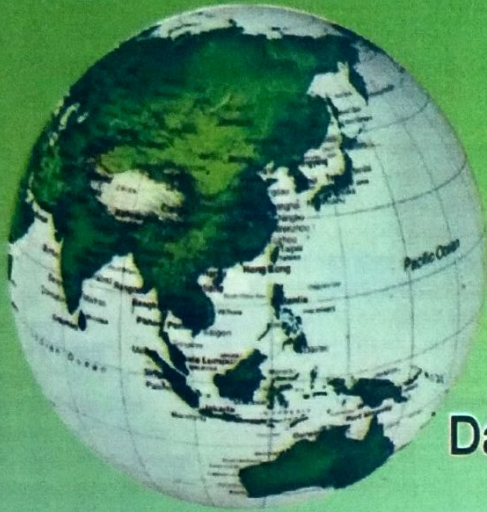


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# Character Building through Language, Culture, Arts, and Their Learning



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## RECONSTRUCTING NATION CHARACTER THROUGH TEACHER'S LANGUAGE USE

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### Abstract

Indonesia is faced with many problems, one of which is moral decadency. Many young people of Indonesia seem to not know where to go. They get lost in "forest" of what is called globalization. As a result, they tend to imitate what they see and what they hear without thinking them deeply. The ways foreigners, especially western people behave, dress and speak either in cyber, real world or mass media tend to be directly imitated since those ways are considered better than their own. In other words, whatever comes to Indonesia from outside is considered better than their own. This gradually makes the young people of Indonesia begin to leave their own cultures, even the good ones. This tendency, of course, breaks the character of Indonesian people who are well-known for their politeness in behaving and in communicating. In communicating with other people, especially the elder ones, Indonesian people used to speak politely. This character of communication has begun to vanish in the world of young generation. Many school-children, nowadays, tend to speak the way their idols speak. Unfortunately, some of those whom they consider as idols are film-artists and foreigners who tend to speak uncontrollably. Therefore, reconstructing nation character is a must and it can be actualized through the use of language.

**Keyword:** nation character, reconstructing, teachers' language use

### A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian people have long been well-known for their good characters. They are considered as friendly, helpful, diligent, cooperative and to have many other positive characters. They welcome and greet strangers whom they do not know, even those coming from foreign countries. They love to help others who need it. They love to work. One proverb from Minangkabau says "*Capek kaki ringan tangan*". The proverb shows how Indonesian people, especially Minangkabau people, used to do their works without being ordered to.

In doing social works, Indonesian people used to do the works together by cooperating to each other. About forty years ago or so, it was really common to see people who cooperated to finish many public works, such as in building new houses, making new roads, or cultivating rice-fields. Those works were done for the betterment of all of the villagers. In making public decisions, they made them based on the agreement of most of them, if not of all of them. Another proverb which also shows how they cooperated in making a decision is: "*Bulek aie dek pambuluah, bulek kato dek mupakaik*".

Another positive character which used to be owned by Minangkabau people as the citizens of Indonesia was that people know what to talk, to whom, where, when, why, and how. In other words, they respected others through their language uses. The well-known proverb from Minangkabau says "*Tau di nan ampek, kato mandaki, kato manurun, kato malereng dan kato mandata*". "*Kato mandaki*" is used when talking to elder people. "*Kato manurun*" is used when talking to younger people. "*Kato mandata*" is used when talking to those of the same ages. "*Kato malereng*" is used when talking to those whom the speaker has marital relationship, such as, to son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and etc. "*Tau di nan ampek*" is a basic principle that all Minangkabau people must follow to be considered polite and accepted in the community of the tribe. The same case also happens to other tribes which form the nation of Indonesia.

The characters which reflect the personalities or characters of Indonesian people, as mentioned above, seem to have disappeared from the earth of Indonesia. The same is true for the character which emphasizes the culture of respecting others through language use. Based on the writer's long observation toward language uses by Indonesian young generation in real-life communications, and in mass-media communications, such as, in TV, internets, newspapers and some magazines, the character of using "appropriate and acceptable" language seem to have vanished. Language uses by jokers, artists, singers and others in TV or in reality gradually ruin the good character in today's young generation. This condition must be stopped. Indonesian nation character must be reconstructed. How to do it? One of the ways is by teachers' socializing good languages among the young generation (students). In other words, the reconstruction of Indonesian nation character will be actualized through teacher's using good languages in his or her classrooms. This paper, therefore, discusses the reconstruction of Indonesian nation character through teacher's language use.

## B. THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER'S LANGUAGE USE IN BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTERS

Why is teachers' language use important in building students' characters? Adults, including parents and teachers, are the models for children. At home, parents behaviors are imitated by their children. At schools, the children tend to imitate their teachers' behaviors, including their language use. In today's era when parents spend more time outside, much more of children's time is spent with their teachers at school. Thus, the teachers play a more important role in educating the children. In other words, teachers' characters will be the models for their students. Therefore, the teachers should perform good behaviors or characters to be imitated by the students. One of the good characters is in using language. According to Schiffrin (1994) an individual whose communicative role is to display information, an actor is assigned two different capacities by which to display information. Goffman's in Schiffrin (1994: 398), for instance, differentiate between information given and information given-off. Information given refers to information intentionally emitted by a person and received by another in the manner intended by the actor. Information given-off, on the other hand, is information interpreted for meaning by a recipient even though the sender does not intend to convey that meaning.

In the context of character building, teachers play a very vital communicative role. The information given by the teachers in their classrooms should be focused on their students' character building. Therefore, they should be really careful in choosing words to be used. Richards (2001: 4-5) points out that what words to be taught depends on the objective of the course and the amount of time available. Moreover, he mentions seven criteria for vocabulary selection: word frequency, word's range or dispersion, teach-ability, similarity, availability, coverage, and defining power.

Wilkins (1978: 217) states that language teaching decisions have to be taken at many different levels: defining the goals of learning, determining the broad methodological approach, assessing the value of particular techniques and organizing the language content.

Helen H. Douglas in Samani and Hariyanto (2013: 41) states "Character isn't inherited. One builds its daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action". Muslich (2011: 44) states that education is a medium for the transformation cultural values, the enforcement of social relationship among citizens, and the development of science to solidify human civilization.

## C. HOW TEACHER'S LANGUAGE USE BUILDS STUDENTS' CHARACTERS

Whorf in Coupland and Jaworsky (1997: 458) points out "Our linguistically determined thought world not only collaborates with our cultural idols and ideals, but engages even our unconscious personal reactions in its patterns and gives them certain typical character.

The statement shows how our cultural idols and ideals influence our characters. Therefore, teachers should make themselves be models in using language for their students.

Language Socialization theory (LS theory) which is an interactionist theory views social interaction as crucial to the acquisition of language. According to LS theory the relationship between language and socialization is twofold: *socialization to use language* and *socialization through the use of language* (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b). *Socialization through the use of language* refers to "the process by which learners acquire knowledge of culture in question as well as of their status and role and their associated rights and obligations as they learn the language" (Dufon: 2008: 27). Thus, the language forms that are chosen, the functions of the forms and the context in which they occur carry implicit messages regarding the value, beliefs, attitudes, and world view of the speech community in question toward the situation and participants in any given interaction.

Socialization through the use of language refers to the process by which learners acquire knowledge of the culture in question as well as of their status and role and their associated rights and obligations as they learn the language (Dufon: 2008: 27). Therefore, to build the students' characters the teachers should socialize the use of good language. Moreover, Stetsenko in Lantolf and Thorne (2006: 288) states:

The child makes progress under the guidance of an adult because the latter, as a representative of human culture, provides the child with new, more efficient cultural tools. These cultural tools, mostly signs and symbols, have to be introduced first on the external, interpersonal level (i.e. in the child-adult shared interaction), because these tools are...activities that have to be actively played out and reproduced in the course of interaction in order for the child to acquire them. In the course of such interactions, an adult introduces and reveals the meaning and function of new cultural tools to the child, as well as ways to operate with the help of these tools. Gradually, these actions ... get internalized by the child, thus constituting the child's advanced cognitive functioning.

McInerney and McInerney (1998: 8) explains that introducing effective learning experiences can take the form of a sensory experience related to the content to be covered; Students may be asked to hear, look at, feel, smell or taste something.

The value of the use of language to transmit information is well embedded in our cultural mythology. According to Brown and Yule (1983), the faculty of language has enabled the human race to develop diverse cultures, each with its distinctive social customs, religious observances, laws, oral traditions, patterns of trading, and so on.

Malinowski differentiates three main functions of language: pragmatic function in which the language function is interpreted as a form of activity, magic function in which the language function is interpreted as a means of control on environment and narrative function in which the language function is interpreted as a place for keeping all useful and needed information (Sinar: 2008). In the case of character building, teachers' language use is interpreted as a means of control on environment, namely, the characters of their students.

#### D. BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTERS THROUGH TEACHER'S LANGUAGE USE: IMPLEMENTATION

How to build students' characters through teacher's language use? Let me show you how to do it. English teachers' focus of teaching is, usually, on their students ability to use the language being learned actively, fluently, accurately and communicatively. In other words, Their teaching focus is on students' English language ability. If they can reach the target, they consider they are successful in their language teaching. Is it just the aim of a foreign language teaching? Surely not. As educators, we must do more. We should motivate our students to learn things independently, work with others, be responsible, be diligent, be friendly, be punctual, be honest, work hard, thank God and others, love their country, environment and the world, and many others. As a result, our language uses inside and outside of the classrooms must be well-controlled.

Inside of the classrooms, we can plan the words we are going to use, from the very beginning up to the end of the lesson. Let's say, for example, when we will start the lesson, we greet our students by using motivating words like "Good morning my **great** students?" How are the things? I believe that everything runs well, right? When starting the lesson, we invite our students to say prayer to God first by saying, for instance "Well my **beloved** students, we are lucky that we are in a good condition today. Of course, this is because of the **blessing** of our God. Therefore, it is our obligation to **thank** our God " Or, when we check whether our students did their homework or not, we can say something like " My **beloved** students, please open your exercise book. All of you did your homework. Right? I'm sure you did because I know that you are **responsible** students. Anybody who did not do the homework? In case, there are students spontaneously raising their hand and saying, "I did not do it ma'am", as wise teachers, we will not directly punish them. Maybe, it will be more useful and more influential if we say something like this "Ok. Being **honest** is **good**. I do **appreciate** your **honesty**. But, for the next meeting I do hope that all of you do your homework for the sake of your future. No more excuse, ok? I believe that you are **responsible** students".

During the lesson, to teach *Simple Present Tense*, to use sentences like " I think Roberto is a *kind* man... I feel that it is important to respect other people's opinions." (Azar,1999: 16) are good for students' character building. The use of the sentences of the same kinds by all the teachers in Indonesia is really imperative if we really care about the reconstruction of our nation character. Thus, to teach the tense, the sentences used by the teachers either for explanation and for exercises should use the positive words which can build our students' characters. As a result, not only their English capability but also their characters will be improved. Let's see the following sentences, for more examples:

- I am a diligent student.
- I always do my homework.
- I love animals.
- We are friendly people.
- I hate cheating.
- Honesty is the best policy.
- I love to help my parents.
- I respect my teacher.
- Indonesia is a lovely country.
- We are responsible people.
- Watering flowers is my hobby.

The words **thank, love, respect, great, beloved, blessing, responsible, honest, friendly and many others** are motivating and can build our students characters. Therefore, each lesson that we bring to our classroom should contain things useful not only for their language capability but also for their character building.

To use those sentences, teachers can apply the technique of role playing to make their students study social behavior and values. Joyce, Weil and Showers (1992: 67) mention two basic reasons why a teacher might decide to use the technique, i.e.: to begin a systematic program of social education and to counsel a group of children to deal with an immediate human-relations problem. In teaching a language, equal time is given to

each of the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Meaning-focused input involves getting input through listening and reading in which the learners' focus is on understanding the message and where only a small proportion of language features are outside the learners' present level of proficiency (Nation and Newton, 2009).

To end the lesson, we can assign our students to work in unison outside of the classroom. Let's say, for example, assigning them to make a conversation of a role-playing situation. Every member must have a role in the conversation. The assignment will strengthen the process of language mastery and character building that we did in the classroom previously. Again, what we do during the pre-, whilst-, and post- teaching activities will improve our students' language capability and their characters.

Outside of the classroom, the English teachers can be models for their students in using appropriate and acceptable language. Even, if they speak using their native language, the language they use (the choice of words and the way to say the words) must show that they are the models for their students and their society. This way the teachers make the students get used to the good language use and this will be their habit. In other words, the teachers use habituation as a method of education. Fadillah and Khorida (2013: 172-174) point out that habituation method is very practical for the building the characters of young age children. Habituation is done through performing skills and saying something to children in order that they can master appropriate ways or manners. Habituation will generate values internalization rapidly (Mulyasa (2012: 166-168). Education through habituation, according to him, can be performed intentionally in teaching through specific planning and unintentionally in daily life performed routinely, spontaneously, and through providing a model. Routine habituation might be in the forms flag ceremonies, collective prayers, cleanliness and self health-keeping. Spontaneous habituation might be in the forms of behavioral formations of greeting, putting the rubbish into rubbish-can, queuing up, and overcoming different ideas (quarrelling). Habituation through modeling might be in the forms of daily behaviors like getting dressed neatly, using good language, reading many books, praising others' kindness or success, and being punctual.

## E. CONCLUSION

Nation character building can be reconstructed if all the citizens, especially teachers –including an English teacher– realize how their language use influences the characters of the younger generation. Therefore, adults, including English teachers, should use the positive words that can build again the positive characters that this nation used to own. The teachers' use of the characters or good language will gradually be able to reconstruct the characters of Indonesian citizens. In other words, nation character building can be reconstructed through teachers' language use.

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