Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. London: Routledge.
- Cook V. (2001) *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* (3rd Ed) London, Arnold.
- Hadley A.O. (2001) *Teaching Language in Context* (3rd ed). University of Illinois: Heinle & Heinle, Thomson Learning.
- Kramsch C. (2001) *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mardian Shah Omar et.al. (2015) *International Journal of Educational Science and Research* (IJESR). "Ability to Use Word Order in Learning Malay Language By International Students" Vol.5, Issue 2, 2015. Transstellar Pvt. Ltd.
- Media Sandra Kasih (2004) *Dewan Bahasa* Julai 2004 "Bahasa Melayu di Mata Penutur Asing", Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE IN MALAY LANGUAGE TEACHING: A

- Mohd Afif Abidin (2004) *Dewan Bahasa* Julai 2004 “Pengajaran Bahasa Melayu Laras Ilmiah Kepada Pelajar Asing”, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Skinner B.F. (1957) *Verbal Behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Uthaya Sankar SB (2004) *Dewan Bahasa* Julai 2004 “Pengajaran Bahasa Kebangsaan Kepada Pelajar Luar Negara”, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Zaitul Azma Zainon Hamzah (2008) *Dewan Bahasa* Januari 2008 “Mengantarabangsakan Bahasa Melayu”, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.