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USING LEGENDS IN EXPANDING  
STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AWARENESS  
AND PRESERVING LOCAL WISDOM IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

A Highlight On Pragmatics

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# USING LEGENDS IN EXPANDING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND PRESERVING LOCAL WISDOM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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**Abstract.** Karya sastra telah amat dihargai di berbagai negara di dunia sebagai sarana untuk memelihara dan mewariskan kearifan lokal kepada generasi yang lebih muda. Karya sastra dapat memberi akses bagi para murid kepada kebudayaan masyarakat yang bahasanya mereka sedang pelajari. Naskah-naskah sastra dalam bahasa Inggris mencerminkan keanekaragaman dunia kita yang kaya dan mengagumkan. Sebuah novel atau cerita pendek ataupun puisi yang bagus adalah materi pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang bagus. Jika materi tersebut dipilih secara seksama, para murid akan merasakan bahwa apa yang mereka lakukan di dalam ruang kelas adalah relevan dan bermakna bagi kehidupan mereka. Dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, memfasilitasi para mahasiswa dari jurusan pendidikan bahasa Inggris dengan pengalaman dengan materi sastra di ruang kelas dapat memberikan kepada mereka pencapaian yang nyata dari penelusuran materi sastra di ruang kelas. Tujuan makalah ini adalah menunjukkan bahwa karya sastra dalam pengajaran bahasa adalah amat penting dalam era global demi memperluas kesadaran bahasa mahasiswa dan memelihara kearifan lokal melalui legenda yang menciptakan atmosfer yang menarik dan mengagumkan. Pembahasan ini meliputi bagaimana materi sastra, khususnya legenda, digunakan dalam kegiatan kelas bahasa Inggris yang melibatkan penceritaan kembali dan pengidentifikasian kearifan lokal. Meminta mahasiswa untuk menceritakan kembali cerita-cerita pendek dari kebudayaan mereka sendiri sebelum mereka membaca kisah otentik dalam bahasa Inggris dengan tema serupa adalah amat memotivasi mereka.

**Key words:** *language awareness, local wisdom, legends*

## INTRODUCTION

Literary works are useful in English language teaching because the study of literature can develop the students' literacy competence at university level. It makes literature itself the content or subject of a language course, while the use of literature as a resource, draws on literature as one source among many different kinds of texts for promoting interesting language activities inside or outside the class. Clearly, if it is the study of literature which has the aim in developing the literary competence of the students is crucial in language teaching. To some, literary texts can be very difficult to apply as authentic materials in teaching English material, especially in such skill classes as speaking, because it is lengthy and time-consuming

and thus less interesting. This view is in contrast with Lazar who stated that "literature means to meet a lot of people, to know others' different points of view, ideas, thoughts, and minds, and to know ourselves better" (1993:1). Lazar's statement speaks of the bottomline of that the students need in speaking ability. This paper discusses the use of literature in teaching English for expanding students' language awareness and preserving local wisdom through legends in speaking class.

The use of literature in English language teaching is important because it is very motivating to learn. The material is authentic and has general educational value. Moreover, it can help students to study another culture. Consequently, it can help

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them to develop interpretive and understanding abilities. Furthermore, it expands students' language awareness, encourage them to talk about their opinions and willingness which is highly valued and has a high status. The use of literature in English language teaching is as stimulus of language acquisition. This will give impact to the students to have a joyful and fun atmosphere. Also, the use of literature in English language teaching will help the students to stimulate their imagination, develop their critical abilities and increase their emotional awareness which will empower their abilities to grapple the text and its language that relates to the values and traditions of their own society.

This paper focuses the discussion specifically on the use of legends in English classes. Legends are parts of folklore which represent the values of culture that they come from. It can open the students' mind of how to deal with kindness, steadfastness, bravery and honesty. Honesty in this case is self-evident which is possessed by human being that invokes trust and similar honesty on the part of others. Steadfastness was often represented by the hero who is always tough in facing his life. Bravery takes from risking danger or some other test usually for the benefit of someone else. Kindness refers to someone's wisdom reflection. Based on the preceding statements, it is clear that legends can be used in English language teaching for preserving local wisdom through moral values. The following discussion points out the elements of teaching that can be achieved in the use of legends in English classes.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Language Awareness**

Literature is a useful tool for encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions. It helps students to become more actively

involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English, as well as the aids of language acquisition. It can be used as an excellent stimulus for group work.

Some people view of adult education is one of andragogy. This science and art of teaching adults is based on two concepts: the adult learner is self-directed and autonomous; the lecturer is a facilitator rather than presenter of content. There is an assumption that the learner arrives in the classroom with a skill set and knowledge base that will be enhanced by the new learning experience. Developmental learning theory derives from cognitive psychology and believes that adult students have already developed their own cognitive maps and strategies to guide their interpretation of the world. They learn by doing and learning new knowledge and skills which they then associate with previous learning and experience. Prior learning is acknowledged as well as assumed.

A language-based approach is quite a broad approach which covers a range of different goals and procedures. Generally speaking, proponents believe in a closer integration of language and literature in the classroom, since this will help the students in achieving their main aim – which is to improve their knowledge of literature and proficiency in English. A language-based approach to using literature includes techniques and procedures which are concerned more directly with the study of the literary text itself. The aim here is to provide the students with the tools they need to interpret a text and to make competent critical judgements of it. Here the method of stylistics or stylistic analysis is frequently adopted. Stylistics involves the close study of the linguistics features of a text in order to arrive at an understanding of how the meanings of the text are

transmitted. The advantages of using literary texts for language activities are that they offer a wide range of styles and registers, they are open to multiple interpretations and hence provide excellent opportunities for classroom discussion, and they focus on genuinely interesting and motivating topics to explore in the classroom (Duff and Maley, 1990, quoted in Lazar, 1993:6).

Ellis defines language awareness as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use (Ellis, 1999, quoted in ALA, 2012:2). Hawkins (quoted in Ellis, 1999:4) states that language learning contributes to language awareness in providing positive feedback on the mother tongue and culture stereotypes. Language awareness blends for aspects of language awareness: a) content about language, b) language skill, c) attitudinal education and d) metacognitive opportunities. They allow the students to reflect on the process of language acquisition, learning and language use. All these four aspects need to be integrated into the existing subject areas. A focus on language awareness is a key aspect of creating student-centered classrooms, and assists the teacher in presenting material accordingly to student readiness (Bilash and Tulasiewicz, 1995:49, quoted in Bilash, 2011).

Language awareness has an “affective element—it engages and helps to evolve attitudes and values”. It encourages teachers to become “autonomous and robust explores of language (Wright and Bolitho, 1993:299). Literature on language teacher’s cognition, which is the study of language teachers’ knowledge, believes and assumes about language, language learning and language teaching, emerges from the interest in teachers’ cognition in general education in the 1980s (e.g., Shavelson and

Stern, 1981, quoted in Ellis, 1999:9). It can be concluded that language awareness is how to encourage the language learner to the reflection of the process on language learning as well as establishing desired knowledge, skills and disposition.

Building language awareness also involves helping students gain a positive attitude toward the target language by developing the confidence to make an attempt or take a risk. By becoming conscious of strategies that can be used to learn the second language, students may become more active in and more responsible for their own learning. Learning more about language in general may help the student develop an appreciation for the target language (Bilash, 2011).

The implementation of language awareness in speaking classes also needs literary competence based on the students’ experiences. It concentrates on genre, plot, appropriate diction and legends choice. The genre that we use in speaking class is legends which belong to traditional prose. Plot is used to explain the chronological events of the legends. Appropriate dictions will represent the stylistics use. Translation is also needed in the implementation of language awareness which aims to get the right translation of the chosen legends in order to obtain the proper syntax.

## **2. Local Wisdom**

Under the influence of globalization, communities from Western countries place importance on economic development and consumerism. Consequently, people in the country have become dominated mentally, intellectually and culturally by forces which are foreign to the traditional atmosphere. Many parents think that their children deserve good education with good facilities. The young generation emphasizes relative relationships, respect for seniors, and

helpfulness even among strangers. Loss of these values causes problems, namely, moral, ethical, health and environment.

The study of literature provides students with an occasion for focused moral reflection and dialogue, an occasion to examine what informs the moral compass guiding fictional lives. Adolescents need a constructive context within which to talk about the lives of others, how they sorted out conflicting desires and learned (or failed to learn) to make their actions consistent with their ideals. Characters in stories are distant enough not to pose a threat to adolescents' ambitions or self-image. Literature gives students privileged insight into the moral journey of a life to discover an authentic individuality, conceiving great ideals, agonizing over relationships to others, burdened by a sense of fate beyond their control, wondering whether the life choices they make will be the right ones (Appleyard, in Bohlin 2005:27). Fictional characters' struggles are of interest to students as they set a course for their own life journey, make their own choices, and in doing so, give consideration to the kind of person they would like to become. Characters in literature often reveal their struggle with conflicting desires (Bohlin, 2005:28). Characters in literature provide us with examples of the various ways human beings deal with fun, happiness, sadness and anger.

Local wisdom is basic knowledge gained from living in balance with nature. It is related to culture in the community which is accumulated and passed on. This wisdom can be both abstract and concrete, but the important characteristics are that it comes from experiences or truth gained from life. The wisdom from real experiences integrates the body, the spirit and the environment. It emphasizes respect for elders and their life experiences. Moreover, it values morals more than material things

(Nakorntap et al., 1996, in Mungmachon, 2012).

Local wisdom is dynamic and flexible to the global situation. It is simple but elaborative and comprehensive. It is usually oral in nature. It is adapted to local, cultural, and environmental conditions. It is dynamic and flexible. It corresponds with quality and quantity of available resources. It copes well with changes (Padmanugraha, 2010).

Community knowledge is transmitted through tradition (Settaboonsang, 2006). Community knowledge is obtained from both within and outside the community. It is used in ways that benefit the community and in ways which it can be passed on. The Thailand Research Fund categorizes community knowledge into three classes. (1) Knowledge to maintain the community is its history, important stories, main values, culture, traditions, regulations, and the important teachings of the community. This knowledge is an indicator of the community's strength in the face of the flow of changing values. (2) Knowledge for a living is the knowledge of occupations, religion, and training for development of the potential quality and health of the members. (3) Knowledge of establishing harmony is the knowledge which comes from people's enjoyment of life or the general knowledge found in coffee shops, retail shops, or meeting places such as temple halls and school sport fields. This knowledge includes storytelling, lullabies, harvest songs, everyday stories and general news. It establishes harmony through close relationships, enjoyment and strength among the members. They value elders who have knowledge that comes from life experiences (Thailand Research Fund, 2009, in Mungmachon, 2012).

### **3. Legends**

Legends are narratives handed down from the past, containing historical elements and usually prose elements that tell about someone or something which do not always based on the fact and they are overtly stated or not from previous generations to the next generations (Spaulding, 2011). Legends are useful for English language learning in the following points.

#### **a. Motivating, authentic and has a general value.**

Literature exposes students to complex themes and fresh, unexpected uses of language. If the students are familiar with literature in their own language, then studying some literature in English can provide an interesting and thought-provoking point of comparison. A legend may elicit a powerful emotional response from students. If the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives.

Asking students to retell short stories from their own culture before getting them to read an authentic story in English on a similar theme could be highly motivating. Literary texts in English reflect the rich and fascinating diversities of our world. Literature can provide students with access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying. They are written by authors living in many different countries and widely divergent cultures which have general value.

#### **b. Help students to study and understand different cultures**

Literature in English language teaching does encourage students to become broadly aware of the social, practical and historical events which form the background to a particular legend. At

the same time, literature does seem to provide a way of contextualizing how a member of a particular society might behave or react in a specific situation. In other words, using literature with our students may enable them to gain useful and often surprising perceptions about how the members of a society might describe or evaluate their experiences. But as this description is very likely to be only a partial one, we should encourage students to treat it critically. In fact, our response to the cultural aspect of literature should always be a critical one, so that the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions in the texts are not merely accepted and reinforced, but are questioned, evaluated and, if necessary, subverted (Lazar, 1993:17).

#### **c. Develop Interpretive Abilities**

Any learning of a new language would seem to involve the learner in the forming of hypotheses and the drawing of inferences, whether these relate to when a particular idiom is used appropriately, how far a grammatical rule can be generalized or what is implied behind the literal meaning of what someone says in a conversation. It has been argued that literature is a particularly good source for developing students' abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations (Rossner's interview with Widdowson in *ELT Journal* 37/1). Thus, by encouraging our students to grapple with the multiple ambiguities of the literary text, we are helping to develop their overall capacity to infer meaning. This very useful skill can then be transferred to other situations where students need to make an interpretation based on implicit or unstated evidence. This skill will be better if it is supported by a reader response theory. Reader response defined as a theory that has many different manifestations, but essentially, the text is seen to interact with

the reader who brings all his/her experiences (cultural, social, cognitive, emotional, literary, linguistic) to bear in the engagement with a text (Sotter,1999:8).

To develop interpretive abilities in speaking class, teachers may use the legend of Bromo Mountain, for example, because first, Bromo Mountain is a very famous tourist destination which is located in East Java. Second, the local people who live around the Bromo Mountain always preserve their local culture through the local wisdom, for example, the Kasodo Ceremony. Third, the students will gain information about this legend so that they can identify the moral value and preserve its local wisdom. Moreover, many symbols may be identified in this story (Symbol being defined as something that means more than what it is, Perrine, 1963:69). The symbols in The Legend of Bromo Mountain story includes mountain, eruption, the local people, and Kesuma's sacrifice. The mountain symbolizes a holy place in ancient Javanese Hindu (the place to worship the gods), while eruption symbolizes the massacre because of the god's wrath. The local people symbolize the innocent people who bear the god's wrath. Kesuma's sacrifice symbolizes love. The highlighted issue to be discussed in the legend is when Joko Seger and Roro Anteng prayed for children to the god of the mountain, with the oath to sacrifice the youngest son when their plead was fulfilled. Thus their breaking of the oath causes the god of Bromo Mountain angry. And as Kesuma, the youngest son, realizes the issue, he jumps into the crater and thus brings the anger to an end, and thus saves the lives of the people and from that moment, people of Bromo, called Tengger (derived from the word Joko Seger and Roro Anteng), live in harmony with the mountain. Kesuma's is commemorated by the people of Tengger as Kasodho. The

moral value of the story is about self-sacrifice life against egotism. Self-sacrificing create a new world full of love, harmony and respect towards each other.

#### **4. Expand Students' Language Awareness**

From legends, students learn to interpret the themes more easily. By focusing on the deviant use of the verb, students are both assisted to become aware of specific stylistic effects in literary work and to consider how this effect is achieved by departing from a norm. For the language learner, stylistics has the advantage of illustrating how particular linguistic forms function to convey specific messages. It uses terminology and a set of procedures reasonably familiar to students (those of grammatical description) to reach and justify literary intuitions. Students are simultaneously involved in the discovery process of more generalised features of language such as rules of syntax and cohesion in plot. For example, the Legend of Bromo Mountain can be used in expanding students' language awareness and preserving local wisdom in speaking class by identifying the symbols in this story. Students can change the past tense used in the legend into present tense in retelling the story with chronological plot to reach their cohesion understanding of the plot. Furthermore, they can describe that the moral values in the story, reflecting the local wisdom that may be applied in wider and more recent context.

#### **5. Encourage Students to Talk**

Focusing on a task which demands that students express their personal responses to this multiple levels of meaning can only serve to accelerate the students' acquisition of language. Acquisition may also be accelerated because the overall context for processing the new language is

so striking. This language enhances the students' abilities to explore their understanding on specific legends, such as the Legend of Bromo Mountain. The students can be encouraged to give opinion based on their personal responses to the story by transferring the story that is in Indonesian into English. Here a contextual translation is involved which aims to accelerate their foreign language acquisition and speaking ability.

### CONCLUSION

Using literary works such as legends as teaching materials in English language classes can guide students towards a more sensitive understanding and appreciation of the literary competence and develop interpretive abilities at academic level. Stylistic analysis that is adopted in the process involves the enclosed study of literature with two main objects: firstly, to enable students to make meaningful interpretations of the legends; secondly, to expand students' knowledge and awareness of the language in general.

For the language learner, stylistics has the advantage of illustrating how particular linguistic forms function to convey specific messages. It uses terminology and a set of procedures reasonably familiar to students (those of grammatical description) to reach and justify literary intuitions. With this approach, students may be helped in both using their existing knowledge of the language to understand and appreciate legends and deepening their knowledge of the language itself. Stylistic analysis can also provide a way of comparing different types of folklore (legends) in order to ascertain how they fulfill different social functions. Thus, integrated literary competence, good translation, proper syntax and stylistic will expand students' language awareness and preserve local

wisdom through legends in speaking class. In conclusion, various types of English literature can be used in English language teaching to expand students' language awareness and preserve local wisdom by designing an integrated syllabus suitable with the students level of education.

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