

BECOMING “AMERICAN”: HOW ARE WE CULTURALLY AWARE?

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Abstract

The current study is aimed at investigating to what extent the seventh semester students of FBIB- UNISBANK are aware of American culture upon completion of Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) class, assigning 25 students. The subjects were given a survey questionnaire, focusing on the four variables, (1) Fashion, (2) Food, (3) Dating, and (4) General Codes of Conducts. Interviews were also held to verify their responses and to further investigate the stance toward the American culture. The findings show that most of the students have positive attitudes towards American Culture, and some of them have adopted the America's ways of life in terms of fashion, food, and dating. Only few of them adopted American social conducts with little modification. However, the interviews yields that they are culturally adoptive at the cognitive level in the sense that they still maintain their oriental thought patterns. Individualism and honesty refer to different things as viewed by both countries. Finally, the study recommends that CCU class be made 'competence-based' with the students actively exploring information for themselves. Further researches are still widely open.

Key Words: culture, American, fashion, foods, dating, codes of conducts

INTRODUCTION

The USA (United States of America) has, as it claims, been a superpower country since the World War II over several issues, such as politics, geographical position, cultural influence, military expenditure, economy, and demographic level—at least according to the best answer provided by wiki.answers.com in response to a question “What Makes America a Superpower?” Not only is it true that the USA has a strong political claws over other countries in the world—with a fixed seat on the UN Security Council and two allies with permanent seats in addition to strong ties with Western Europe, Latin America, Commonwealth of Nations, and several East Asian countries but also considered to be the world's police controlling over democratic practice, and enactment and establishment of human rights standards.

Of the six issues that make America a superpower, the researchers are interested in the cultural influence it has over most countries in the world, including Indonesia as a developing country. Many young people in Indonesia practice American culture in their daily routines. They eat American food, wear American clothes, sing American songs, watch American movies, even try, as best as they can, to speak American English.

The above phenomena are not bad at all. The question is whether or not they adopt the culture both externally and internally. By external adoption of American culture is meant that they adopt how American physically looks. Meanwhile, the internal adoption refers to the way American behaves, thinks and acts in response to internal and external stimuli expressing their attitudes toward particular social and cultural issues.

Suppose those young people adopted the American culture totally, that would be fine in the sense that they managed to think and act in accordance with the rules of American conducts in terms of such as, being critical, honest, responsible, and many other positive American personal characteristics. However, if they were only physically American, they would be in big problems, taking one example driving a car but throwing the garbage (of the car) over its window.

Apparently, there are some of them who are dressed like American but behave like illiterate and uncivilized individuals. The researchers are currently inspired to conduct a research, investigating their awareness of what they are culturally doing to find out whether they are American-like Indonesians or they are becoming Americans, addressing four issues, namely (1) with respect to the fashion (clothes, hair, etc), to what extent do they adopt or adapt American culture? (2) with respect to the type of food, to what extent do they adopt or adapt American culture? (3) with respect to the norms of dating, to what extent do they adopt or adapt American culture? And (4) with respect to social behavior, to what extent do they adopt or adapt American culture?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Similar studies to this current research are hard to find as it investigates the degree of awareness of the students of English language major with respect to their cross-cultural understanding class. It deals with how American culture is integrated into Indonesian culture and on the other hands, Indonesian culture is integrated into American culture from which a 'new' culture has emerged as their cultural identities. However, any individual entering America must adapt him or herself in the new country as the cases of American parents adopting Asian children outlined by Le (2013), arguing that 'As these adopted Asian children grow up in predominantly White families, they frequently encounter adjustment and ethnic identities issues and conflicts about their "place" in American society.' Adoptees feel that they are whites and refuse to be related to Asian. Le concludes that:

Asian adoptees are likely to be an increasingly prominent feature of the Asian American population and their diverse range of experiences can be seen as resources in bridging different cultural and racial groups, which will become an increasingly important asset as American society increasingly becomes more diverse, globalized, and transnational (Le, 2013).

Another study (Donalson, 2009) reiterates despite the common trend in America to be adopted individuals, they still have to struggle for self-identities, fight against racism, and finally realize that they never become whites. They probably manage to deal with language and social behavioral conducts but they still look physically not like American origin.

Araujo (2011) outlined that the most significant variables related to the international students adjustment in American colleges were English fluency, social support, length of stay in the U.S., perceived discrimination and establishing relationship with Americans. Thus, it can be assumed how difficult it is to become "American". Those non-Americans really lived and studied in the U.S., let alone those who study about America only in a class named 'cross-cultural understanding.

American Fashion (AF)

Like in many other countries with respect to fashion, the U.S undergoes the same things. Old fashions are commonly replaced by the new ones—meanwhile,

fashions which have faded away for decades may become new with little modification. At the moment, the latest fashions (for women) include dresses with kimono sleeves, baby doll dresses, wrap or shirt dresses, and jersey dresses. For men, fashions do not seem to change much. Jeans both as trousers and jackets are common among male and female youths. In formal setting, the U.S does not change considerably significant—suits are still preferable.

American Food (A Food)

Despite the fact that America is a multicultural country, it has specific food that characterizes America. CNNTravel lists 50 American great foods as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. American Food

Thanksgiving dinner	Cheeseburger	Reuben sandwich	Hotdogs
Philly cheese steak	Chicago style pizza	Delmonico's steak	Blueberry cobbler
Chocolate-chip cookies	Green chilli stew	Po'boy	Frito pie
Apple pie	BLT	Barbecue ribs	Indian frybread
Buffalo wings	Lobster roll	S'mores	New Mexican flat enchiladas
New England clam chowder	Fried chicken and waffles	Popcorn	Baked beans
Peanut butter sandwich	Fortune cookies	Cioppino	Potato chips
Maryland crabcakes	Macaroni and cheese	Grits	Meatloaf
California roll	Wild Alaska salmon	Chicken fried steak	Smithfield ham
Biscuit 'n' gravy	Jambalaya	GORP	Cornbread
Banana split	Fajitas	Jerky	Twinkies
Pot roast	Cobb salad	San Francisco sourdough bread	Tater tots
Key lime pie			

In Indonesia, there are American brand names for food, such as Pizza Huts, McDonald, CFC, KFC, each of which has been the name of a restaurant selling various American-associated foods.

Norms of American Dating

With respect to dating, many assume that youths are without norms; this is due to the misleading American "movies." eHow spelt out the norms for dating in America as outlined below:

First of all, either man or woman may ask for a date, which is somehow unnatural in some other countries. Secondly, dating activities may include going to movies, dances, or simply just hang out together as done in college. Most people do not expect sex for the first or second date, even they may break after the first date (politely

done). Even if they have sex, there must be a mutual consent from both parties. Forced sex is against the law and considered rape that will be brought to court (eHow).

Social Norms of American Behavior

In America and many other countries, people's behaviors are framed by social norms that are acceptable within particular communities. Sociologists differentiate folkways from mores (both belong to norms) in which the former represents formal norms of behavior, and later represents normal behavior. The most significant point with respect to norms is that they are very much determined by the basic characteristics (values) of the people. In America, back to the main discussion, individualism, democracy, honesty, directness are very much valued. These have framed American people into particular norms (mores and folk-ways) by which they are abode in their daily activities. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/basic-concepts/Social-Norms.php>

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study belongs to a survey (Cohen, 2000) to find out the attitudes of a group of students majoring in English literature toward American culture upon completion of CCU class.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in the present study is the attitudinal awareness of American culture with respect to clothes, food, dating and social norms, each of which will be analyzed in terms of to what extent the students have managed to be aware at the level of cognitive and psychomotor.

Data Collection and Sampling

A Likert Scale Questionnaire was administered to a group of students to find out their demographic data and attitudinal awareness of the American culture. Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) class is offered at the seventh semester of the English Literature Study Program. Since the number of the students was within manageable research undertaking, the researcher decided to take the total sampling. Thus, 25 students participated in the study.

Data Analysis

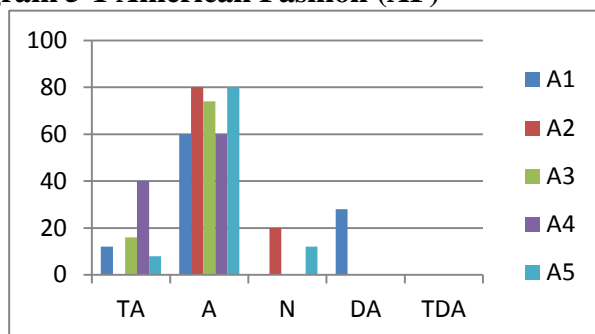
As has been previously mentioned, the data were collected from the students by administering a questionnaire. When the data had been gathered, they were analyzed. The students' attitudes were ranged using Likert scales with (TA) strongly agree, (A) agree, (N) neutral, (DA) disagree and (TDA) strongly disagree in order to position their attitudes toward American culture. Quasi-statistics (percentage) was used to categorize the students' choices. The data were depicted in Histograms for ease of reference in the description and interpretation of the findings. The researcher discussed the findings for possible implication on which to draw some conclusion and recommendations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

American Fashion

It has been previously outlined that American fashion (AF) has been changing very fast in line with the development of multiculturalism and multi-racism in the USA. In the current study, the English Department Students of FBIB Unisbank showed very positive attitudes and awareness toward American fashion, as revealed in Histogram 1 below.

Histogram 5-1 American Fashion (AF)



Histogram 1 shows that 12 percent of the students (12 percent) totally agreed to A1 statement that AF is good to adopt; while 60 percent expressed agreement. However, 28 percent of the students disagreed. Thus, it indicates that they have positive attitudes and awareness toward American fashion.

This phenomenon may also apply in non-English Department students, or even those who have no opportunities to be admitted to Higher Education. Many young people have adopted American fashion. In higher education, many students wear jeans accessories, tight T-shirt and the like. Outside the educational settings, the so-called punk clubs, where young boys and girls are dressed like American rockers. It is also supported in Statement A2 that 'Wearing jeans is part of American fashion' To this statement, 80 percent of the students expressed agreement while the other 20 percent chose 'neutral', indicating that they may be in doubt that jeans symbolizing America. This is somehow normal since in jeans factories with American trade marks, such as Levis, are located in Indonesia. Those who agreed may have been influenced by the fact that American movies displayed boys and girls wearing jeans in casual situations.

Similarly, wearing accessories as part of AF was agreed with by 74 percent of the students with 16 percent of strong agreement. These phenomena may be influenced by foreign tourists visiting Indonesia with a lot of accessories despite the fact that the tourists are not necessarily Americans.

Surprisingly, 40 percent of the students agreed that AF is a symbol of dynamism, further supported by 60 percent. In this respect, it can be said that nowadays, young Indonesian people want to be labeled as 'dynamic generation'. This is somehow contrary to the nature of Indonesian people who are often characterized as being grace and no haste. Therefore, it can be assumed that they want to change their basic personality of Indonesian people to the newly adopted dynamic personality of American people.

Finally, with respect to how AF is promoted, eight percent of the students totally agreed that it is promoted through Hollywood with its thousands of movie stars. Many if not all young people watch American movies even though it is assumed that those movies with a lot of violence and sadism are actually 'junk movies' which have no market place in the USA. However, Hollywood manages to export to most under-developed countries like Indonesia.

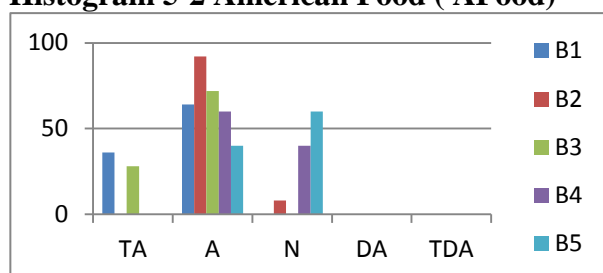
The researchers were wondering why only the fashion could be adopted. American English is still problematic in Indonesia despite the new paradigm of teaching English as a foreign language—the so called 'Discourse Approach'. However, it is not the researchers' concern at the moment. Such a problem in teaching EFL is left to those in charge of English language pedagogy.

The interviews revealed that most of them have adopted American fashion—at least none of them wear traditional clothes as Indonesian. Moslem females may wear veils on their heads but also wear tight T-shirt and jeans. They jokingly said that they have Arabic heads but American bodies. American clothes are prevalent in Indonesia, especially in cities. Traditional clothes are mostly worn in traditional ceremonies, such as wedding. Nowadays, *bathik* clothes are considered ‘traditional’ clothes.

American Food (AFood)

Food, including the way people eat—table manner—may become one characteristic of culture. However, due to globalization, a particular type of food can be adopted to become the food of different people of different cultural background. This happens to some types of AFood. There are quite a number of American restaurants marketing their products overseas, including Indonesia as revealed in Histogram 2 below.

Histogram 5-2 American Food (AFood)



Histogram 2 indicates that, in response to Statement B1, ‘American restaurants are prevalent in Indonesia, especially in big cities’, 36 percent of the students expressed total agreement, and the rest (64 percent) agreed. This means that everyone, especially who lives in big cities has easy access to AF. As it has been previously mentioned, all the American restaurants have been designed exactly the same as their origin—America. The only difference lies in the use of *bahasa* Indonesia or other local languages when the waiters or waitresses take orders from the customers.

With respect to ‘preference’, most students (92 percent) agreed to Statement B2, ‘Most Indonesian youths like eating AFood.’ with only few students (eight percent) expressed ‘doubts’ or ‘neutral’. This is a normal phenomenon that few students may have a different opinion about the prevalence of AF. It can also be assumed that those few students have not tasted AFood or may have come from remote areas. This is due to the fact that Unisbank does not consider places of origin regarding the new student intakes. Diversity in the students’ co-cultures does exist.

When prompted to Statement B3, ‘Pizza huts, McDonald, KFC are symbols of American favorite food.’ all students expressed positive attitudes with 28 percent of total agreement and 72 percent agreement. It is not surprising because the restaurants keep their original names. When there was a political chaos back around the year 1998 upon the fall of President Soeharto, it was claimed, to avoid being destroyed by the angry mass in support of the reform struggle, that McDonald was owned by Indonesian business person of local folk as ‘under license business’. Destroying this kind of ‘foreign-look’ restaurants would only cause hundreds of unemployment. It should be noted that Chinese and other foreign investors were targets of violence by supporters of the reform struggle (Purwanto, 2007).

Statement B4, ‘Eating American food increases dignity.’ deals with self-dignity related to American way of life. The majority of students (60 percent) expressed

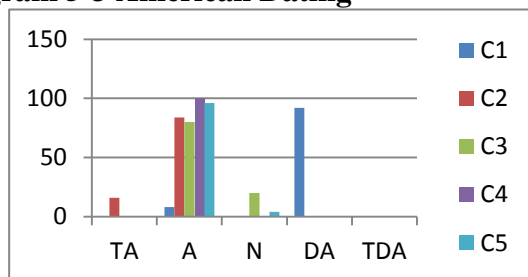
agreement; the rest (40 percent) kept their positions at neutral point. This is understandable that some students are still fanatic to their own culture in the sense that dignity has nothing to do with the type of food being taken. However, the fact shows otherwise. American restaurants in Indonesia are normally crowded with local people who are possibly curious to taste AFood regardless of the high price they have to pay. In this respect, there is a good lesson for them, namely they learn how to stand in line—a difficult social conduct in Indonesia. It can therefore be assumed that by having meals at American restaurant, they feel going international—and thus, lifting up their self dignity.

When prompted with Statement B5, ‘Children’s birthdays are often celebrated in American restaurants.’ surprisingly, more students (60 percent) expressed their neutral position. Surprisingly, the interviews revealed that some of the students in the study, especially for the first or second time of American restaurant manners, had cultural shocks, such as (1) having to stand in line to be served; (2) having to pay in advance prior to taking the food to the table; (3) not knowing how to use spoons and forks or knives correctly; (4) being awkward or disoriented to decide what to eat since the menu is in English, maintaining the American names of food.

American Dating (AD)

Dating is sometimes considered as one way to find out a potential will-be spouse. The results of the questionnaire can be seen in Histogram 5-3 below.

Histogram 5-3 American Dating



With respect to Statement C1, ‘Dating in American does not always end in sex.’ most of the students under study expressed disagreement (92 percent) in contrast to eight percent of those who agreed. This really indicates that most of them have misunderstood about American dating. They might have been inspired by western movies that dating always ends in sex. Of course, such a wrong concept must be corrected.

This is supported by the attitudes toward Statement C2 saying that ‘Having sex on mutual consent is acceptable.’ It turns out that 84 percent of the students expressed agreement, and the other 16 percent expressed strong agreement. Despite the fact that it is culturally true in America, it should not be assumed that Americans allow free sex. The interviews also revealed that most of them thought that free sex was allowed in the US as frequently reflected in the American movies; the truth is that Americans have rules to observe, laws are highly reinforced. This can be seen in the fact how President Clinton was almost impeached following his sexual harassment case.

Regarding the new concept (according to Indonesian dating norms), that, in America, both man and woman may ask for a date, 20 percent of the students expressed neutral positions, and the other 80 percent expressed agreement. This is actually in accordance with the true American characteristic—being individualistic. In other words, they do not want to be bothered. Thus, any party wants something; he or she must

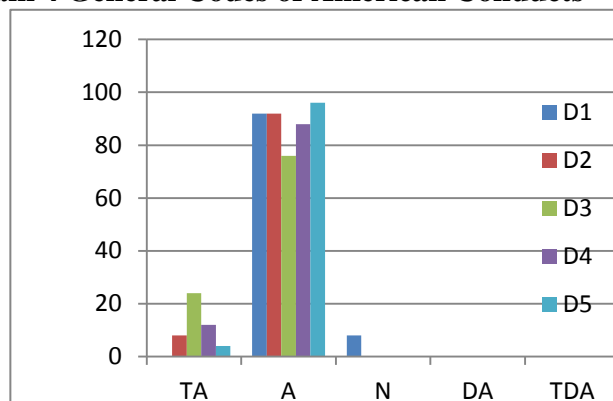
approach first. It does not have to be a man who approaches a woman—such as being practiced in Asian countries.

Without any surprise, every student (100 percent) agreed to Statement C4 that ‘Rape is a serious crime in the US.’ This has become ‘universal truth.’ The question is why all students expressed agreement instead of strong agreement. This may be caused by the fact that rape cases in Indonesia are sometimes left untouched. However, Statement C5 saying that ‘Law on sexual harassment is fully reinforced.’ is quite otherwise in Indonesian context. In Indonesia, sexual harassment is almost in an everyday's scene without any penalty from the authority. However, as a result of studying CCU, the majority of the students expressed agreement (96 percent). Only one student expressed neutral position (four percent). They have learned a new concept of penalty in sexual harassment as opposed to the fact in Indonesia.

General Codes of Conducts (GCC)

Americans are framed in clearly defined codes of conducts, and most people commit to whatever has been ruled out by social norms. They are ashamed of being labeled as being under educated or uncivilized. In Indonesia, it is quite on the other way around. Most rules, traffic, schools, government offices, are mostly violated. Indonesian people usually feel proud of being able to break the rules without being found. The Histogram 4 below yields the results of the survey questionnaire on General Codes of American Conducts.

Histogram 4 General Codes of American Conducts



With respect to Statement D1 saying that ‘In American, it is good to be honest about something.’, 92 percent of the students expressed agreement contrary to the neutral position (2 percent). However, the interviews revealed that there was a different concept of honesty between America and Indonesia. In America, honesty is telling what it is, but in Indonesia, honesty may sometimes be telling what it should be or what it is not. Honesty in exams in the US is highly appreciated to produce really competent students, on the contrary; honesty in exams in Indonesia may result in failing the exams. Only few Indonesian students are honest in examination. Therefore, it will be a kind of shock when those who used to cheat in exam have to do vigorously-supervised tests such as in job recruitment process.

Eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed that individualism in American does not mean that Americans do not help each other; the other 92 percent expressed agreement. A difference in the concept of individualism between Indonesia and American was revealed in the interviews. In Indonesia, individualism is thought of as ‘wanting to keep everything for one’s self’, while in America, individualism refers to ‘self-protection’—not wanting to be bothered in terms of privacy.

Regarding the concept of democracy—supporting majority, the students under study expressed strong agreement (24 percent), and the other 76 percent expressed agreement. This is a normal phenomenon concerning the definition of democracy. However, due to the political situation in Indonesia, the interviews revealed that democracy referred to ‘from money for money and by money’. They were not to blame since Indonesia top scored in corruptions—at all levels of bureaucracy. Furthermore, gossiping is viewed as being negative in America. The students under study strongly agreed (12 percent), and agreed (88 percent). This is a general truth according to any norm of religion. However, the interviews revealed that the students enjoyed gossiping for fun, even it is often seen in TV, such as about family matters of some public figures (artists). Gossiping is marketable.

Finally, with respect to Statement D5 that human equality is highly appreciated, most students (96 percent) expressed agreement, the others (four percent) expressed strong agreement. However, the interviews revealed such gender equality should not violate human nature. This is normal in Indonesia that patriarchy is still an everyday’s scene—somehow ruled out in religion; that men were created as being more than women. Man is so far as the head of a family, at least.

CONCLUSION

Most of the students under investigation showed positive attitudes and awareness toward American culture with respect to (1) American fashion, (2) American food (3) American dating and (4) American social conducts.

American fashion has become prevalent among the young generation without regards to sex variable. Males and females wear American jeans, T-shirts and accessories. However, the interview revealed that some Moslem females are somehow controversial. They may wear tight jeans but also veils to show Islamic identity. It can therefore jokingly be said that Moslem females may have Arabic heads but American bodies. Meanwhile, most American restaurants in Indonesia have tried to accommodate the taste of the majority of Indonesian people. They enjoy eating “American” food, even as a means of upgrading their self-dignity. Many of them feel proud of being treated or treating their friends in American restaurants. Are they becoming American? Yes, they are—partly though. With respect to the language, most of them have not got used to speaking English. They still have problems with English, and so do they with using spoons and forks or knives in American restaurant in accordance with International table manners. In dating, they have been influenced by American movies—sometime misled to behaving “more American than the American”. Furthermore, American behaviors have not been adopted fully in terms of individualism, honesty and democracy. Some students in the study have not had reading habit like most Americans. They still cheat in the exam for one reason or another. They still like gossiping although they know it is not good, and against any religious teaching. However, they have begun to learn how to stand in line. In other words, they have adopted the American ways of behavior at cognitive level, meaning that they know something good about American but they still do not want to practice American thought and behavioral patterns. Finally, Indonesia and American in terms of human (gender) equality have also been discussed on the basis of interviews—leaving a choice whether or not we continue becoming American in all aspects of life. Alternatively, we still keep our own cultural heritages.

RECOMMENDATION

The lecturer of CCU should be the one with at least one academic degree from abroad (MA or better still PhD) from which he or she has experienced in international environments of education—however, a teacher who has visited a foreign county may be acceptable. More specifically, CCU class should be competence-based following the constructionist. Future researches are still widely open with respect to subjects, and variables (cultural issues).

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