

Non-English Department Students' Understanding of Cultural Concepts Expressed in Indonesian Folklore Through Focus Group Discussion

Sri Wahyuni(1), Muhammad Arief Budiman (2)
Universitas PGRI Semarang
Email:¹ sriwahyuni.said@gmail.com, ² ariefbudiman@upgris.ac.id

Abstract

Teaching English to non-English department students must consider many aspects of the language. It is important to not only teach them how to understand grammar but also to understand literary work. Some lecturers sometimes ignore teaching the students to make use the literary works especially to teach cultural concepts to students. They mostly focused on the students' need to understand text in the context of their major only. The purpose of this research is to know to what extent the mathematics students in 2022/2023 understand the cultural context in Indonesian folklore. The method applied in this research is descriptive analysis. Focus group discussion in this research is used to help the students understand through sharing ideas in groups to analyze the literary works. Through this Focus Group Discussion, students understanding of the cultural concept of Indonesian folklore can be improved through sharing ideas. In the end, it is hoped that while the students learn the language they also learn about Indonesian literary work.

Keywords: culture, literary work, focus group discussion

INTRODUCTION

The writer chooses this theme because the writer assumes that it is necessary to understand the necessities needed in the English learning process in mathematics programs. The writer focuses on the concept of culture because the concept of culture is used to acknowledge the reading ability of non-English students (Nizma dkk, 2020; Suwandi dkk, 2016).

Up to now, there is a shortage in the assessment process of the student's reading ability. The students are only monitored on their reading ability, they are not monitored on their understanding ability. To cope with this need, the writer added the element of cultural understanding to monitor students' ability to understand.

To understand culture, we do not need stories from abroad. The writer chooses stories from Indonesia in English to preserve our own culture.

The method of collecting data is a focus group discussion. This method has strength in that it allows students to sharpen discuss abilities and share thoughts. Up to now the culture in Universitas PGRI Semarang focuses on individual assessment in classroom activity which causes students to focus only on their ability in various skills, including reading skills. With this method, both lecturer and students are allowed to show their skill in discussion, negotiation, thinking together, exchanging ideas, debate, and so on.

This paper discusses how far the student's ability in reading is. This paper also discusses how far the students' ability to understand the content of reading material, especially material on culture.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper applies the following underlying theories as the basis for the analysis:

A. Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion (FGD) is a process of data collection of a certain problem which is very specific through group discussion (Anabel and Simanjuntak, 2022). According to Bohnsack (2004), a focus group discussion is the interview of a small group of people which is led by a moderator who smoothly encourages participants to speak bravely, openly, and spontaneously about important things related to the topic of the discussion of the time.

The interaction between participants is base for obtaining information. All participants have the same opportunity to propose and give a statement, to respond, to comment, and to deliver a question. The purpose of focus group discussion is to obtain input and information about a certain problem locally and specifically. The settlement of the problem is determined by the other party after inputs are obtained and analyzed.

Focus group discussion has some characteristics. The participants are 6-12 persons thus each person gets the opportunity to deliver his idea. Generally focus group discussion is held on the target population which is homogenous (having similar characteristics). Those similar characteristics are determined by the purpose of the research.

There are some reasons why focus group discussion is being used. First, there is a belief that the problem being analyzed cannot be understood by survey and interview methods. Second, to gain qualitative data in the short term. Third, as a suitable method for the problem which is local and specific, thus focus group discussion involves residents which is considered as the most ideal approach. Fourth, to encourage the voting role of people being analyzed, thus when researchers give recommendations, people easily accept those recommendations.

Every focus group discussion needs a moderator, note-taking, a developing participant, and one or two logistics and blockers (Irwanto, 1998).

The main tasks of moderator or facilitator are guaranteeing a friendly, trustworthy environment among participants; introducing every participants; explaining the rule of interaction by emphasizing that all opinions and suggestions have the same value and importance and no true or false answer; knowing the problem thus able to propose an appropriate question and provoke participants to think; giving the main outline of the topic will be discussed to determine the direction of the discussion; being relax, enthusiastic, flexible, open to suggestions, willing to be interrogated, patient, and able to control his tone; paying attention to the involvement of the participants, impartial, not letting some of the participants monopolize the discussion and make sure that every participant get enough opportunity to speak; paying attention to communication or response in the form of body language or non verbal; closely listening the discussion while paying attention to the time and leading the conversation in order to be able to move smoothly and on time thus all problems can be discussed fully (the duration is no more than 90 minutes to avoid tiredness).

The participants are people from the target population randomly selected and thus can represent the target population. But often this way is impossible to be conducted or is not wanted because of limited funds, demography, or culture. It is better to create a general group that is by selecting based on certain characteristics.

B. Narrative Structuralism Theory: Model A.J Greimas

The work of art becomes both indifferent and complex, thus different from other descriptions. Therefore it needs more knowledge to understand it. This is the result of the role of the structure of the narrative. The theory of structural narrative is developed from analogies of certain basic linguistics. The syntax is the basic model of the narrative rule. Todorov and others talk about narrative syntax. The most basic of syntax division in a sentence is between subject and predicate: A hero (subject) kills a dragon with his sword (predicate). This sentence can be an episode or event in the whole story. We need to remember that generally structuralist period is involved in the dichotomy of Fabula and Sjuzhet, story and plot. Fabula refers to the chronological sequence of the events in a narrative; Sjuzhet the re-presentation of those events. Some of the pioneers are Claude Levi-Strauss (myth structure) and A.J Greimas (narrative grammar and structure of actant). Actant is an abstract theme in a narrative such as desire, power, a concept, character, and many others.

Levi-Strauss gives his attention to myth which is contained in every fairytale both wholly or fragmented. In his opinion, myth is narrative itself, especially those that involve aspects of certain cultures. While A.J. Greimas (Ratna, 2010:137) is a combination of Levi-Strauss and Propp's syntagmatic. Compared to Propp's research, the object of Greimas' research is not limited to a certain genre that is fairytale but broadens to myth. By utilizing almost similar functions, Greimas pays attention to relation, and proposes sharper concepts, with a more general purpose which is universal narrative grammar. Thus the writer uses the theory of narrative structure of A.J Greimas because the theory proposed by Greimas is broader than Levi-Strauss' theory.

For Greimas, actant is something abstract like love, freedom, or a group of characters. For him, actant is the smallest narrative unit. Related to the narrative syntax unit, actant is a syntax element that has certain functions. The function is a story-based unit that tells logic and meaningful action which creates narration. In other words, scheme actant still emphasizes the plot as the most important energy which moves the story and thus becomes narration, with the most important episodes being the introduction, complication, and resolution. (Jabrohim, 1996:13)

Narrative structure pays attention more to function and its relation. According to Luxemburg, et al. (in Ratna, 2010: 139), between three binary oppositions, the most important is subject-object, the relation between a fighter with his purpose. Generally, a fighter (subject) consists of various wills that must be gained, like freedom, justice, wealth, etc. A struggle generally is blocked by the authority (sender), but if it is successful thus the fighter (receiver) gets a reward.

Therefore, Greimas emphasizes more on action than doer. There is no subject behind discourse, there is only a subject, pseudo-human formed by action, which is called actants and acteurs. According to Rimmon-Kenan (in Ratna, 2010:140) both actants and acteurs can be an action, but it is not always human, it can be non-human. Different from actants which have limited function in narrative structural, which is differentiated into three binary oppositions, actants is a general category. Greimas' ability to explain structure actants causing his theory of narrative structure is not only useful in analyzing literature text but also philosophy, religion, and other social sciences.

C. Reader Response Approach

The approach of reader-oriented blooms in the 1960s as a reaction to the domination of the approach of text-oriented, like new criticism. This reader-oriented approach is called

reception theory, reader response, or aesthetic response. In use, those three terms are almost synonymous. (Klarer, 2004: 92).

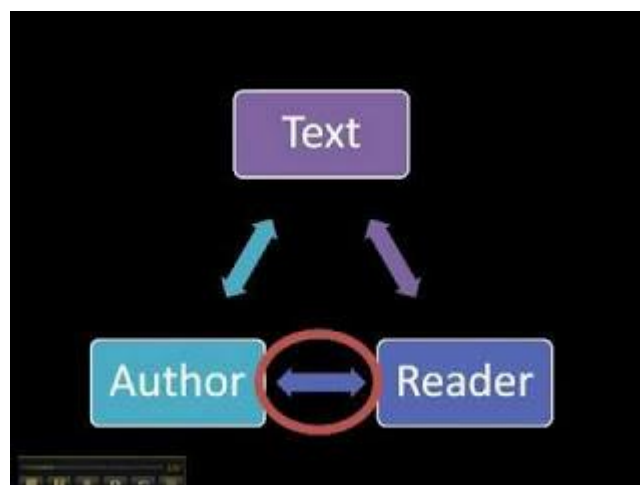


Figure 1

But, Adi (2011: 174-184) differentiates the terms of reader response approach with reception approach. The reader response approach emphasizes the forming of aesthetics in a text, while the reception approach more focus on the effect that appears, whether the reader becomes happy or not, and the background reader's judgment. In other words, reception is the reader's judgment.

The nature of the reader response approach and reception both refers to the reader's involvement in building meaning for a text. The reader response approach has a broader scope than the reception approach because it does not only talk about reader reception but also about reader interpretation.

This approach can be juxtaposed with other approaches, like psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, etc. For example, in a psychoanalysis study, we conduct research about psychological motives on various interpretations of literature text, thus it includes one of many forms of reader response critics (Tyson, 2006: 169).

One of many scholars in reader response is Hans Robert Jauss. The response of a reader will be different from other readers. Hans-Robert Jauss called that difference a horizon of expectation. Pradopo (2007: 208) states that the horizon of expectation is the reader's expectations before reading a work of art. The horizon of expectation of a person is determined by the level of education, experience, knowledge, and ability to respond to a work of art. The horizon of expectation is determined by the general norms which are in the text; knowledge and experience in the text which is read before; and the contradiction between fiction and reality.

D. Theory of Comparative Literature

The term comparative literature first appears in England and is pioneered by French scholars such as Fernand Baldensperger, Jean-Marie Carre', Paul van Tieghem, and Marius-Francois Guyard. In comparative literature, they are known as the pioneers of the French school or old school (Hutomo, 1993: 1). In the next development, comparative literature also spreads

in America, developing the concepts of comparative literature of French school, thus comparative literature of American school is known as a new school (Hutomo, 1993: 1).

French school as old school assumes that comparative literature is comparing literature systematically from two different countries (Hutomo, 1993: 1). While the American school view is broader. American schools do not only compare two literature from two different countries but they also compare literature with other sciences or arts (Hutomo, 1993: 3). It is not approved by French schools. But in practice, the French school also applies the concept of the American school. (Hutomo, 1993: 4).

Talking about comparative literature, we cannot be apart from national literature, general literature, and world literature. Those three terms are often overlapping. As Wellek and Warren (1989: 47) said that comparative study academically is not a success although it is an important study. To overcome this problem, we need to identify the meaning of comparative literature, national literature, general literature, and world literature. In this case, some scholars have tried to give meaning to these terms. Although it is still blurry it helps in solving the problem.

Renne Wallek as a supporter of American schools states that comparative literature initially appears in the oral literature study, especially in folklore. Then this folklore is identified about its origin, its spreading area, and its transformation into written literature. (1989: 47-48). Suripan Sadi Hutomo (1993: 5) said that comparative literature is based on the national literature of a certain country. Budi Darma (2004: 28) argues that national literature is the literature of a certain nation or country, such as Brunei Darussalam literature, Indonesian literature, English literature, etc. National literature is literature that is written in the national language and has a universal theme (Zaidan et.al, 2007: 182). National literature is literature that generally belongs to a certain nation. Here national means the political border of a certain nation (Endraswara, 2008: 134). In conclusion, the meaning of national literature is based on geographical situation.

In the dictionary of literary terms, world literature is literature that belongs to many nations in the world and because of its mutual idea crossing, it enriches human life (Sudjiman, 1986: 68). Hutomo (1993: 6) states that world literature is national literature which is allowed to place itself in the environment of world literature with certain function and criteria, and parallel with national literature of other nations in the world. The term world literature is closely related to the term Weltliterature which is proposed by German scholar Goethe. Goethe's concept refers to World Masterpieces or canon literature of the world and not to ordinary literature. (Hutomo, 1993: 6).

METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive qualitative research where researchers conduct research by describing phenomena that occur in the field. This research was carried out in the academic year 2022-2023 at the Department of Mathematics Education, Faculty of Mathematics, Science and Information Technology Education. The research subjects were 30 students of the third semester. Data collection methods use observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Observations were carried out in class during learning to find out the process of learning English using folklore learning media. Interviews were conducted with lecturers regarding the effectiveness of using folklore as a learning medium in English courses. Questionnaires were given to students regarding their understanding of the learning material provided by the English course lecturer.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

1. *Malin Kundang*

The story is about a boy who lives with his mother in a village. They are poor. The boy asks permission from his mother to go to the city to find a job. The mother permits him. After he becomes wealthy, he returns to his village with his wife. The mother wants to meet him but he denies her because she is poor. If we analyze using Greimas' actant, the story will be like this:

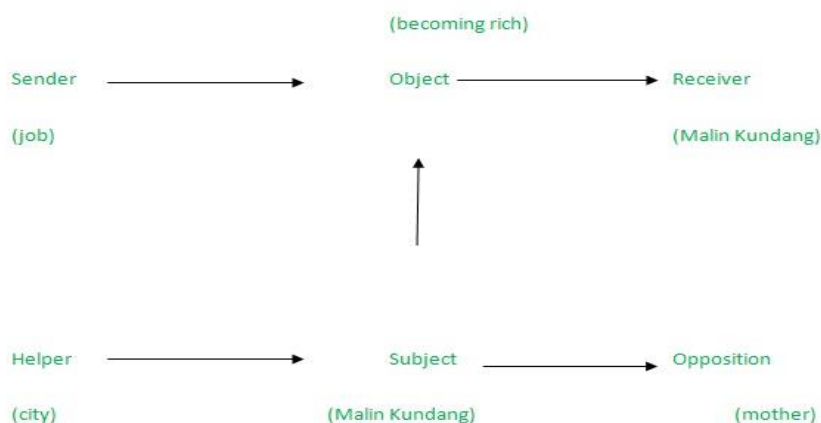


Figure 2

From the scheme, we understand that Malin Kundang (subject) wants to be a rich man (object). To achieve his goal, he goes to the city (helper) where he can find a job (sender). Becoming rich is his dream (receiver). When he returns to the village as a rich man, he denies his mother (opposition) because he is ashamed of her.

From the focus group discussion, the students decided that the good character is the mother because she is a patient woman and loves her son very much. The bad character is Malin Kundang because he is arrogant and rebellious and denies her mother.

The students argue that the story wants to teach some moral values to the reader, they are do not forget where you come from; do not be insubordinate, rebellious, and arrogant regardless you are a rich person; honor and respect your mother.

2. *Timun Emas*

The story tells us about a couple of farmers who do not have a child. They pray to Buto Ijo to give them a child. Buto Ijo gives them a child on one condition, Buto Ijo will eat the child when she is a teenager. They name her Timun Emas. When she is an adult, Buto Ijo comes to collect her. The farmers ask Timun Emas to run away with some pieces of luggage. She accommodates those pieces of luggage to become weapons to conquer Buto Ijo. If we analyze using Greimas' actant, the story will be like this:

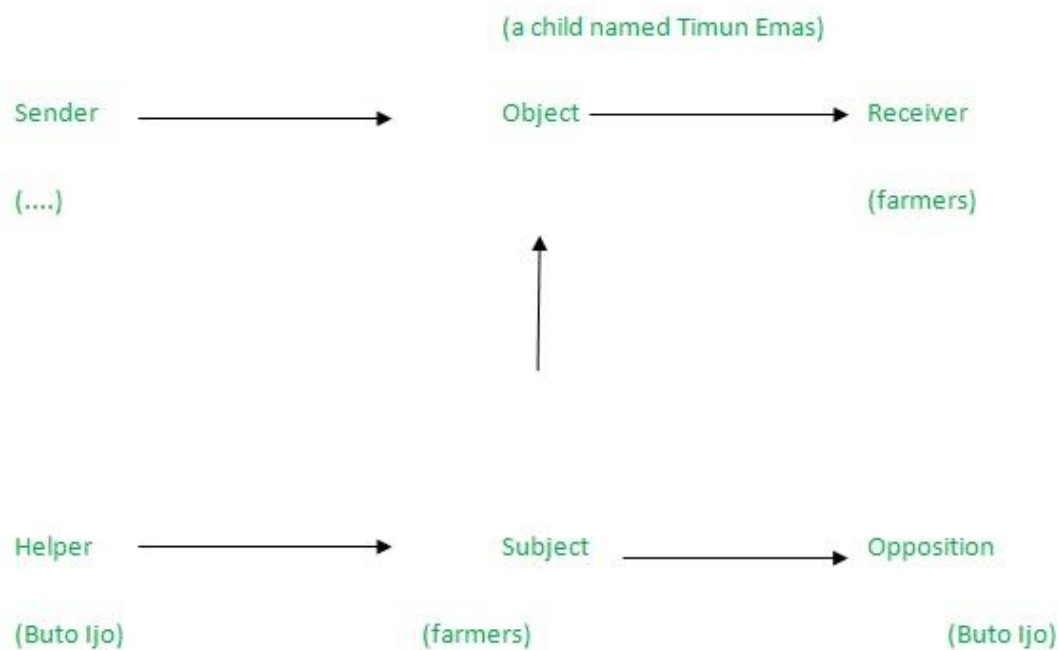


Figure 3

From the scheme, we can see that the farmers (subject) want to have a child (object). Buto Ijo (helper) helps them to have a child named Timun Emas. After Timun Emas is an adult, Buto Ijo (opposition) comes to collect her. To save Timun Emas, the farmer (receiver) asks her to run away with some pieces of luggage.

From the focus group discussion, the students state that the good character is Timun Emas because she is smart, diligent, and obedient. While there is a disagreement among the students to decide which one is the bad character. 87% of the students decide that the bad character is Buto Ijo because he is ferocious. While 14% of the students decide that the bad characters are farmers because they do not keep their promise to Buto Ijo.

The students also state that the story teaches the reader some moral values, they are: pray to the Lord and no other; believe in miracles, do not believe in magic; do not give up easily; be patient and be strong facing the problem; keep your promise; resolve your problem; be thankful to the Lord; do not threaten others; do not lie; do not use others' kindness for your own sake.

3. A Loyal Farmer

The story tells us about a loyal farmer named I Tunding who works for a rich man called Jero Pasek. At first Jero Pasek does not trust I Tunding but I Tunding works very hard to prove himself. At last I Tunding earn Jero Pasek's trust. One day there is a thief who steals the harvests and cattle. Jero Pasek is very angry. I Tunding prays at the temple. God changes him into a big black snake thus he can watch over the harvests and the cattle. If we analyze using Greimas' actant, the story will be like this:

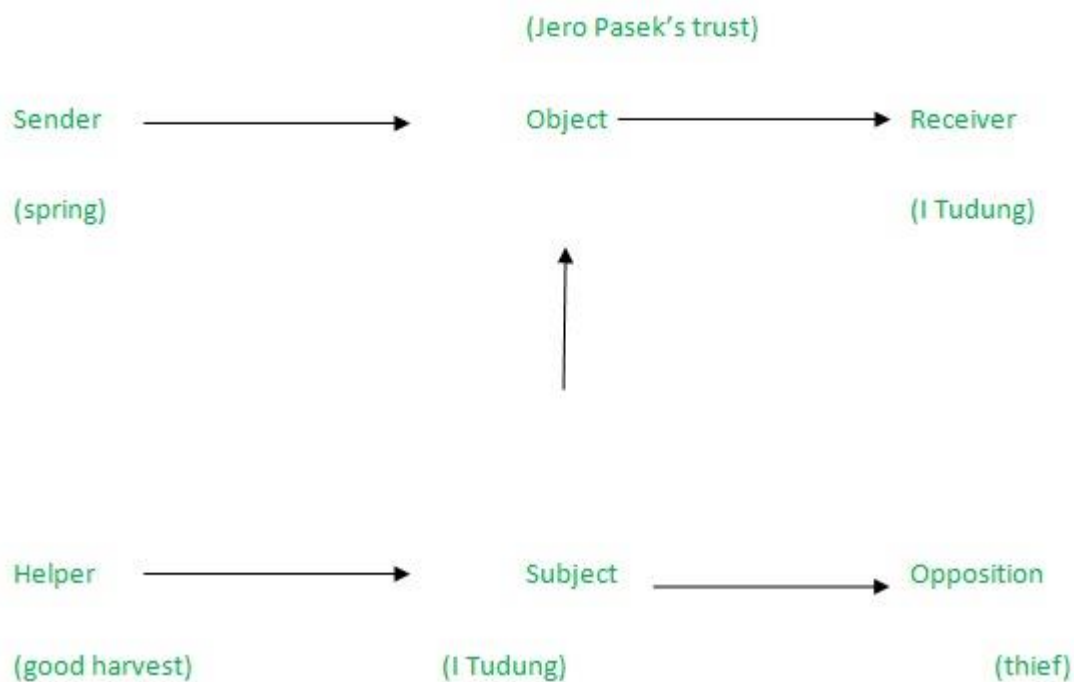


Figure 4

From the scheme, we can see that I Tudung (subject) works for Jero Pasek. I Tudung works very hard to earn Jero Pasek's trust (object). I Tudung works very hard in the field thus he gets a good harvest (helper). This makes I Tudung (receiver) earn Jero Pasek's trust. Jero Pasek gives him a new task in an arid land. He finds a spring (sender) to water the land thus he can produce a good harvest. But a thief (opposition) comes and steals the harvests and the cattle.

From the focus group discussion, the students decided that there were two good characters. 86% of the students say that the good character is I Tudung because he is a diligent, patient person who works hard, is willing to sacrifice, and never gives up. 14% of the students say that the good character is Jero Pasek because he gives a job to I Tudung. The students also have different opinions about the bad characters. 72% of the students say that the bad character is Jero Pasek because he is egoist, crafty, self-centered, and thinks only of himself. 28% of the students say that the bad character is the thief because he steals others' stuff.

The students argue that some moral values taught by the stories are being responsible, honest, loyal, diligent, and patient; believing in God; trusting others, not accusing others without any evidence; appreciating others; do not being reckless.

B. DISCUSSION

From the three stories analyzed above we can see the similarities and the differences. The similarities lay in the mystical part. The first story says that a man can be cursed into a stone, while the second story tells that a monster can give you a child, and the third story describes that a man can transform into a big black snake.

The differences lay in the teaching part. The first story teaches us about how to become a grateful son to our parents. It teaches what features we have to obtain to be a grateful

son. It also teaches what features are considered inappropriate as a grateful son. The second story teaches us about how to become a trusted person. It mentions implicitly what are the characteristics we need to have to be a trusted person. It also mentions the opposite characteristics considered inappropriate for a trusted person. The third story teaches us about how to be a hard worker and a loyal subordinate. It describes the qualities of becoming a hard worker and a loyal subordinate. Having known that it also implicitly describes the qualities that should not be owned by a hard worker and a loyal subordinate.

CONCLUSION

By using focus group discussion, the class can successfully analyze three folklore from Indonesia. Analyzing these folklore, the students find that these are the media to teach moral values from the older generation to the younger one as folklore started as oral literature.

As a medium for teaching moral values, this folklore should contain good stuff only. However, from the analysis, we found that there are some inappropriate teachings in the stories. For example, the second story 'Timun Emas' mentions the main characters (the farmers) conduct some inappropriate behavior to save their daughter. They do not keep their promise to Buto Ijo. Although Buto Ijo is a bad character, we cannot teach our children not to keep their promises.

But overall, these folklores bring us some local wisdom that we need to keep to preserve our culture. Explicitly these folklores mention what is good and what is bad. From those teachings, implicitly we give our younger generation the role model who has good qualities.

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