

STUDENTS' ABILITY IN COMPREHENDING MOVIE ENTITLED "MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING" OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS OF BATANGHARI UNIVERSITY: A CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this research is to identify how far students of English Education program of Batanghari University can understand the differences of cultures that can be seen from the movie entitled "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". Their comprehension about the cross cultural understanding will be notified from their analysis towards the movie. The subject of this research is semester VI students of class A1 which consists of 23 students. Meanwhile the object of the research is students' analysis of cross cultural matters in a form of interview after they watch the movie. The method used in this research is mix method. Qualitative approach is used in analyzing the cross cultural matters in their analysis towards the movie and quantitative approach is used to count the forms of cross cultural matters that occurred from the movie. The hypothesis of this research is that the students are able to understand the difference of other cultures especially American, British, or Australian culture which is related to their major.

Keywords: Cross cultural understanding, Students' ability, movie, My Big Fat Wedding

INTRODUCTION

Cross cultural understanding is a necessary subject that needs to be taught to the students who take English major. This subject shows how one culture is different than other cultures. This is a crucial subject in which students need to understand in order to have a communication with people from other cultures. Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) refers to basic ability to recognize, interpret and react to people and situations

that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural difference. Different cultural background can create conflict, frustration, and even shock. Therefore, learners are expected to get familiar with CCU, so that it would minimize or overcome such problems. They need to know properly the culture of the other countries and the people where the language is from.

When people communicate, make contact, or interact with people from different cultures, a problem can arise, because they find different patterns,

expectations, need, and choices based on their own cultural value. They find it strange with the people from different culture outside them. So the study of Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) or the culture of other people is very important. Cross Cultural understanding covers an understanding of values, beliefs, attitudes, thinking patterns, customs, habits, language and the ways of communication.

Language and culture are inseparable, when people learn a language at the same time they will learn the culture of people from the country where the language is from. Cross Cultural Understanding refers to basic ability of people to recognize, interpret, and correctly react to people, incident situations that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural differences. There are some guidelines to use language effectively and sensitively to equip communication, namely to be aware and choose words carefully, avoid idioms, slang, jargon, acronyms, respect the basic rules of correct grammar and standard syntax, be polite and formal, avoid informality, avoid jokes and humor, listen, value silence.

CCU is one of the subjects taught in Batanghari University for English education program. From this course, students are expected to know the

differences of cultures around the world especially from English speaking country. They are demanded to take this course in one semester which consists of 16 meeting. Toward this research, researcher wants to identify how far they are able to recognize certain cultures which are represented in intercultural movie called "My Big Fat Wedding".

The purpose of this research is to identify the capability of the students of English education program of Batanghari University in understanding cross cultural matters which can be seen from their analysis towards the movie entitled "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". Beforehand, the students has been given some materials related to CCU in every class meeting. So this research will be an evidence of their understanding towards other cultures. By understanding it deeply, students are able to communicate with other people from other cultures.

By the end of the research, there are some benefits that needs to be expected:

- a. Students are able to understand the differences accross cultures from the movie.
- b. Students know how to communicate with people from different cultures.
- c. Students are able to implement their ability towards other cultures in their conversations with other speakers

especially those who come from different cultures.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cross Cultural Understanding

Cross-cultural understanding is needed wherever there are cultural differences, it would seem most appropriate to focus on the development of a way of thinking about human behavior and its cultural determinants (Parsons, 1962). Cultural differences are the main issues in cross-cultural education (Grant & Lei, 2001). Recognizing the differences between people with different cultural background such as religion, ethnics, belief is a must.

Cross-cultural understanding is the ability to recognize the (cultural) differences make correct interpretation and react properly to people or situations in the communication with these communities (Sugirin, 2009). Cross-cultural understanding is important not only in communication between people by different nationality or language but also people of the same nationality but have different culture. Foreign language learning can be considered as cross-cultural education. In foreign language class, the students learn not only linguistic

competence but also the society's culture that use the language that is learned. The cross-cultural understanding should be trained.

The goal of training cross-cultural understanding is to help students acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to successful function within their own micro-culture, mainstream culture and the global community (Sinagatullin, 2003). This process is a means to improve cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in the practice and learning a foreign language. Tanaka (2006) claims that the concept of 'cultural awareness' – understanding of different cultures – has been emphasized as an essential part of English learning and teaching. This claim can be applied in the other foreign languages too, for example French, German, Chinese, and Korean etc. In the classroom context, cross-cultural understanding will support the students to achieve cross-cultural competence through cross-cultural sensitivity. Cross-cultural understanding should be taught in the classroom. This process can be done in several ways.

Intercultural Approach

Intercultural approach has similarity with communicative approach. In this approach, culture is also part of the

language class. It means that the culture teaching and learning are integrated with language class. The teaching goal of this approach is that the students have the ability knowing something new or different in a foreign culture and the competence to communicate in a situation with different culture. The content of this approach is everything that represents the target culture (the culture of the society, whose language is being learned). The students should make systematically comparison of some things of target language's culture with things that are suitable with their own culture. A foreign- language learning is used as a discovering process of something in a foreign culture, without leaving our own culture behind. Besides, there is a strategy development, in order to use and get knowledge from a foreign language and culture. The purpose is that the people with different culture can communicate well. It takes time and adequate exposures for the students to develop this competence. Sugirin (2009) states the stages the students must go through to achieve this competence.

The stages are:

1. Cross-Cultural Knowledge (CCK) is a prerequisite for cross-cultural understanding. The inability to appreciate other cultures often stem from the absence of knowledge about them. Respect and appreciation of a culture will happen and grow if people are familiar with the respected characteristics, values, beliefs and behaviors in the culture.
2. With adequate CCK, people will develop Cross-Cultural Awareness (CCA), i.e. they will show understanding and appreciation, which may be accompanied by changes in behavior and attitudes towards the culture.
3. Proper CCA will naturally produce Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (CCS), i.e. the ability to read into situations, contexts and behaviors that are culturally rooted and be able to react to them appropriately. A suitable response necessitates that people no longer carry their own culturally determined interpretations of the situation or behavior (i.e. good/bad right/wrong) which can only be nurtured through both cross-cultural knowledge and awareness.
4. Only through the possession of adequate CCK, CCA, and CCS will people achieve Cross-Cultural Competence (CCC). CCC is the final stage of cross-cultural understanding and signifies the actor's ability to work effectively across cultures. In Ross and

Thornson's words, it is the development of knowledge and skills through experience in cultural differences to create cultural synergy that leads to the development of cross-cultural competence (Ross & Thornson, 2008).

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is mix-method. Qualitative descriptive approach is used in analyzing students' analysis of the movie. Meanwhile quantitative approach is used to calculate the whole results of the analysis about the point of the movie which is related with cross cultural matters. In collecting the data, first, students are asked to watch the movie and then make a summary or conclusion of the movie. Then, their essay are submitted. In classifying the data, the researcher lists the data based on the theory of cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, the data is analyzed. At the end, to measure their understanding about the movie, the list of table in the form of quantitative approach made.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

From the students point of view after watching the movie, such thoughts come

in mind. In the movie, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding", Toula, the daughter of Gus, the owner of the restaurant called Dancing Zorbas helps run the family restaurant due to their family's cultural beliefs. Ever since her encounter with Ian, Toula decided to break from the cultural myopia within the family. With the help of her Mother's help, and changes in self-presentation, self-disclosure, cultural view, Behavioral flexibility and self-perception, Toula was able to get the family to accept her marriage with Ian. Toula was an ordinary Greek woman, who lived in a Greek family, who take Greek beliefs very seriously.

There is a Cultural myopia that exists within her family and is especially pungent in the minds of Gus, her father. All her life, Toula has been molded in the Greek way. Everything she did had to be Greek and she was taught to be proud in her culture. Unlike her family, Toula and her brother Nick are the only ones who are not governed by the family's Cultural myopia, and so are more interested in other cultures.

This movie is really helpful for the students to understand two or more different cultures. Such understanding towards one culture will make them learn on how to respect and to act based on what that culture serves. Moreover, by doing this research, it is expected that students are able to comprehend the context of

cross cultural understanding through the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”. Moreover, by understanding the situation and the cultural matters in the movie will help the students to face such situation in their real life whether it happens in the present or in the future.

Intercultural Communication is necessary for different cultures to understand and accept the differences in their culture. Cultural sharing is the main medium of intercultural communication. Symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations and norms of behaviors are examples of culture that are shared freely in various groups of people. Intercultural communication is an important aspect in communication today due to globalization. More and more countries everyday mingles with each other and due to cultural and language barriers, misunderstanding usually arises.

The movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” is a good example of intercultural clash due to poor intercultural communication. My Big Fat Greek Wedding is a story of a Greek girl named Toula, who fell in love with Ian, a white anglo saxon protestant. Toula’s family is a very conservative Greek family. Toula’s father forbades Toula to go out with any other man except if they are Greek. Toula’s father is an example of a Greek man who feels superiority being Greek. He believes other nationalities are inferior. An example of this whenever Toula’s father tells the etymology of words, he emphasizes that English words have root

words that came from Greek. This is a proof of cultural identification. A hilarious example of this was shown in the movie when he was explaining where the English word arachnophobia came from. The funny part is when Toula’s friend asks where the word “kimono”, which is a Japanese derived word, came from and still Toula’s father continued his long dialogue of the etymology of words. It was also very ironic to see Toula’s father rely on “Windex”, a type of glass surface cleaner which is made in the United States. Toula’s father relied heavily on “Windex” as a remedy for everything he may think of. It is also ironic for Toula’s father to bring his mother to the United States of America.

Toula, born in a Greek family is required to marry a Greek and bore many children. It was also expected for a Greek woman to uneducated because Greek family felt it was unnecessary because they are going to marry anyways. This was shown when Toula painstakingly ask her father to study in college as if she was looking for a needle in a haystack. It was also showed that Toula’s father thinks that ladies are stupid, which an evident form of stereotyping. This is a obstacle in intercultural communications especially when one is exposed to a culture wherein

male and female stereotyping is not prominent.

Intercultural communication is a very important part of interracial marriage. Toula's was forbidden by her father to marry or even mingle with non-Greeks; however in the course of the movie, Toula met Ian and they suddenly got into each other. When Toula's father knew about this, he went berserk. Intercultural clash was evident in scene where Ian asks Toula's father if he can court her. Then, Toula's father again began judging by his appearance, his hair in particular, which is not very Greek. The conversation never had an end and they parted ways.

Rituals are very important in intercultural communications. Participating in another cultures ritual means that the cultural barrier has been lifted. In the movie, Ian was required to undergo baptism in a Greek Orthodox Church. It was a very strict rule that before Toula and Ian's marriage, Ian should be baptized. This ritual is not a ritual of acceptance but a ritual of conversion. In the movie, after Ian was baptized, he said that he was already Greek. This is a proof that to be able to have good intercultural communication, one should be converted.

Another ritual shown in the movie is where Ian's parents were asked to drink several shots of vodka. This is a welcoming ritual usually done in gatherings. Ian's parents are not drinkers, though they still complied and they were also accepted as part of the family.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the analysis, it can be concluded that most of the students understand the situations happened between those two cultures in the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* which includes Greek and Indian cultures. Some of them said that two people from different cultures who got married are also belong to intercultural communication. Such understanding from different cultures can be pointed out from this movie.

In *My Big fat Greek Wedding*, the marriage of Toula and Ian, brought two different families together. They are being cooperative and understanding towards their cultural background. The movie "*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*" has a lot of components that shows the importance of intercultural communication. It is not impossible for two different cultures to be united. Knowledge and understanding of

each others' culture is necessary to promote peaceful and harmonious living.

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