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Indonesian-Japanese Language Learner's Cultural Identity Awareness in Context of Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Despite intercultural communication competence as one of the important language learning process goals since globalization has started, there comes a tendency to neglect to foster cultural identity awareness in language learning process. This research is a preliminary study that explores Indonesian learner's cultural identities awareness as well Japanese cultural identities during the process of learning the Japanese language as one of their foreign languages. The respondents are twenty-one students of Japanese language classes participating in Japanese language speaking class 1 (elementary level) at Al-Azhar Indonesia University, categorized as A1 (beginner) Japanese learners by JF (Japan Foundation) standards. Through two conversation topics ("my family" and "my home town") the respondents have been invited to mention their local custom while conversing within the topics and comparing such custom to Japanese people's local custom. The data are collected utilizing portfolios and Likert scale pre-post questionnaire during November 2016 and analyzed descriptively. The result of this study exposed that the participants were aware of Indonesian cultural identity and Japanese cultural identity in the context of intercultural communication, namely, in the conversation of family and hometown. While having a dialogue with unfamiliar people, mainly speaking about personal information, i.e. family topic, Japanese people tend to have conversation plainly in general subtopics since Japanese people have collectivistic culture. Distinctively, since Indonesian people believe in "Unity in Diversity" (different but one), they are feasible to discuss wider subtopics despite the unfamiliar interlocutors.

Keywords: Indonesian, Japanese Language Learners, Cultural Identity, Intercultural Communicative Competence

Introduction

Since economic reasons stimulated migrations, globalization has started in the world. Moreover, the technological innovation has driven the world, becoming borderless space where distance and time have no longer being obstacles of international interactions. In this globalization era, people around the world can interact and communicate each other without being worried of distance and time.

Despite the technological innovation creating the borderless world, still, languages and cultures exist. Languages and cultures in every country are still the geographical characteristics of each country. Therefore, to interact communicatively with people around the people, mutual understanding of self-identity and other's identities at the same time is a must. Practical communication that occurs across international borders such as business communication, political negotiation, and educational reasons could not achieve the desired

results unless there is a mutual understanding of the self-awareness and cultural identities among the parties.

For educational reasons, many researchers and educators have taken various attempts of integrating cultural and language concepts in language learning process based on language learning standards. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for languages), a standard that describes foreign language learner's achievement referred in Europe and most of the EFL practices in some countries, declared communicative competencies that foreign language learners should master are linguistics competence, sociolinguistics competence, and pragmatic competence (Goullier, 2007:15). Related to sociolinguistics competence, in decades researchers and educators are developing intercultural communicative Competence (ICC) through language learning process. Ability to generate awareness of similarities and differences of each other's regarding culture within particular communication situation. Intercultural competence in language learning develops the ability of learners to be intercultural speakers who respect for individuals with multiple identities including of their identities and to prevent the stereotyping to recognize the equality of human rights (Byram, 2002, p.9).

Unfortunately, there comes a tendency to neglect to foster cultural identity awareness in conventional language learning process. Based on my experiences learning and teaching foreign languages, some conservatives textbook explore target language's cultural identity, yet neglect to explore language learner's awareness of self-cultural identity. Foreign language learners are always taught to comprehend the target language's culture as well while studying language itself, yet lacking the capacity of expressing their culture.

Objectives

This study explores Indonesian learner's cultural identity awareness as well as their understanding of Japanese cultural identities during the process of learning the Japanese language as one of their foreign languages at the level of A1 standard based on JFS (Japan Foundation Standard) comparing to CEFR standard.

Research Questions

This study clarifies research questions below:

- What do the respondents aware of Indonesian cultural identities as well acquire about Japanese cultural identities related to selected topics while they are learning the Japanese language based on JFS level A1?
- While the respondents are conversing within the selected topics, what kind of linguistics barriers that they faced?
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Theory

This research refers study about cultural identity related to a model of intercultural communicative competence developed by Byram (2002). Additionally, the analysis uses the JFS (Japan Foundation, 2010) and CEFR level A1 standards to assess what linguistics and sociolinguistics competences that respondents acquired.

Methodology**Respondents**

Table 1

Respondent's Background (21 respondents)

Profile Factors	Particulars	F	%
Sex	Male	7	33.33 %
	Female	14	66.67 %
Length of Learning Japanese Language formally	< 1 year	5	23.81 %
	1 – 3 years	16	76.19 %
	3 years <		0 %
Living in Japan Experience	Never	21	100 %
	< 1 year	0	0 %
	1 year	0	0 %

Table 1 above, describes the respondent's background related to their Japanese language learning process. The respondents are twenty-one students of Japanese language classes participating in Japanese language speaking class 1 (elementary level) at University of Al-Azhar Indonesia. All of the respondents are having no experience of being resident in Japan before, yet 5 (five) of them have experience learning the Japanese language, not more than one year whether as a compulsory subject in high school or autodidact. Moreover, None of the respondents have JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) certificate, authorized by the Japan Foundation. Hence, based on those backgrounds (described in Table 1), all of the participants are categorized as A1 level language learners by JF (Japan Foundation) standards.

Data Collection Procedure

Figure 1 displays the data collection procedure. Through three conversation topics (“asking and giving direction,” “my family” and “my home town”) the respondents have been invited to mention their local custom while conversing within the topics and comparing such custom to Japanese people’s local custom.

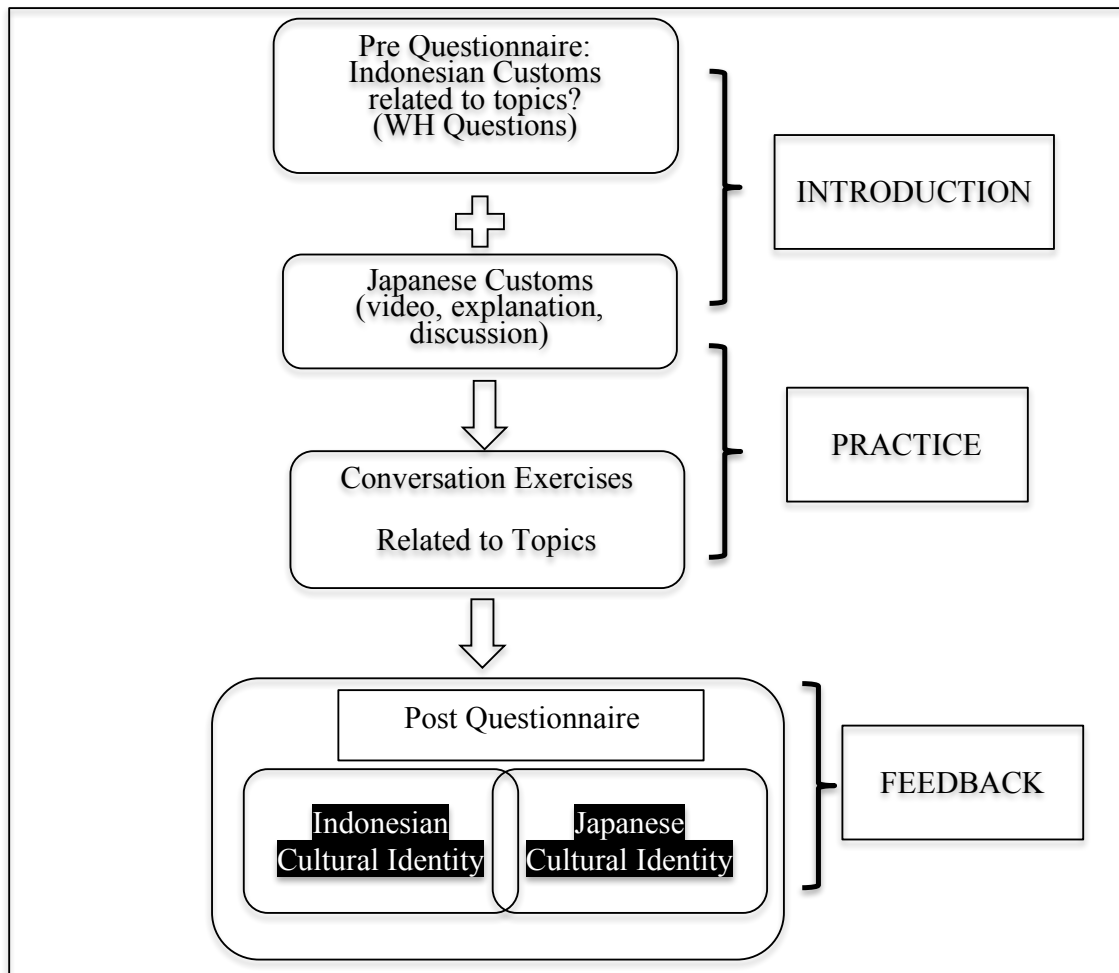


Figure 1. Data Collection Procedure

Those items have been modified based on both linguistics and sociolinguistics parameters to measure their linguistics and sociolinguistics competences. The data are collected utilizing portfolios and Likert scale pre-post questionnaire during November 2016 and analyzed descriptively. Through portfolios and pre-post questionnaire, the respondents should answer questions below:

- According to your awareness about local customs, what kind of sub-topics that you will discuss in each selected topic?
- Through observing Japanese clip movie related to each selected topic, what are you aware about Japanese local customs?
- What kind of linguistic barriers that you faced while talking about each selected topic?

- What are you conscious of the Indonesian cultural identity and Japanese cultural identity in the context of intercultural communication?

Literature Review

Common European Framework of Reference for languages, abbreviated as CEFR(L), is a standard that describes foreign language learner's achievement, referred in Europe and most of the EFL practices in some countries. CEFR standardized foreign language learner's proficiency in six levels, namely A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Moreover, CEFR describes A1 level is a very basic level that orients to the competence below:

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. (Modern Language Division, 2001, p.24)

Besides, CEFR in Modern Language Division (2001) declared communicative competencies that foreign language learners should master are linguistics competence, sociolinguistics competence, and pragmatic competence. Related to sociolinguistic competence, it refers to the sociocultural condition of language use, included in the rules of politeness, classes and social groups, expression of folk-wisdom, and others that reflect differentiation among cultural parties. (p.13)

The Japan Foundation, an independent administrative institution founded by the government of Japan that one of its programs is promoting Japanese -language education overseas, has established "JF Standard (JFS) for Japanese-Language Education 2010" (The Japan Foundation, 2010). Coincides with CEFR, "JFS Tree" shows that communicative language competences branches into linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence. Sociolinguistic competence that is defined by The Japan Foundation (2010) is, "concerned with the appropriate use of language according to a relationship with the other party or situation. "(p.9); also, similarly to CEFR, JFS describes the level of Japanese-language proficiency as six levels which are orderly A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Though, slightly different to CEFR, JFS draws the proficiency that Japanese-language learner in level A1 should gain is "Can read a very short, rehearsed statement - e.g. to introduce a speaker, propose a toast."(p.10).

Furthermore, Byram (2002) developed a model of intercultural communicative competence that consists of four components of intercultural competence in language learning, i.e. 'knowledge, 'skills, 'attitudes' and 'individual value.' Additionally, Byram explains 'knowledge' in intercultural communication is knowledge of social groups (including in process and products), self and other, social interaction and including of how other people see oneself. Besides, intercultural speakers and mediators should have 'skills,' namely, abilities to interpret, to compare to discover and to interact with other cultures and its practices. Intercultural 'attitudes' here mean curiosity and openness of other cultures, including of values, beliefs, and behaviors that might be different with their own. Finally, 'individual value' that intercultural speakers and mediators should be aware of is critical cultural awareness of their culture and country as well as those of other people with different cultural backgrounds. Figure 2 displays Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence.

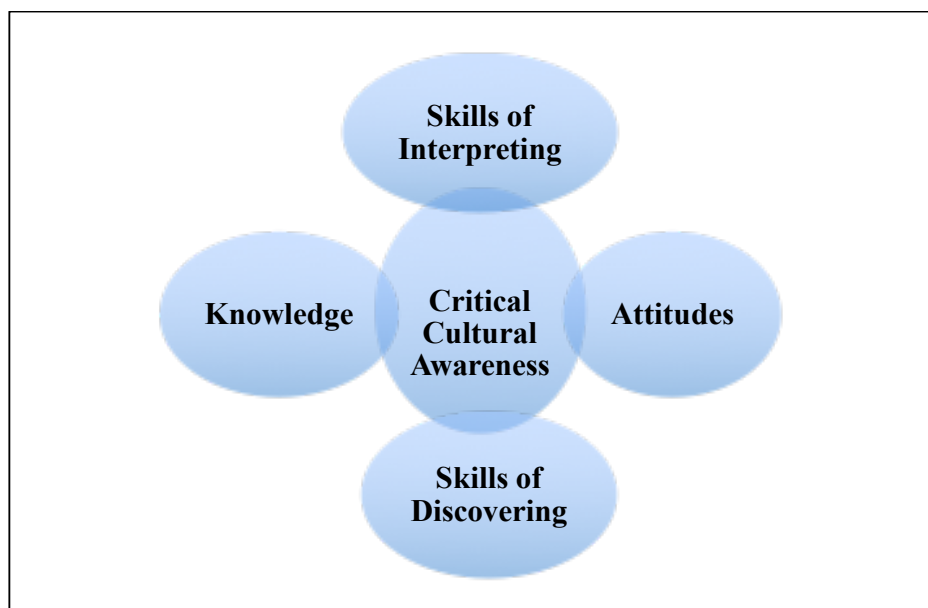


Figure 2. Byram’s (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Findings

The result of analyzing portfolios and pre-post questionnaire shows the respondent’s awareness about Indonesian as well as Japanese local customs related to the topics that they have practiced through the tasks of this study. Additionally, the data expose what respondents become aware of the similarities and the differences of Indonesian and Japanese cultural identity on allied topics. Finally, it also displays linguistic barriers that respondents faced while they were engaged in conversation about the selected themes in the Japanese language.

First, figure 3 lays out the data about respondent’s awareness related to “My Family” topic. As displayed in figure 3, the Indonesian-Japanese language learners conscious that while discussing on “My Family” topic, contrastingly with the Japanese custom, they speech about extended subtopics. Mainly, while having a dialogue with unfamiliar people, Japanese people tend to speak about their family, simply in general subtopics, namely number of family members, name, birthplace, profession, workplace, place of residence, siblings, and hobby. Distinctively, the respondents stated that Indonesian people are feasible to extend more subtopics, i.e. the meaning of the name, native place, physical appearance, general characters, marital status, and relatives who live together, regardless the partner is either unknown people or foreigner. Nevertheless, due to the lack of vocabularies in some subtopics as displayed in figure 3, the participants have difficulties to develop the conversation in the Japanese language. Hence, to overcome the lack of vocabularies, some participants stated in their portfolios that they utilized English words.

Topics	Cultural Awareness		Linguistic Barriers
	Indonesian Customs	Japanese Customs	
My Family	Talking about wider and specific subtopics, i.e. number of family members, name, and its meaning , place of residence, profession	Talking about general subtopics, i.e. number of family members, name, age, birth place, profession (job or education), workplace, place of residence,	Lack of vocabularies about the <u>meaning of name</u> , <u>specific profession</u> and <u>hobby</u> ,

	(<u>job</u> or education), age, native place , physical appearance , general characters , marital status , <u>hobby</u> , workplace, sibling position and birth order, living at home with relatives	sibling position and birth order, hobby	<u>characters</u> , and <u>relatives</u>
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Figure 3. Respondent’s Cultural Awareness and Linguistic Barriers on “My Family” topic

Topics	Cultural Awareness		Linguistic Barriers
	Indonesian Customs	Japanese Customs	
My Home Town	Introducing a local tourism object, namely location, interesting points, characteristics of place and uniqueness, history of area, activities, local food, interesting view, pick seasons/pick days, transportation use, traffic jam around location , good season, landmark around there	Introducing a local tourism object, namely location, interesting points, characteristics of place and uniqueness, history of area, activities, local food, interesting view, pick seasons/pick days, transportation use, good season, landmark around there	Grammatical constraint for historical explanation, words limitation on food ingredients
	Transportation use: Transjakarta (Bus Rapid Transit) , Bus, <i>Commuter Line</i> (local train), taxi, online transportation (car and motorbike) , Angkot (minibus) , shuttle bus, rent car	Transportation use: subway , local train, bus, walking , local sightseeing bus , taxi	Lack of words while explaining local transportations
	Activities: buying the souvenir, eating at local restaurant or street stall, taking photos (mostly selfies), watching a movie , pray	Activities: buying the souvenir, eating at local restaurant or street stall, taking photos	Vocabularies obstacle of explaining local souvenir’s material
	Prohibited things:	Prohibited things:	

	<p>throw garbage away, draw on the wall (graffiti), wear shoes inside the mosque / pray room, photographs or videos, touching on displays, using the mobile phone, smoking, outside food and beverages</p>	<p>selfie sticks, restricted photographs or videos, smoking, using mobile phone, outside food and beverages, touching on displays</p>	
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Figure 4. Respondent’s Cultural Awareness and Linguistic Barriers on “ My Home Town “ topic

Second, figure 4 above exhibits respondent’s cultural awareness related to “ My Home Town” topics. The result reveals that while they are conversing about their hometown, either in Indonesian custom or Japanese custom, they discuss subtopics alike. Since Indonesia has the problem about the traffic jam in the major cities like Jakarta, respondent explained that they tend to warn the other cultural party to avoid the traffic jam in particular areas. Besides, while they developed the topic to the activities that are possible to do in the hometown, respondents clarified the uniqueness of Indonesian customs compared to Japanese custom, i.e. taking selfie photos. Contrastingly, respondents discovered that utilizing of selfie stick is prohibited in some public area in Japan. Furthermore, the data exposes the participant’s statement of pray as Indonesian Muslim daily activities, though they are in public spaces. Consequently, they also explained either mosque or other prayer room’s rule, e.g. taking off shoes before entering the place.

Limitations and Recommendation

This preliminary study exposed Indonesian-Japanese language learner’s awareness of self-cultural identity as well Japanese cultural identity in the context of intercultural communicative competence, particularly in topics of “My Family” and “ My Home Town. ” However, while the data was collected, instead of having the conversation directly with the Japanese people, the respondents practiced with the other Indonesian-Japanese language learners. Consequently, the result of cultural awareness is gained according to clip movies observation limitedly. Hence, in order discovering actual data about Japanese cultural customs, I would like to suggest developing this study with the revision of the data collection procedure through facing the Indonesian respondents with Japanese people partners directly. Additionally, despite the participant’s cultural awareness of Indonesian and Japanese cultural identities related to the selected topics, the participants have some linguistic constraints, primarily the lack of vocabularies and grammatical barriers. Therefore, for the purpose of enhancing foreign language learners of cultural awareness, either self-cultural identity or interlocutor’s cultural identity, the teachers are expected to anticipate the linguistic obstacles through developing some strategies, namely utilizing loan words, gesture, pictures and other non-verbal communication tools.

Conclusion

The result of this study exposed that the participants were aware of Indonesian cultural identity and Japanese cultural identity in the context of intercultural communication, namely, in the conversation of family and hometown. While having a dialogue with unfamiliar

people, mainly speaking about personal information, i.e. family topic, Japanese people tend to have conversation plainly in general subtopics since Japanese people have collectivistic culture. Distinctively, since Indonesian people believe in “Unity in Diversity” (different but one), they are feasible to discuss wider subtopics despite the unfamiliar interlocutors.

Through the findings, it is desired that the foreign language learners as intercultural prolocutors as well as interlocutors could take the advantages of the cultural awareness while they interact with other cultural groups to build a mutually-beneficial relationship.

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