

Conference Paper

Cultural Representation as Seen in Indonesian Early Bilinguals' Essays

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Abstract

A thorough observation on the implementation of immersion program at the Laboratory Primary School of Universitas Negeri Malang has recently been conducted particularly to see how English exposures work in non-English classrooms. The research also objectifies the initial mapping of the English proficiency of Early Bilinguals sitting in the 3rd Grade of International Class Program who are the main research subjects to whom the language proficiency tests are given. The findings indicate that the students possess good English language competence, comprehensively and productively. In language comprehension, 85% of the students are able to comprehend meanings of various explicit and implicit instructions in the forms of declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives. In language production, 80% of the students are able produce simple and basic syntactic constructions (SVO order) accurately using almost correct singular-plural and present-past tense. Beyond these significant findings, the researchers discover a lot more concern on how they construct ideas in their essays as well as how these ideas reflect their daily socio-cultural practices. Given the context of *My Last Holiday*, the 48-students' essays have narrated more than only series of event or moments to remember, but a piece of universal concept internalized in their mind as Indonesian natives. This paper specifically outlines not only the most frequent words and phrases in their essays becoming apparent to represent the things the students value more, but also the initial mapping on universal cultural concepts in Asian context.

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1. Introduction

A nearly one year research project has been conducted to have a closer look at the second language development of early bilinguals sitting in what so called Partial Immersion Program in International Class Program of Primary Laboratory School of Universitas Negeri Malang [10]. It mainly aims at examining the level of English proficiency of the third graders and mapping the characteristic of the program. The English proficiency test was given to confirm the level of language comprehension and production in English, Science, and Mathematics class as they have been in such learning situation where, in these three classes, English becomes the instructional classroom language. The hypothesis has been made regarding the significant role of the amount and length of exposure given, knowing that the third graders of ICP have been exposed to English in English, Science, and Mathematics class for three years. In other words, the research

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seeks for scientific evidence of what language exposures can contribute to the early bilingual language development. Mapping the program framework implemented in the school becomes the concern in this research so that it can provide scientific and pedagogical explanation on the effective second language teaching and learning.

Reviewing the second issue is much easier since the research has come with the sort of extraction of the Partial Immersion Program implemented. The Primary Laboratory School of Universitas Negeri Malang has implemented ICP class since 2007 under several frameworks; 1) the implementation of bridging course, (2) the elaboration of national and international curriculum since grade 1, (3) the specific duration of learning which is 3 (three) sessions (70 minutes for each session) for English and 2 (two) sessions for Science and Mathematics in a week, (4) 3 (three) sessions of English is divided into 2 (two) sessions of regular class consisting of *Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking* and 1 (one) additional session for *Reading*, (5) the changing from 2 (two) into 4 (four) sessions in a week for Science and Mathematics class starting from Grade 3, (6) the introduction of the Science and Mathematics concept in Indonesian language while the review and feedback are in English with the underlying principle that the higher the grade, the least the use of Indonesian language, (7) basic syntactic and other linguistic components of English are exposed through contextual learning experience in teacher made workbooks of English, Science, and Mathematics, (8) the join of Progression and Achievement Test of CIE (Cambridge International Examination), thus all assessment in English, Science, and Mathematics subjects are designed to prepare them for Progression and Achievement Test, (9) the supervision of 1 (one) class teacher (usually English teacher) and subject teachers who are certified [10].

Seeing the aforementioned framework, it is relevant to hypothesize that the specific teaching and learning design implemented in ICP class should contribute to a significant improvement and progress to the students' second language proficiency that the first concern of this present research is made. By giving written tests, the initial mapping of students' English proficiency is attempted to make the results of which show that the English proficiency in Science and Mathematics class are different in the way that the first subject is higher than the second. It, accordingly, explains that understanding Mathematical concepts using English are more difficult than Science. Meanwhile, the proficiency test result of English subject is much significantly higher compared to the other two subjects. It presumably corresponds to the fact stated in the aforementioned program framework that English has been given more learning hours and more reading exposures than Science and Mathematics. It also scientifically proves that language inputs take the significant role in second language development [10].

The result of English proficiency test in English subject has actually talked more than only numerical description. Students' level of English is somehow much more interesting to explore, especially on the section of short essay writing in which they have to tell their last holiday experience. Hence, it is the concern of this paper. From

linguistic aspects, the level of language development is observed from (1) the number of sentences the students are able to produce, (2) the topics the students provide, (3) the accuracy of word order representing the students' understanding on the basic syntactic pattern of English language, and (4) the grammatical aspect focusing on tense and number markers. This paper is going only to analytically discuss the second finding because the researchers aims at figuring out how one's language production represent both his or her life experience and universal concept of his or her surroundings. As formulated by the Swiss scholar, Ferdinand de Saussure that a language according to him is an example of the kind of entity which certain sociologists call as 'social facts'. The other significant underlying point of his theory is that social facts are ideas in the collective mind of society that do not exist completely in any individual speaker; rather, it exists perfectly within a collectivity which is, afterward, embodied in the concept of *langue* and *parole*. Everything the students have written in their essays mirrors the society's universal mind notably about where to go and what to do to enjoy holidays since students regardless of their age are factually the member of their societies. In other words, what most students prefer talking about the last time holiday experience is actually the society's voice about it.

Holiday has always been a very special moment for people to wait all over the globe. It gradually shapes our understanding about celebration and tradition that we commonly do during holiday that it seems to change over times. The changing and shifting are usually triggered by globalization. In [6] suggests two influential points about globalization that it is, in such a way, increases human productivity because of the acceleration of people, goods, and ideas that in the long run, improve people living standards, while digital and electronic technologies aiding globalization will eventually destroy local traditions and create a homogenized world culture. Seeing our surroundings, it is undeniably true that the increasing of human productivities to some extent influences their life style which is, in a very specific way, changing their attitudes toward holiday celebration and tradition. Thus, by employing linguistic evidence from students' language production in their essays, this paper wants to carefully explain the cultural representation of holiday embodied in universal mind of Indonesian society.

2. Method

The design of the research is descriptive quantitative which attempts to describe the cultural representation from students' language production in their essays submitted for the sake of English proficiency test [8]. The subjects are 39 third graders of Primary Laboratory School of Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java, Indonesia in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015. They belong to the so-called 'International Class Program' (ICP) in which English is used as the medium of instruction for other

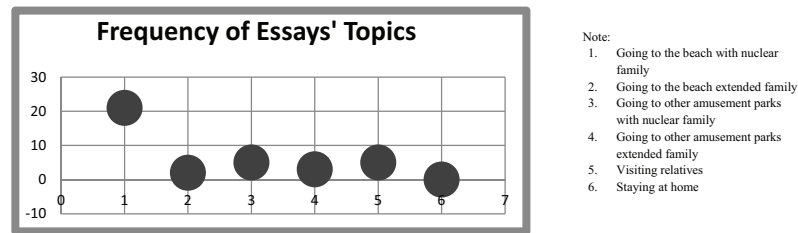


Figure 1: The Frequency of Essay Topics.

subjects—Mathematics and Science. Yet, for this study, the focus is on the English language proficiency, especially the written language production. To obtain data, 20 test items on English which one of them has asked students to write a short essay about “Last Holiday” were given. After that, the linguistic elements especially within the sub item of essay writing were analyzed to examine the students’ English language production. Further and deeper quantitative analysis on their language production was done to quantify the most frequent holiday activity (topic) and the most frequent words to aim at translating and articulating the cultural value represented by the linguistic findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Word Frequency as a Piece of Linguistic Evidence

The average number of sentences that the students are able to produce is 7 (seven), most of which are simple sentences with a basic yet accurate syntactic structure. About the essay title, most students wrote the general one, such as *My Holiday* and *Last Holiday*, few of them were very specific by putting *Went to the Trans Studio Makassar*, *I Went to Surabaya*, *Steak Holiday*, and *Go to Beach* on the title section. The last, *Go to Beach*, is the most frequent one. However, the researchers map out the topics not simply from the title but the whole main idea of the essays is seen from Figure 1 below.

In the context of students’ essays, nuclear family means father, mother, and siblings (sister and/or brother), while extended family is uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother, and cousins. There are six main ideas of holiday activities. Out of the six, “Going to the Beach with Nuclear Family” is the most frequent one, while “Staying at Home” is the least. It seems that a cultural shifting has been in its way to happen when we as the generation of 80s reflect ourselves especially in the way we enjoy holiday. In those years, 1980s, holiday means staying at home, helping our mothers doing household chores or spending times to play with cousins and other extended family members. However, most students have clarified this initial-yet-accurate-ethnographic data through written utterances within their essays. Thus, it probably leads to the new hypothesis that the changing social situation is that everyone or

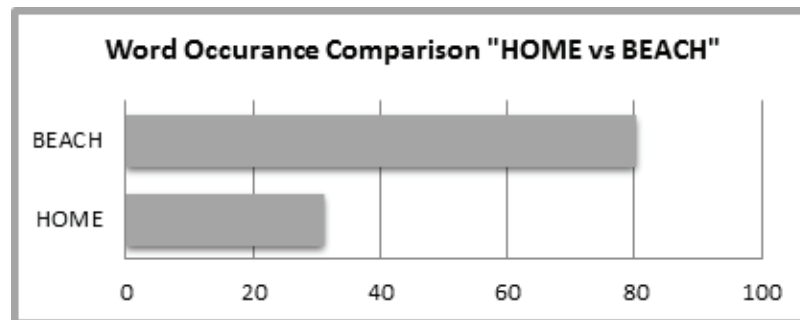


Figure 2: The Frequency of Word "Home" and "Beach".

every family has been moving to different ways of conducting holiday activities. And communication makes it really possible to spread such different ideas to anyone else. That is what happens in the school. Students like to tell stories to their friends. Finally, it is undeniably crucial to note that children language development is embedded in socialization process and that language acquisition process works, at the same time, with the transmission of socio-cultural knowledge. This particular fact makes us realize that 'every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in social situations, and this, in turn, affects . . . children's utterances' (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984 in [5]). The first finding corresponds to the following word occurrence quantification.

Comparing the occurrence of the word "Beach" and "Home", the quantification shows corresponding finding to the previous one in the way that students mention the first a lot more than the second. It obviously means that holiday does not mean "home" but "beach" or any other amusement parks. The convincing reason to state this issue is by taking Malinowski's scientific argument that everything is there in long conversation by which it can also be a tool to understand the way the past affects the present [11]. In other words, language becomes the key point to help us figure out what and how one perceives something. And it is culture that this paper is highlighting. People, nowadays, perceive holiday activities differently. As most of the 20th century anthropologists agree that "Culture is no longer perceived as a preprogrammed mental library—a knowledge system inherited from ancestors... culture (if they use the term at all) as a set of ideas, attributes, and expectations that is constantly changing as people react to changing circumstances" [12].

Here, the cultural shifting happens probably because of the advancement of technologies that make our world smaller so that meeting up with extended families can be easily done by phones, texts, video calls, video chats, e-mails, etc. Thus, spending holidays does not mean staying at home or visiting relatives, but bringing them out of the town to experience different routines. In [12] has also convinced us by exemplifying that;

...in 1969 an international telephone call from Hong Kong to Chicago cost nearly \$10 per minute; in 2001 the same call varied from \$1.20 to \$4.00 per minute, immigrant workers in London relied on postal systems and personal letter carriers to send news

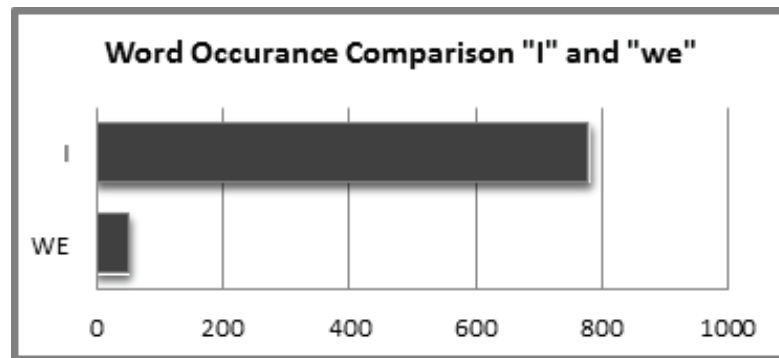


Figure 3: The Frequency of Word "We" and "I".

back to their home villages in India and China; it took two months to receive a reply. Telephoning was not an option, even in direct emergencies. By the late 1990s, the grandchildren of these first-generation migrants carried cellular phones that linked them instantaneously to cousins in Calcutta, Singapore, and Shanghai. Meanwhile, foreign travel has become a routine experience for millions of middle- and working-class people.

Referring to [12] interesting data above, technology bridges the geographical gaps and communication barriers among families, as the result, it changes people perception about holiday celebration and tradition as well. It is supported further by [2] in a broader context that Asian countries, cultures and religions will continue to meet modernity that affects all parties, especially economic and local cultures. There is gradable complex interplay between localism and globalism. What the old families commonly do refers to doing local tradition, while the modern families tend to go global, doing what most people in the universe do to enjoy their holidays. Furthermore, [7] says that "at the level of culture, the impact of consumerism, co modification, the trans-nationalized forms of pleasures and desires and their concomitant impact on indigenous traditions becomes extremely important. It is evident that modernization is a global condition that reshapes our understanding of the self and society, time and space in culturally specific ways". So, the changing and shifting of culture around us is completely undeniable.

Linguistic evidence in students' essays, in addition to the previous evidence, provides another empirical data of cultural shifting. It is the way the students value the spirit of individualism and collectivism by considering the frequency of the use "we" and "I" as seen from Figure 3 below.

Students use more word "I" instead of "we". Responding this very critical finding, Whorfian hypothesis stating that the influence of language on thought is habitual or in other words, thought is guided by language is most likely the most relevant one [9]. It is because the preference of using "I" which is, to a great extent, reflecting the concept of individualism that becomes the underlying factor of choosing "Going to the Beach" as the most frequent holiday activities instead of "Staying at Home" or

“Visiting Relatives” as the two least frequent ones. The study of linguistic data like this does not belong to structuralism that paid no attention to mental phenomena. In relation to which domain influences which, the contrasting argument is pointed out by [3] proposing the idea that language could not determine thinking, rather, language is one of our ways of thinking.

3.2. Articulating the Linguistic Evidences Showing Cultural Shift

This paper articulates the aforementioned linguistic evidence by relating it to the cultural shifting reflected by students’ language production. Why it (the changing) happens is probably interesting part of the findings to explore. As mentioned before that socialization becomes the gate by which communication among students trigger the information exchange practices. Thus, students give more ideas on how to spend and enjoy the holiday to each other. However, it might not be the only way. Another possible way is television. Particular research has been conducted to see the relationship between children and television and found that children are not merely passive viewers, but active, sophisticated, and discriminating viewers [4]. There is a dynamic interplay between ‘social’ and ‘individual’ that are happening while children watch television. Anything from television can become both language exposure as well as social exposure that in such a way, students get many ideas of holiday activities and the way to communicate it with family as well.

What is clear from the abovementioned linguistic evidence is corresponding to [1] who suggests that “Asians, like other groups, wanted to spend their spare time with other members of the same group”. It implicitly hints that “going to the Beach” activity is one of the efforts to socialize with a larger community of the same race, though; it does always go that way in our context.

The other major finding from [1] relevant to the finding of this research is that extended family plays an important role in the life of an Asian individual. The quantification does not suggest that “Visiting Relatives” is the favorite holiday activities, however, we cannot underline certain conclusion that they (extended family) do not matter at all. They are, indeed, very important in our society. Even though the 1983 survey as quoted by [1] discovered that a majority of Asian parents and young people—eight out of ten—believed that Asians preferred to live in extended families. This particular finding is overwhelmingly interesting since we, the 21st generation, seem unable to find the social situation stated by the abovementioned survey in which the relationship between extended family members does not seem go that intimate. This all strongly brings up the issue that cultural shifting has, anyway, been very close to our daily. In other words, we are undergoing a shift from localism to globalism, at least seen from holiday activity.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

To conclude, this paper finally seeks for our agreement towards the not-new-anymore phenomenon of what so called cultural shifting. Now, we are experiencing a different cultural situation where people are happier to do what most global people do, especially in the way they celebrate and enjoy their holiday. Students' essays as analyzed by this paper have really provided empirical linguistic evidence that "Staying at Home" and "Visiting Relatives" as a local tradition in past times do not belong to their preferred holiday activity anymore. Another initial shifting of culture seen from the more occurrence of "I" than "we" becomes the second finding that this paper aims to propose that our children as the new generation might hypothetically value the spirit of individualism more than the spirit of collectivism.

To suggest, the analysis of this paper is conducted from simple and basic linguistic evidence only by employing explorative descriptive strategy, thus further analysis should be across subjects, such as sociology, psychology, and ethnography. It is also worth suggesting to include student interview to have more verbal clarification and confirmation about the content of their essays.

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