

## **Cultural Interference in English Speaking Class**

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### **Abstract**

The local culture can give people an advantage in understanding and developing intercultural knowledge and skills. It is also useful for achieving a successful life in this challenging global world. In order to understand people it is important to understand their values and culture. Indonesia consists of various ethnicities, which consequently affect people's culture as a whole nation. This research was done at one of universities in Makassar, State Islamic University of Alauddin. It comprised 15 respondents from various ethnic backgrounds such as: Makassarese, Buginese, Javanese, and others. The interview used was developed on the basis of Hofstede's work on values. The study showed that respondents showed five cultural dimensions in speaking which indicated high on Power Distance, Collectivism, Masculinity; and low on Uncertainty Avoidance, and Short and Long Term Orientation.

### **Key words**

collectivism, masculinity, power distance, short and long term orientation, uncertainty avoidance

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## **INTRODUCTION**

English has been taught for years in Indonesia. Many people have been learning it. However, they may know English but sometimes they have a problem to speak with the native speakers or to understand what the native speakers say. Furthermore, to be able to speak English, it is not only to know about the vocabulary and structure but also to know another important element, such as culture. Without conceiving the culture favorably, someone will be difficult to communicate well. It is because to communicate well, someone needs to have communicative competence including grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence (Savignon, 1983).

From those components of communicative competence, one of the components that is most important to be used in speaking is sociocultural competence. Without understanding the sociocultural competence, the speaker will not be able to understand or to be understood by other speakers. Hence, it is important to integrate culture in teaching language. This is in line with the concept declared by Volosinov (1973) that the actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psycho-physiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances.

The quotation above implies that in teaching language, culture is important where culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Then culture is recognized as instrumental in shaping speakers' communicative competence, in both their first and subsequent languages.

Moreover Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981) mentioned two points should be clear, what perceived as important tends to vary from culture to culture, and what and how a person communicates are reflections of what his culture perceives. Hence, a crucial precept of intercultural communication is that the world we perceive and communicate about may not be the same world being experienced and expressed by someone from another culture. Even people live within the same geographic boundaries, there are problems in the use of language. We must in mind the notion that word usage and meanings are learned, and that each culture, subculture, or subgroup has different experiences that help shape usage and meaning.

In addition, according to Whorf (1956), language affected how a culture conceptualized reality. Different languages evolved different ways of seeing. Yet, when Chomsky (1965) focused linguistic inquiry upon a universalist quest for the structures that underlie all language, Whorf's relativist position on culture and language became unfashionable. The culturally shaped differences among languages appeared trivial when compared to their common, underlying features.

People use the language because of cultural interferences as a reflection of their own culture which still exists on their environment (Schumann, 1978). However, the existence of cultural interferences in English speaking class has yet been properly analyzed in State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar at ELT area. Hence, the researcher considered that analyzing the cultural interferences in the English speaking class should be done. Before analyzing it, the researcher was going to provide a hand book of Impact Values which has some topics related to the culture to find out the cultural interference that appeared in the class by the students in their practice.

McKay (2003) contends that culture influences language teaching in two ways:

1. Linguistically

It affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language.

2. Pedagogically

It influences the choice of the language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. For example, while some textbooks provide examples from the target culture, some others use source culture materials to facilitate the communication of learners' ideas and culture.

Based on the quotation above, the researcher assumed that it is important to organize the students' participation and students' language learning materials that would explore and realize their own culture regarding that the language is a medium of its culture. Further, their English thinking would be strengthened as their expression and also it will facilitate the students to build up their communicative competence in which the researcher is going to use the cultural competence that falls into the category of pragmatic aspect of communicative competence.

In analyzing the cultural interferences, the researcher used the aggregation of five culture dimensions namely power distance, individualism or collectivism, masculinity or femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long or short term orientation that were modeled by Hofstede in culture context to know which dimension were used in their speaking class. Each dimension was reflected by the learners based on their own society. All the dimensions were the interferences that might be appeared on students' utterances in English speaking class.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Samovar et al. (1981) communication is cultural. The ways in which we communicate, the circumstances of our communication, the language and the language style we use, and our nonverbal behaviors are all primarily a response to and a function of our culture. Then the concepts of culture which are complex, abstract, and pervasive help to determine communicative behavior that influences on communication.

In line with that opinion, Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (1998) properly pointed out this believe is unwarranted. Unless the student is learning the language in the target culture. The cultural referents necessary to understanding a native speaker must also be learned.

Hofstede (2005) stated that children in these societies are more likely to learn that the world is a hostile place and are more likely to be protected from experiencing unknown situations. High uncertainty avoidance cultures try to minimize the unstructured conditions and situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level, by a belief in absolute Truth; there can only be one truth and we have it. However a little bit weak uncertainty avoidance dimension appeared among them.

According to Hofstede and Minkov (2010) there is sometimes even an order of authority among the children themselves, with younger children being expected to yield to older children. Independent behavior on the part of a child is not encouraged. Both experts stated that the educational process is teacher centered; teachers outline the intellectual paths to be followed.

A family consists of a number of people living closely together, namely parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, servants, and other housemates. This is known in cultural anthropology as the extended family (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Related to the culture, Chou and Yen-Lin (2014) said compliments can be viewed as an expression of certain cultural values. Therefore, integrating the teaching of the cultural values of the compliments in the language classroom provides learners with opportunities to learn not only the language (English) but also the cultural differences. Chou and Yen-Lin (2014) assumed that engaging learners in speaking can be reached by giving certain materials especially about the cultural values. The reason will be there must be compliments from the learners towards their different arguments about it. Further, unconsciously they will be involved in the situation where they have to be communicatively expressing their thought.

Achua and Lussier (2010) stated that it is necessary to facilitate the learners participating in the class where some of them are presenting their opinions about the culture in group discussion while others are listening to what they are exploring. Moreover, the role play activity, group discussion, and oral presentation are utilized in the language classroom in order to improve learners' speaking competence, especially the communicative ability. While the learners are engaging in the activities, it is attainable for the teacher to assess whether the learners achieve the objectives or not as well as evaluate each student's speaking competence.

In their research, Roslina, Mutawakkil, Nashruddin, and Amin (2020) found that learners can obtain a variety of opinions from their partners while participating in the group discussion by means of the role play activity. Learners can experience cultural values and awareness because it gives an opportunity to be emotionally involved in cross-cultural learning and reflects upon cultural differences. The achievement of those learners was caused by the effort applied by the teacher, namely supporting students in developing their creativity on literary activities.

Related to the English speaking, Kashima and Kashima (1997) said that individualist cultures have languages that require the use of "I" and "you" English is a good example. It would be difficult to write a letter in English without the use of these

words. Individualists are very positive about "me" and "we," whereas collectivists are sometimes ambivalent about "me" but very positive about "we."

Seelye (1984) proposed that the enlightened teaching of selected cultural elements can help prepare a student both to understand and enjoy a native speaker. In short, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice versa.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this research, qualitative was used to describe what kinds of cultural dimensions in cultural interference and the effect of it in the speaking class. The data was collected by observing, interviewing, and recording. This research was conducted at State Islamic University of Alauddin, Makassar. This university is located in Samata, Gowa regency. The university had five classes of English department. Each class consisted of 32 students.

The participants of this research were purposefully selected. The participants were students of English Education Department. The students were chosen due to their cultural dimension in speaking class. The researcher used focus group interview as stated by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), participant may be interviewed individually or groups. There were 15 students chosen purposively to be interviewed and taught to know their cultural dimensions in speaking class.

The goal of this research was to find out the kinds of cultural dimensions used in students' speaking class in order to know the effect of it on students' speaking ability supported by the book of impact values. Hence, the instrument used was video recorder to record the students while speaking and interview.

Procedures of collecting data were interview and interview and classroom recording. The data was interpreted and related to the review of literature and previous related research finding. The method of the analysis used was discourse analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In categorizing dimension, the researcher provided the key differences of each culture dimension. The key differences were used to analyze which dimension used based on the transcripts. Moreover, the researcher put some extracts in each dimension that were present on the transcripts.

### **1. High and Low Power Distance**

The types of power distance dimension appeared in speaking class as showed in the following extract:

**Extract 1**

- Student 1 : My father just reaches elementary school but my father always advises me that education is important so you have to continue your study in the university so you are not being a foolish
- Student 2 : My father advises, I have to be more than my parents
- Student 3 : If I get piercing maybe my father will be angry
- Student 4 : We have learned from our parents we have taught that we have to believe with Allah SWT.
- Student 5 : I use computer rarely because I don't have computer. If I have assignment I just lend my friend's computer until it is finished.

The above extract shows that the power distance used by the students is the High Power Distance (HPD). It was indicated through students' utterances "**My father just reaches elementary school but my father always advises me that education is important so you have to continue your study in the university so you are not being a foolish**", and "**We have learned from our parents we have taught that we have to believe with Allah SWT**". The students' utterances referred to one key of HPD, parents teach children obedience. Further, another key of HPD indicated when the student said "**If I get piercing maybe my father will be angry**". The key appeared is to respect for parents and older relatives. Then when student said "**I use computer rarely because I don't have computer. If I have assignment I just lend my friend's computer until it is finished**", it shows the key that the less powerful people should be dependent.

The extent to which people of different status, power or authority should behave toward each other as equals or un-equals is referred to as power distance. Based on the findings, the researcher found the students were categorized in the high power distance situation. The transcripts refer to key the respects for the parents. Children are expected to be obedient toward their parents.

This is in line with the concept stated by Hofstede and Minkov (2010) that there is sometimes even an order of authority among the children themselves, with younger children being expected to yield to older children. Independent behavior on the part of a child is not encouraged. Respect for parents and other elders is considered a basic virtue; children see others showing such respect and soon acquire it themselves.

Furthermore, in the teaching and learning class, the teacher always took the initiatives by giving directions in catechizing. It can be seen from the teacher's question "**and it's also the same with you S?**", The teacher asked this question regarding that almost the students had the same answer. Then, when the teacher said "**but I think you grow well**", it implied that the teacher needed more explanation from the learner who had different answer from other. Still looking for any information, the teacher responded his explanation then asked him "**You are not crying? But I see, No no, don't cry baby. Great family, do you have any brothers and sisters?**". This initiative was done for involving the students speaking in order to gather information from students' explanation.

Teachers are treated with respect or even fear (and older teachers even more so than younger ones); students may have to stand when they enter. This is also in line with what Hofstede and Minkov (2010) stated that the educational process is teacher centered; teachers outline the intellectual paths to be followed. In the classroom there is supposed to be a strict order, with the teacher initiating all communication. Students in class speak up only when they are invited to. Teachers are never publicly contradicted or criticized and are treated with deference even outside school teacher takes all the initiative.

## 2. Collectivism and Individualism

### Extract 2

- Teacher : What language do you use in your family?  
Student : Actually in my family, we use two languages, the first is Indonesian language automatically, and the next is local language. But the most important in my family we use Indonesian language. We know in our country, our national language is Bahasa Indonesia. We just usually use local language in specially time. But in every time we just speak in Indonesian language.
- Teacher : So your first language is Indonesian language. Then what about you S?  
Student : Actually in my family, we usually use Indonesian language but sometimes we use Buginese because I'm Buginese and my father, my mother, my family is Buginese. We speak English not all day but Sometimes.
- Teacher : Buginese not all times, just sometimes?  
Student : We speak buginese not all time, we speak Indonesian only sometimes
- Teacher : Which one is commonly used in your family?  
Student : Indonesian language
- Teacher : ooh Indonesian language, so what about you S?  
Student : Indonesian language as primary language, another language, a local language is seldom.

Based on the extract 2, the teacher found that almost all students were speaking as a collectivist. Every student was asked “**what language do you use in your family?**”, in which **you** refers to *kamu*, not *kalian*. So the probably answer would be **I**. But in fact, mostly the answers used **we**. It can be seen from the transcripts; “**we use two languages**”, “**we usually use Indonesian language but sometimes we use Buginese**”, and “**we speak buginese not all time, we speak Indonesian only sometimes**”. However, all of this is related to key collectivist dimension where children learn to think in term of “**we**”.

The researcher found that some students used the collectivist dimension and some used the individualist dimension. The transcript shows the collectivist dimension where the students considered the one as part of “**we**”. It can be seen from the transcripts that even when the students were asked to give their opinion about their own personal, they still used to regarded themselves take responsibility as a whole family. it refers to what stated by Hofstede and Minkov (2010) that family within which the child

grows up consists of a number of people living closely together: not just the parents and other children but also, for example, grandparents, uncles, aunts, servants, or other housemates. This is known in cultural anthropology as the extended family.

The quotation above implies that indeed the students who were brought up from an extended family will tend to bring their family member as a part of who they are to be. In this way, individual answers become group answers, and those who speak up do so in the name of their group. Often in subsequent exercises the students will spontaneously rotate the spokesperson role.

Collectivist societies maintain extended family links. The center of authority could very well be the grandfather as long as he is still alive, with the father as a model of obedience. It was also supported by what Kashima and Kashima (1997) stated that individualist cultures have languages that require the use of "I" and "you" in English.

### 3. Masculinity and Femininity

#### Extract 3

- Student 1 : My father works as a teacher my mother is a housewife so automatically my father holds the most status in my family.
- Student 2 : My father works hard to find money to what is to income our family our life.
- Student 3 : My father holds the most status in my family because my father has a job then my mother does not have. My father is stronger than my mother but my mother respects to my father.
- Student 4 : You need to let it go the piercing
- Student 5 : Phill want to look Michele to be good personality
- Student 6 : If Michele really loves Phill she will stop wearing her piercing

The transcript shows the masculine dimension. It is because almost all students said that the one who holds the most status in the family was their father. It shows that the key appeared is being responsible is for men. The men refers to their father as the chief on their family. Then the student that said “**you need to let it go the piercing**” means that the men being decisive to ask the women to do something. Other utterances also shows the decisions were taken by the men. It also proves that Masculine dimension appeared.

The transcript shows that almost all students have the leader on their family, their father. For them, father has an image as the one in the family who controls the situations. Handling the hard thing on his family especially earning money is going to be his responsibility. This is in line with the concept Hofstede and Minkov (2010) stated that it explains male-dominated societies and most women want the male dominance. In more masculine cultures, the strict role division between a father who earns the family income and a mother who handles the household is relatively more common.

The movement for women’s equality has been one of the most successful social movements of the past century, despite the varying oppressions still suffered by women around the globe. Feminist theories have been shaped by women’s changing place in



contemporary societies, and these theories have sometimes proved effective in changing both men's and women's consciousness and conditions.

#### 4. Strong and Weak Uncertainty Avoidance

Extract 4	
Student 1	: Because the cosmetic surgery will not the save of god.
Student 2	: But to be a good look you need, you don't need to want the cosmetic surgery just be the way you are.
Student 3	: Why did they decide to use it? And as we know that someone people think that it really cool and so but I don't think so, of course not. Do they think that they are beautiful? Do they think that they are great of course not
Student 4	: Piercing is not good for our body because it's dangerous for our skin because actually it's made from metal ingredients
Student 5	: Piercing is not good for our health because it's so hard for our body.
Student 6	: Piercing makes someone look handsome, look cool and other but beside there are many negative effects
Student 7	: You are women so you have to keep yourself, don't get pregnant without married

On the extract, the dimension used by the students was strong uncertainty avoidance. When the student said "**Because the cosmetic surgery will not the save of god**", "**But to be a good look you need, you don't need to want the cosmetic surgery just be the way you are**", and "**why did they decide to use it? And as we know that someone people think that it really cool and so but I don't think so, of course not. Do they think that they are beautiful?**", all utterances referred to the key what is different is dangerous.

From their point of view, the researcher assumed that some students thought that plastic surgery was dangerous. Then, thinking that the different thing is dangerous including in the key of strong uncertainty avoidance. Furthermore, one student stated about her parent's statement "**you are women so you have to keep yourself, don't get pregnant without married**". This utterance also indicated the strong uncertainty avoidance which refers to the key tight rules for children on what is dirty and taboo.

Uncertainty Avoidance can be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. It indicates to what extent a culture compels its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual. Furthermore, the researcher found the existence of strong and weak uncertainty avoidance. It can be seen in the first extract that propounded that plastic surgery is indeed different and it is dangerous.

The reason why they thought that was dangerous because they didn't have experiential belief toward the plastic surgery. They just have informational belief that guided them to have that point of view. It is supported by what Hofstede (2005) stated

that children in these societies are more likely to learn that the world is a hostile place and are more likely to be protected from experiencing unknown situations.

The researcher found that the students had low stress when teaching and learning process were running. What they did was enjoying the subject by giving initiatives to the teacher. It is also supported by what Hofstede and Minkov (2010) said that these societies rules are more flexible.

## 5. Long and Short Term Orientation

### Extract 5

- Teacher : Do you have any eating habits/rituals that are specific to your culture?  
Student : Yes, I know actually we are guide to our Allah SWT by preparing some food to for man or for women we call it as *syukuran*. So that we do this when have a good news, when we get good experience. We call it *syukuran*.  
Student : In my culture, we usually, we eat ritual such as something like that *barasanji* and don't know exactly what is the reason so many people do it but usually *barasanji* is used when we do before we have what is *maulid* also and other celebration.  
Teacher : You?  
Student : Specific ritual or eating habit in my culture is it's called *cera' manurung* I really don't know what is the purpose of that activity because it's just aaaa, actually usually people in my place do that. We make this party before something happens or maybe worried about something that will happen mess with our society.

The extract shows the short-term orientation dimension. The teacher asked about eating habits or rituals that might be done by several students. Then they conveyed their arguments, for instance **“in my culture, we usually, we eat ritual such as something like that barasanji and don't know exactly what is the reason so many people do it but usually barasanji is used when we do before we have what is maulid also and other celebration.”** This argument indicates that he respects to the tradition which is including the key of short-term orientation.

Another dimension found by the researcher was long-short term orientation. Even though students don't know well the concrete meaning of what they are doing on their tradition, they just still believe it. It is because the information about the tradition is coming from not only from their family but also from their society.

Children growing up in a low-LTO culture experience two sets of norms. One is toward respecting “musts”: traditions, face-saving, being seen as a stable individual, respecting the social codes of marriage even if love has gone, and reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts as a social ritual. It is supported by the concept stated by Samovar et al. (1998) that identify five such similarities. Rituals are the third similarity. They are practices required of the membership or acts that are forbidden to the members. These acts embody humility, restraint, and awareness, behaviors of great significance.

Vertical cultures accept hierarchy as a given. People are different from each other. Hierarchy is a natural state. Those at the top "naturally" have more power and privileges than those at the bottom of the hierarchy. Horizontal cultures accept equality as a given. People are basically similar, and if one is to divide any resource it should be done equally.

In active cultures individuals try to change the environment to fit them; in passive cultures people change themselves to fit into the environment. The active cultures are more competitive, action-oriented, and emphasize self-fulfillment; the passive ones are more cooperative, emphasize the experience of living, and are especially concerned with getting along with others. In general, individualist cultures are more active than collectivist cultures, though the relationship between the two cultural syndromes is not strong.

Based on the data observation found, the data showed that in the English speaking class, the students used five cultural dimensions; High/ Low Power Distance, Collectivist/ Individualist, Femininity/ Masculinity, Strong/ Weak Uncertainty Avoidance, and Short/ Long Term Orientation. From all the cultural dimensions appeared in the class, the researcher be opting two dimensions to be used in the speaking class. They are High/ Low Power Distance and Collectivity/ Individual dimensions.

The use of High/ Low Power Distance is suitable with the situation in the class whether the teacher should take all the initiatives or the students themselves. When the teacher who takes the initiatives, it means he should provide everything that might be needed by the students. Differ from when the teacher does not take the initiatives, it means he expects that the students will make it such us to be more active to be involved in the class and they lead themselves. Further, this dimension gives guidance to teacher and students toward how to treat each other. It influences the teaching and learning of speaking class.

Moreover, Collectivity/ Individual dimension also is suitable used in speaking class. The reason is this dimension shows the way the students present their opinion. In short, those dimensions are suitable be integrated in the speaking class.

For the second research question namely about the effect of cultural interference in the class, it highly influenced in speaking class. By providing impact values book, the students were engaged to give their opinion toward the topics chosen. In presenting their opinion, the students integrated their own culture into how they use the target language. Hence, the cultural interference appeared in their speaking. However their motivation in speaking English was increased. Asking them to present their argument was regarded as a task. Then it motivated them to prepare themselves before coming to the class.

As a result, it improved students' speaking ability. Hence the researcher assumes that in highlighting the cultural interference in the English speaking class by providing book related to the culture, it can improve students' speaking ability. Finally from this discussion above, the researcher hopes it can give contribution for teaching and learning process.

## CONCLUSION

This research reports the use of cultural dimensions in English speaking class by using discourse analysis approach. The aims from the research are to find out the kinds of cultural dimensions in English speaking class, and effect of cultural dimensions in EFL teaching. From the result of the data analysis, it was found that there were five cultural dimensions used in the speaking class. Those five cultural dimensions are:

1. High Power Dimension
2. Collectivist and Individualist
3. Femininity and Masculinity
4. Strong and Weak Uncertainty Avoidance
5. Short and Long Term Orientation.

There are two cultural dimensions that are suitable used in the speaking class. The first one is the use of High/Low Power Distance which is suitable with the situation in the class whether the teacher should take all the initiatives or the students themselves. The second one is Collectivity/Individual dimension that is suitable used in speaking class. The reason is this dimension shows the way the students present their opinion.

Based on the findings, the cultural dimensions highly influenced speaking in the class. It is because it was supported by using impact values book that has a lot of topics related to the culture.

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