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Anakanak is Hero, Ongkor is Villain:
**Incorporating Culture into the teaching of
Kadazandusun as a Foreign Language**

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Abstract

Culture is often said to be the fifth skill in language teaching and learning which complements the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As language is the tool that expresses thoughts, knowing the culture of a language helps the learner to understand the norms and values that the community speakers perceive as being important, and use the language effectively. The present paper discusses how culture is incorporated into the teaching of Kadazandusun (KD), a less commonly taught foreign language in Sabah, Malaysia. The paper is qualitative in nature, in which four language instructors (teachers) in Universiti Malaysia Sabah were interviewed to obtain the data. The data were then transcribed, and the themes emerging from the interview were identified. The finding reveals that the teachers believe that culture can be incorporated into KD language teaching through literature, such as highlighting the recurring pattern of Anakanak always being the hero while Ongkor is always the villain in most KD folktales. In addition to that, based on the teachers' experience, songs and other interactive activities can be effective means to convey the teaching of culture. Comparing KD culture with the learners' own cultures, and raising the learners' awareness of some linguistic forms which reflect the KD community speakers' culture are two other themes found in the data.

Keywords: culture, language teaching, folktales

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Introduction

In order to successfully teach a foreign language, culture is an additional aspect that has to be incorporated in the teaching and learning. Often called the fifth skill apart from listening, speaking, reading and writing, language learning is said to be incomplete without culture (Krasner 1999, Bennet 2003, Normalis Amzah 2012). Generally, teachers of foreign languages believe that teaching culture is essential for a number of reasons. Sakuragi (2006) in Normalis (2012) states that not only learning the culture of a language brings direct benefit such as being able to do business negotiation without a middle person, it can also bring indirect benefits in terms of the learner's own personal growth that is being able to see things from different perspective. Tomalin (2008) emphasizes that by learning culture, one becomes culture-sensitive and as a result, will be able to deal successfully with people from other cultures."Knowledge of the codes and behaviour of other people is important if a foreign language student is to communicate fully in the target language" (Mohammad Abdollahi-Guilani et al, 2012:115).

Even with the belief that culture should be part of language learning, teaching culture still faces much controversy. Among them are the definitions of culture itself", ...the limits to these definitions, the contents to be taught, methodology of teaching it and the ways in which it can be effectively intergrated into language teaching" (Horne, 2012: 341). Teachers' uncertainty on what aspect of culture is relevant to the students, has always been one of the problems in carrying out the teaching of culture successfully (Simpson 1997) cited in Lobo (2005). As revealed by Byram et al (1991), teachers culture-teaching practice are influenced by three factors: (1) personal philosophy about language teaching in general; (2) personal experience with the target language culture(s); and (3) expectations regarding the learning abilities of the given group of learners (Byram et al. 1991: 63).

This paper is a result of a small scale qualitative study involving four teachers of Kadazandusun (KD) as a foreign language in University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) on incorporating the teaching of culture as part of the language learning. It will be divided into three main sections: the background of Kadazandusun teaching and learning in UMS, some literature review on culture and the teaching of culture, and the results of the study.

Background

KD is an indigenous language in Sabah, Malaysia that has only been offered as a subject in Sabah schools for slightly over a decade. In UMS, it has been offered as an elective foreign language subject for learners of non-Kadazandusun ethnics. KD itself is a 'standard' language that is based mainly on two main Dusunic dialects, the Bundu and Liwan. According to the classification of languages in Sabah based on percentage of similar cognates (PCS), Kadazan/dusun comprises thirteen dialects including the dialects of

Bundu and Liwan that are spoken in most localities of Kadazandusun and have greater number of speakers (Smith, 1984).

In the primary and secondary schools in Sabah, KD is taught as a heritage language. On top of that KD is also taught in two higher learning institutes in Malaysia, Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris and Kent Teacher's Institute as a teaching subject to future teachers of Kadazandusun. It is only in UMS that KD is offered as a foreign or third language to learners. The current practice of UMS is that every foreign language is offered in three levels, in which every level is taught three hours per week for fourteen weeks. The selection of teaching and learning materials depends solely on the instructors. In the case of KD, the materials are written by the instructor based on syllabi that have been prepared by the course chairperson with input from other instructors involved in the teaching of KD. In the three modules of KD, elements of culture of KD are reflected in the texts such as with regards to folktales, food, festivals, and other customs.

Culture and the Teaching of Culture

The word 'culture' encompasses a very wide dimension that defining it is often a challenge. From teaching perspective, among the accepted definitions are traditions, norms and behaviours of a society (Geert Hofstede, 2010). Hofstede definition is widely accepted in the current culture-teaching practice. The anthropologist, Taylor (1871) cited in Kuper (1999) defines culture as a complex body of knowledge, belief, arts, moral, rules, customs and other practices inherited by a community member.

Ting-Toomey (1999) uses the iceberg metaphor to define cultural aspects. On the floating surface, the physical aspects of culture such as popular culture, fashion and so on are reflected. The greater part of the iceberg is buried reflects the finer aspects of culture such as beliefs, assumptions and norms. These aspects are naturally more difficult to teach and learn.

Citing Allan (2011:5), "Language thus represents the hidden values in societies' cultures, as well as the way in which these values are transmitted and become apparent and significant in the narratives of groups or individuals as they make sense of the world. In other words, language is a representation of culture as well as a culturally specific form of communication".

With regard to language teaching, Tomalin (2008) presents four aspects of culture to be included in teaching:

- a) Cultural knowledge, which refers to the knowledge on the culture being learned.
- b) Cultural values, which are what people think as important such as family, hospitality and so on.
- c) Cultural behaviour, the knowledge of daily routines and behaviours.

- d) Cultural skills, the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>)

Byram (1997) believes that it is not possible to teach a foreign language, in his case, English, without incorporating culture. He suggests using significant cultural contents from all cultures and focusing on the things that are common of these cultures. An (2011) proposes three dimensions of foreign language learning related to culture: 1) providing learners with the opportunity to know about a foreign language culture (Learn to know), 2) providing learners with the opportunity to practice what they have known of the culture (learn to do), and 3) providing learners with the opportunity to interact with foreign language culture and its members (learn to interact).

What then, should be taught if culture is to be incorporated in a foreign language teaching? Iwasaki (2013) presents a guidelines from The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006: 47-48), which consists of three components. These are products that refer to tangible objects like books and intangible objects like music, behavioral practices, which are patterns of social interactions, and philosophical perspectives that refer to meanings, attitudes, values and ideas which determine products and practices.

The Study of Culture Incorporation in the Teaching of KD as a Foreign Language in UMS

This paper is based on a qualitative study involving four teachers of KD as a foreign language in UMS. At the time the interview was conducted, they were the only teachers involved in the teaching of the language. These teachers have been involved in the material productions of KD teaching for over 10 years in different capacities. Some are lecturers who take charge of KD language program in institute of higher learning, some are involved as textbook writers in primary and secondary schools, but all of them have taught KD as a foreign language in UMS. The teachers were interviewed to elicit their perspectives on the teaching of culture in general, what aspects of culture should be taught, and how should culture be incorporated into the teaching of KD. Some of them answered the interview in English, while some answered in Malay. The interviews were then transcribed and the Malay responses were translated into English. The following presents the results, which is a summary of their responses. Themes that arise from the responses are highlighted.

Belief in Incorporating Culture in Language Teaching

All four teachers believe that incorporating culture in the teaching of KD is essential. Quoting one teacher:

“As in BM (Malay language- the national language of Malaysia), we learn grammar and at the same time we also learn the Malay culture. Culture and language are two elements that can’t be separated in teaching and learning language. Language has their own language society from which the language originates. In teaching a language, teachers need to understand the grammar as well as the hidden culture found in the language itself. So, teachers need to consider the nature of the language (make the culture explicit) to teach KD language.” (T2)

The teachers generally believe that the correct way to behave in a society can only be learned if learners are taught the culture of KD. For example, a younger speaker is expected to address an older speaker with a certain title (often kinship-based) to show respect. This has to be made explicit to the learner in order for him/her to be able to master it. In sum, the teachers believe that in order to understand and use KD well, the learners need to know the culture of the speakers.

What Aspects of Culture Should be Taught?

The teachers present different perspectives as to what aspects of culture should be taught. The following table shows the different responses:

Table 1. *Aspects of Culture to be taught*

Teacher	What aspects of culture to be taught
T1	Literature such as <i>misundawit</i> (riddles), <i>misudawil</i> (using poetic forms), and <i>tangon</i> (folktales). Also costumes, dances, food, and songs.
T2	To understand the KD everyday lifestyle or habit in the society, expose them with KD life as a farmer (farmers) in the paddy field in rural area (s). Also the way the KD people behave in everyday interaction among their country folks. Give them full understanding on how the KD people make use of the language in actual manner. Teach them what is important to the KD people.
T3	Food, costume, literature like folk stories because literature show what matters to a certain language users.
T4	For basic learners, it is important to teach basic culture like food, costume, <i>sogit</i> (punishments for wrongdoings) and some aspects of literature. For example, folktales . They teach a lot about the thinking and attitude of the community speakers.

Despite the differences in perspectives, it seems that “folkales/folkstories” arises as one important aspect of literature to be taught. This brings us to the first part of the title of this paper, “Anakanak is hero, Ongkor is villain...”. In the interview with the teachers, the topic of heroes and bad guys came up. It was revealed that certain names in KD literature are always associated with something positive. Anakanak is one of them, although some of the teachers think that the name is very childish (Anakanak literally means ‘the small

child’) and not very suitable to be used in the context of higher learning institution. However, some teachers argue that it is the moral values projected by this particular aspect of culture that count. Coming back to ‘Anakanak’, in many folktales of KD, he is always associated with these adjectives: obedient, hardworking, strong, loving, disciplined, and honest to name some. On the other hand, Ongkor (also has other variants such as Bongkoron and Ongkol), has just the opposite portrayal from Anakanak. Ongkor is always a person who is lazy, disobedient, jealous, impatient, distracted, and many more negative attributes. So much so that in the KD community itself, a person who is well-known for any negative attributes can easily be nicknamed “Ongkor”.

What the teachers try to imply here is that folktales reveal the values of the KD community. These values are part of their culture, and as such it is quite necessary to make learners aware of these. In the modern time, a story of Anakanak and Ongkor may be invented, but the characters will still be painted as ‘the hero’ and ‘the villain’.

Ways to Teach Culture

The themes arising from this topic are: 1) using interactive activities, 2) Comparing KD with the learners’ own cultures, 3) Highlighting the recurrent patterns of certain things, and 4) pointing out language structures/forms that reflect culture. These themes will be discussed as follows.

Using Interactive Activities

All of the teachers mentioned having been using some forms of interactive activities in the classroom namely singing, dancing, acting out dialogues, and showing video clips on KD. Of these activities, the students seem to enjoy singing and talking about songs, and watching video-clips more. Some students tend to be shy when they are asked to dance. Acting out dialogues is also seem to be a well-accepted activity in the classroom.

One teacher says that “It’s a shame that we do not have very much time to do all the interactive activities that might be enjoyable to the students. For example, a hands on cooking activity. They would have enjoyed that. They would also learn better by seeing the ingredients physically and doing the cooking on their own. My students enjoyed singing the Kd songs I teach them, so we do that every opportunity we have. But when I asked them to dance the steps I taught them, they tend to be shy” (T1).

Another teacher emphasizes the importance of having drama as one of the interactive activities that can be used to teach culture.

“...of course it is very essential to involve all KD students in language activities as in drama etc. So many language skills can be practiced the time they stage this drama. For example, they can enhance script writing skill, speaking skills and at the same time they can experience wearing the KD costumes etc” (T2).

In relation to this, the result of Horne (2012) study on the students' perception on the role and purpose of culture teaching in language learning in Japan also shows that most students prefer using videos, role-play and activity-based classes in learning culture if there are no visitors from the country speakers of the language they are learning to come and bring their culture into the classroom. Apart from that, Hong (2008) also suggests that interactive activities in the language classroom can be used to improve speaking, listening and comprehension skills and should be encouraged in the learner-centred classroom.

Comparing KD with the Learners' Own Cultures

All the teachers believe that comparing KD with the learners' own culture help them understand KD culture better. As the learners are from other ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Bajau and so on, they are really able to reflect on the differences and similarities of KD with their culture. This is an extract from T3's interview:

“For example, the concept of respecting rice is a very important aspect of KD culture. We have a name for the rice spirit, *Bambarayon*. So I normally ask students if they have similar concept in their culture. Some of them say yes, like a Malay, Iban or a Bajau student. Although they might have no idea if there is a name for their rice spirit. Or if there exist any rice spirit at all! But that makes them reflect and that is good because they can think more about what is similar and what is different in their culture” (T3).

Using this method to teach culture is effective because there are many aspects of cultures that can be compared and contrasted such as food, costume, taboos, belief systems and so on. This method is also suggested by An (2011) as it helps develop the learner's cultural creativity. The learners are provided with information about the new culture (foreign culture), and they are asked to reflect on their own home-culture. This new and previous knowledge is a good basis of understanding culture.

Highlighting the Recurrent Patterns of Certain Things

This aspect is also another popular way of teaching among the KD teachers. The most common example is the use of folkstories as previously mentioned. Apart from Anakanak and Ongkor, there are other popular names such as Kinomulok (reflecting the perfect KD lady physically and in terms of attitude), Kudingking (another hero, very much the same as Anakanak but features more in stories of creation and wars), and Rinokian (also a male hero who is portrayed as “the perfect one”).

Apart from recurrent patterns in folktales, teachers also suggest that other aspects of the KD culture are also recurrent like the concept of *sogit*, which is a punishment for wrong doers in Kd. For example certain offences are punishable in terms of animals. A person who is found guilty of an offence of

getting pregnant outside of wedlock may be asked to pay a *sogit* of one buffalo. A person who hits somebody may be fined a smaller animal such as a chicken. The teachers suggest that all of these are patterns that can make the students understand more about the culture of KD.

The same is also true about other aspect of the KD daily life such as rice-planting. There is a cycle of every rice-planting season that is always marked with certain ceremonies. By pointing this out to students, that aspect of culture is taught.

Pointing out Language Structures/Forms that Reflect Culture

Certain aspects of culture are subtly reflected in the language of KD. Sapir (1958), states that the vocabulary of each language reflects the physical and social environment of the community speaker. This holds true for KD. For example, in the Bundu Dusun dialect (one of the basis for standard KD), the verb *nakasawo* (from the root word *sawo* = husband/wife) refers to the action “a man taking a woman as his wife”. On the contrary, *nasawo* refers to the action “a woman being taken as a wife by a man”. The morphology of *na-ka* and *na-* is explained as follows:

- a) The prefix *na-/no*¹ - carries the meaning *past event*.
- b) The prefix *ka-/ko-* carries the meanings ability or involuntary (accidental) action that happens to the actor (*Actor focus*).
- c) The prefix *n-* also carries the meaning *past event*.
- d) The prefix *a-/o*² - carries the meaning ability or involuntary (accidental) action that happens to the undergoer (*Undergoer focus*).

Example:

1a. *Nakasawo i Jim di Ana*

(**Jim** was able to take Ana as his wife/ **Jim** accidentally/against his will married Ana)

The focus in 1a., marked by the focus marker *i*, is Jim (actor).

1b. *Nasawo di Jim i Ana*

(Jim was able to take **Ana** as his wife/ Jim accidentally/against Ana’s will took **Ana** as his wife)

The focus in 1b., marked by the focus marker *i*, is **Ana** (undergoer).

Never it is said “*Nakasawo i Ana di Jim*” (Ana took Jim as her husband), which reflects that in the culture of KD, men are always the actor and women are always the undergoer. It is a subtle way of saying that the woman is never really equal with the man. This aspect of language is very cultural and can be pointed out to the learners by learning such structures.

¹The choice of *na-ka-* or *no-ko-* depends on the first syllable sound of the root word. If the first syllable contains the vowel [a] the prefix is realized as *naka-*. If the first vowel sound is one of either [o, i, u], then the prefix *noko-* is realized.

²The choice of *n- a-/n-o-* is also based on the same principle as in 1.

The teachers also mention words of the same category that have different senses, for instance, in the wash category there are:

- a) Podsu = to wash body
- b) Pupuk = to wash hair
- c) Ilagup = to wash face
- d) Oug = to wash hands or small objects that can be lifted
- e) Lihung = to wash plates/utensils
- f) Pupu' = to wash clothes
- g) Isu = to wash dirt

These kinds of vocabulary are culture specific, and need to be taught to the learners.

Conclusion

Although as a less commonly taught language KD still have a long way to go to achieve a greater height in teaching and learning, the awareness that culture is an essential part of language teaching is in itself a positive thing that can enhance teaching and learning. A proper planning on what aspects of culture should be incorporated, and the methods to carry out the teaching of culture are recommended to practitioners of KD in order to improve the quality of culture-teaching. Indeed, it is a challenge to achieve this goal as KD teaching in UMS faces constraints such as time and materials, but with proper planning, it is possible that culture-teaching can be better planned to complement the other language skills that the learners learn.

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