SEMIOTICS AND ITS ROLES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with semiotics and its roles in teaching English as a foreign language and their sample applications in the language classroom. The foundation for semiotics must be laid with perception. The objects of perception are percepts. Percepts are not the material objects in the physical realm that the mind imagines (rightly or wrongly) that it is sensing. Visual percepts are patterns of area (shape, size, and position) and color over a two-dimensional field. Audial percepts are patterns of pitch and volume over time. The verbal and the non-verbal aspects of language teaching should not be kept separate since they are closely interrelated and interdependent. The use of signs, symbols and visual aids by the teachers help the enhancement of the learning capacity of the language learner both at cognitive and meta-cognitive levels as they listen and try to learn a foreign language component in the classroom.

Key Words : *Semiotics, language teaching methods, cognitive, meta-cognitive, context, sign, symbol*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching of English has long been a difficult task for both EFL students and teachers in Indonesia due to reasons such as lack of resources and little contact with the target language. The present study intends to highlight the extent of Indonesian undergraduate students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language and the differences in instrumental and integrative motivation.

Considering the growth of international relations of Indonesian with other nations and the extended interest towards today's growing technology and science throughout the world, learning English language as an international language has found a greater importance compared to previous years. Increase in the numbers of language institutes and their students, also increasing interest of parents for their children to learn English can be a good evidence for recent value of English language in Indonesian. In this country English is taught at guidance schools, high schools and universities. Due to limitations in state schools, private language institutes have simply attracted an increasing number of interested learners including young children and adults. Many parents send their children from the age of six to learn English in these teaching centers.

SEMIOTICS

Semiotics, or semiology, is the study of signs, symbols, and signification. It is the study of how meaning is created, not what it is. Discussing about semiotics, it cannot be separated with the important keywords and their explations as mentioned below.

Some brief definitions of semiotic terms, beginning with the smallest unit of meaning and proceeding towards the larger and more complex: (1) Signifier - any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, an image. (2) Signified - the concept that a signifier refers to. Together, the signifier and signified make up the (3) Sign - the smallest unit of meaning. Anything that can be used to communicate (or to tell a lie). (4) Symbolic (arbitrary) signs - signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific, e.g., most words. (5) Iconic signs - signs where the signifier resembles the signified, e.g., a picture. (6) Indexical Signs - signs where the signifier is caused by the signified, e.g., smoke signifies fire. (7) Denotation - the most basic or literal meaning of a sign, e.g., the word "rose" signifies a particular kind of flower. (8) Connotation - the secondary, cultural meanings of signs; or "signifying signs," signs that are used as signifiers for a secondary meaning, e.g., the word "rose" signifies passion. (9) Metonymy - a kind of connotation where in one sign is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of Jakarta for the Indonesian government or of the arrow for a certain tribe power. (10) Synecdoche - a kind of connotation in which a part is used for the whole (as hand for sailor). (11) Collections of related connotations can be bound together either by (11a) Paradigmatic relations - where signs get meaning from their association with other signs, or by (11b) Syntagmatic relations - where signs get meaning from their sequential order, e.g., grammar or the sequence of events that make up a story. (12) Myths - a combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up an of-told story with elaborate cultural associations, e.g., the cowboy myth, the romance myth. (13) Codes: a combination of semiotic systems, a supersystem, that function as general maps of meaning, belief systems about oneself and others, which imply views and attitudes about how the world is and/or ought to be. Codes are where semiotics and social structure and values connect. (14) Ideologies - codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power. Ideology works largely by creating forms of "common sense," of the taken-for-granted in everyday life.

The semiotic nature of language teaching is a complicated and an essential concept to study. In the language classroom, the primary role of the language learner is to transfer and exchange correct information with his/her audience. While doing this, the language learner makes use of the semiotic signs. Most of these signs are used unconsciously by the students and the teachers. Since semiotics is the combination of signs and symbols to communicate the information, the students and the teachers make use of a number of signs, some of which are iconic and some are symbolic. Thus, it can be said that, semiotics is a fundamental issue to be considered in language teaching pedagogy, because it helps the individual to develop his cognitive facilities at all levels of perception. Moreover, semiotics not only offers different models of teaching but also broadens the scope of language teaching by offering tools to consider for visual communication in a given context. To illustrate, non-verbal and visual communication, cultural elements in semiotics and for vocabulary teaching, signs and symbols are used actively in the language classrooms. The language teachers should study many semiotic

signs in the teaching process. To illustrate, while teaching a language, the teacher refers to his/her linguistic knowledge. (Hodge and Kress, 1988:24) mention that "Linguistics then works in the borderland where the elements of sound and thought combine; their combination produces a form, not a substance." In the lines above, they also state that linguistics, which is the study of language, has a careful role to perform in humanities related sciences. According to them, linguistics works at the borderland, because linguistics should provide every background and philosophical information to language teachers and learners to help them overcome their problems in learning a foreign language. One of the contributions of linguistics to language teaching is in the field semiotics. According to Jacobson, (1974:32) the role of semiotics in linguistics is to provide "the communication of any messages whatever" or "the exchange of any messages whatever and the system of signs which underlie them." (Sebeok, 1985:I) In this case, Jacobson and Sebeok's concerns include considerations of how messages are successively generated, encoded, transmitted and decoded in certain contexts. About the importance of semiotics in language, French Semiolog (He used the term semiology instead of semiotics) Ferdinand de Saussure (1983:15-6) states that, "A language . . . is a social institution. But it is in various respects distinct from political, judicial and other institutions. Is special nature emerges when we bring into consideration a different order of facts . . . A language is a system of signs expressing ideas, and hence comparable to writing, the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, symbolic rites, forms and politeness, military signals, and so on. It is simply the most important of such systems. . . . It is therefore possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as a part of social life. It would form part of a social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology. (from the Greek semeion 'sign.'" In the lines above, Saussure puts forward the importance and the necessity of the existing semiotic signs and symbols in the language system. Thus, in language teaching, the teachers should make use of these semiotic signs (both iconic and symbolic) in the language teaching process to provide a better understanding in the target language, to gain acceleration and perhaps the most important, to avoid cross-cultural failure in the classroom while teaching a foreign language. As Hodge and Kress (1988:26) claim, "Students of cross cultural communication know how often misunderstanding arises because of different assumptions in different cultural groups. Undoubtedly, it creates heavy demands to extend semiotics in this way, to include the description and analysis of the stock of cultural knowledge in a given society." Therefore, it can be said that semiotics not only helps learners to get the right message through semiotic signs to avoid cross-cultural failure, but also encourages the language teachers to play a critical role in the classroom. Semiotics is a very influential and essential field of study, because by making use of signs the learners are able to achieve a lot of information on various fields such as; literature, art, architecture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc. In other words, communication is the primary concern of semiotics. In the language classroom, the teachers make use of semiotics symbols to lead to a better understanding of the topic. By doing so, the learners find the opportunity to study the topics of a given course in a more informative and enjoyable way. In order to provide accurate and clear comprehension in the target language, the teachers use a number of methods and techniques in the classroom. Most of these language teaching methods have semiotic elements in their nature. By making use of these semiotic elements the students are provided the opportunity to better understand the lesson.

SEMIOTICS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

There can be no doubt that language teaching methods provide the language teacher the opportunity to cope with four skills more easily. People have approached language learning in many ways over the years. The self-directed language learner or the language teacher have always asked the same question: "What approach should be used?" However, the hot debates of the last fifty years showed that there is no ideal language teaching method which would meet all the needs of the language learner. Thus, in order to be successful in target language teaching, the teachers have to make some critical decisions about the course material, activities, content, etc, but these may not be enough.

There are semiotic signs which are actively used by the students and the teachers. Semiotic signs in language teaching help learners in a many respects. They not only present visual feedback for the students but also accelerates the learning process as well. Most of the language learning methods have semiotic elements. These elements are presented through activities in many methods especially in direct method, audiolingual method and in communicative method.

Situational language teaching is a term not commonly used today, but it is an approach developed by British applied linguists in the 1930s to the 1960s, which had an impact on language courses which survive in some still being used today. The theory of learning underlying the situational language teaching is behaviourism. It gives more importance to the process rather than the conditions of learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (1990:37) "Situational language teaching employs a situational approach to presenting new sentence patterns and a drill based manner of practising them." For Richards and Rodgers, the situation refers to the manner of presenting and practising the information (the structure of language) in the language classroom. "The situation will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material. . . . in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learner's mind of the meaning of what he hears. . . almost all of the vocabulary and structures taught in the first four or five years and even later can be placed in situations in which the meaning is quite clear" (Pittman, 1964:155-6).

Pittman (1964:155-6) used the term situation to refer to objects, pictures, and realia, together with gestures to demonstrate the meanings of new language items. These objects and pictures are always used as semiotic signs to provide a better understanding in the target language. The situational language teaching includes the following principles in general. (1) Language learning is a habit formation, (2) Students should avoid making mistakes. Teacher's immediate guidance is needed if they make mistakes. (3) Language skills are better and more effectively learned if they are presented orally first, then in written mode. (4) Analogy is better than analysis, (5) The meanings of the words can be learned more easily in a linguistic and cultural context. (6) Accuracy in pronunciation and grammar is always appreciated, (7) Students' ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations is always welcome, (8) Students and teachers should have the auto-control over the structure of language use. (9) A situational presentation of new sentence patterns is a must. (10) Procedures move from controlled to freer practice of structures, and (11) Procedures move from oral use of sentence patterns to their automatic use in speech, reading and writing.

For example, take one Semiotic Sign from any source, the students first of all observe the sign and name it, then learn the correct pronunciation of the vocabulary. With the teacher's immediate guidance the students are encouraged to talk about it.

Another mothod that can be applied related to semiotics is the Audio-Lingual (A-LM)/ Audio-Visual Method. It has a goal very different from that of the Grammar-Translation Method. It was developed in the United States during the Second World War. At that time there was a need for people to learn foreign languages rapidly for

military purposes. We can trace the Audio-Lingual Method rather directly to the "scientific" linguistics of Leonard Bloomfield and his followers. Both behaviouristic psychology and structural linguistics constituted a reaction against a vague and unscientific approach to the questions of human behaviour, including the acquisition of knowledge. Every language, as it is viewed here, has its own unique system. This system is comprised of several different levels: phonological, lexical, and syntactical. Each level has its own distinctive features.

Everyday speech is emphasised in the Audio-Lingual Method. The level of complexity of the speech is graded so that beginning students are presented with only simple forms. The structures of the language are emphasised over all other areas. The syllabus is typically a structural one, with the structure for any particular unit included in the new dialogue. Vocabulary is also contextualised within the dialogue. It is, however, limited since the emphasis is placed on the acquisition of the patterns of the language. The underlying provisions of this method include five maxims to guide teachers in applying the results of linguistic research to the preparation of teaching materials and to classroom techniques:

1. Language is speech, not writing : (a) Emphasis on correct pronunciation from the beginning; (b) Listening and speaking before reading and writing; (c) Realistic, situational utterances from start; (d) Oral mastery first; reading/writing as reinforcers; time lag will depend on situation.
2. Language is a set of habits: Based on the assumption that language learning is a habit formation process, pattern drilling and dialogue memorisation are extensively used.
3. Teach the language, not about the language: (a) Revolt against the grammar-translation method; (b) Grammar for the teacher not the learner; (c) Learn thorough doing, through active practice; (d) Practice first, rules induced later.
4. A language is what its native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say: (a) Emphasis on colloquial wealth of language; (b) Literary language at much later stage; (c) Traditional grammar mistrusted: style and register (occupational, emotive, informative) studied as well as language of attitude.
5. Languages are different: (a) Universal rules of transformational grammar mistrusted; (b) Contrastive studies of language encouraged; (c) Translation accepted when necessary or possible; (d) Translation a later skill with its own techniques.

A-LM enables the students to use the target language communicatively. In order to do this the students are believed to overlearn the target language, to learn to use it automatically without stopping to think. The students achieve this by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming the old habits of their native language.

Communicative Method can also be mixed with semiotics. This was partly in response to Chomsky's criticisms of structural theories of language and partly based on the theories of British functional linguists, such as Firth and Halliday, as well as American sociolinguists, such as Hymes, Gumperz and Labov and the writings of Austin and Searle on speech acts. Communicative language teaching is based on the following principles: (1) □The functional approach (the functional-notional syllabus) is behind the communicative approach. (2) □Activities should involve real communication to promote learning. (3) □Activities should not be imaginary but should be based on realistic motives. (4) □The meaningful use and production of language promotes the language learning process. (5) □Students use language as a means of expressing values and their concerns. (6) □Students are demonstrated with the functions of language that best meet their own communicative needs. (7) □The communicative language teaching makes use of any activity which would help the

learners to get engaged in authentic (real) communication. (8) □The communicative language teaching aims to develop certain language skills and functions by using the target language and communicative activities. (9) □Favourite activities are; social interaction activities; conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues, pair and group discussions and role plays.

In communicative language teaching, the instructional materials play an important role. "A wide variety of materials have been used to support communicative approaches to language teaching. Unlike some contemporary methodologies such as Community Language Teaching view materials as a way of influencing the quality of classroom interaction and language use. Materials thus have a primary role of promoting communicative language use." (Richards and Rodgers, 1990:79). The materials in communicative language teaching can be studied in three groups. They are text-based, task-based and realia. In the text based materials, depending on the context of study, to start the conversation, dialogues, drills, sentence patterns, visual cues, taped cues, and pictures are used actively. In the task-based activities, a variety of interactional patterns like, pair work, group work, games, role plays. In this respect, the cue-cards, pictures and the activity cards are actively used as the semiotic elements of the course. In terms of realia, as is clear, the communicative language teaching requires the use of authentic and from life materials in the classroom. These materials can be in the form of; language-based realia, such as signs, magazines, advertisements and their symbols, graphics and statistics. (i.e. maps, pictures, charts, symbols)

For example, take a picture that is full of semiotic symbols such as, *kg.*, *$* or *Rp..*, the pictures of fruit and the shopping woman. By making use of semiotic signs and symbols, the students compare and contrast the things in the pictures. The semiotic symbols in the picture can be *kilogram, U.S $ 100*, the kinds of fruits, etc. The students make new dialogues for the items presented in the picture. Now, they use their own local items. At the end, a pair work activity follows the procedure. Roleplay is another interactional activity which can be used to serve to meet the communicative needs o the foreign language learners.

The Direct method can also be applied with semiotics. The target language was used as the medium of teaching in very small classes. Lessons were made up of carefully-graded exercises consisting of question and answer responses. The basic idea behind Direct Method was that language learning should be made to be as similar as possible to first language learning with an emphasis on oral interaction where possible and no translation between the L1 and L2. The method's over-simplification of the similarities between first and second language and the difficulties in its adoption to large classrooms are frequently cited criticisms.

In direct method the guidance and the instruction of the foreign teacher plays an important role. Its main features are: (1) Classroom instruction should be conducted in the target language only, (2) □The learner should be actively involved in using the language in realistic everyday situations, (3) □Students are encouraged to think and act in the target language. (The oral communication should be carefully designed by the native speakers of the target language in terms of question-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small and organised classes," (4) □Priority is given to teaching speaking, then reading and writing has to be considered, (5) □Vocabulary is taught through demonstration by making use of objects, and pictures' and (6) □Correct pronunciation and grammar is emphasised in the direct method.

The role and the prominence of the use of semiotic signs and symbols are seen in teaching the vocabulary to learners in Direct Method. The native speaker (since he does not know the learners' mother tongue) has to use objects and pictures, even some

symbols and body language to teach the correct meaning of concrete and abstract vocabulary. Also the students practice and role-play the activities in the course of a conversation, and several semiotic symbols like; body language and context specific visual material are also exercised.

The sample classroom applications for the Direct Method can be any semiotic signs and symbols found in any sources.By making use of the chosen semiotic symbols, the students speak in English to discuss the different aspects about them. The students with the teacher's guidance pay attention to communicate in foreign language only. Native speakers of target language is preferred for the direct method. However, the native speakers of the target language, themselves, also become the symbols of the direct method.

Besides the other language teaching methods as described above, there are others where semiotic symbols are actively used in lessons and activities. These methods are (1) the silent way, (2) suggestopedia and (3) the total physical response (TPR) method. The theoretical basis of Gattegno's *Silent Way* is the idea that teaching must be subordinated to learning and students should develop their own inner criteria for correctness. For example, one student might tell another to take a rod and put it under, inside or behind a box. As the student attempts to give these instructions, the teacher's job is to provide feedback on his or her pronunciation and grammar, and also to supply expressions the student doesn't know or can't guess. All four skills - reading, writing, speaking, and listening - are taught from the beginning. Students' errors are expected as a normal part of learning, the teacher's silence helps foster self-reliance and student initiative. The teacher is active in setting up situations, while the students do most of the talking and interacting. While setting up situations and the activities for the language learners the teacher uses a lot of thought provoking symbols. To illustrate, the teacher may show a number of traffic signs and may ask students to write or talk about the suggested behaviour of a driver on the roads taking into consideration the traffic signs. Here by providing minimum input to the students the learners are encouraged to practise and participate more the classroom activities.

Suggestopedia Lozanov's method seeks to help learners eliminate psychological barriers to learning. The learning environment is relaxed and subdued, with low lighting and soft music in the background. Students choose a name and character in the target language and culture, and imagine being that person. Dialogues are presented to the accompaniment of music. Students just relax and listen to them being read and later playfully practice the language during an "activation" phase. In suggestopedia, the dim lights, the posters on the walls, the background music, context specific cards, etc. themselves are used as symbols to provide motivation for the learners and better learning in the target language.

Total Physical Response Method is also called Asher's approach begins by placing primary importance on listening comprehension, emulating the early stages of mother tongue acquisition, and then moving to speaking, reading, and writing. First of all the teacher gives a command and the students demonstrate their comprehension by acting out commands issued by the teacher; teacher provides novel and often humorous variations of the commands quite quickly. In this method, the teacher directs the students other than the volunteers. Activities are designed to be fun and to allow students to assume active learning roles. Activities eventually include games and skits. In total physical response, the teacher and the students are the active participants of a dynamic course. In order to let students response physically, semiotic signs, symbols are frequently used in the activities. This method is not only used in language teaching but also in other training courses as well, such as courses for drivers, courses for pilots,

courses for sportsmen, etc. To illustrate, at a course offered for drivers, the teacher (in the car) can ask the trainee to act accordingly taken into consideration the traffic signs. Here, the signs function as physical stimuli which gives way to the driver's behaviour. In a language teaching classroom, the teacher can show students the traffic signs and can ask students to write commands about each sign. Later, the students can write a response essay as a follow-up activity about the ideal driver's responsibility in the traffic.

CONCLUSION

In language teaching, the teachers use different methods depending on the goals and objectives of the course. Taking into consideration the students' needs, a variety of materials are used for different purposes in the language classroom. Besides their linguistic and pedagogic value, most of these materials have semiotic value. These methods help the language learner to get to know more about the social and cultural cues in the target language. Such symbols also fasten the cultural acquisition of the foreign language learner. For a better understanding in the target language, students and teachers should not only undergo training in language, but also a socialising experience.

By doing so, the students find the opportunity to develop their sociolinguistic competence which both broadens the students' education by presenting more cultural input, and exercises semiotic signs and symbols in a variety of activities. According to Hymes (1971) the sociolinguistic competence, which is concerned with the social rules of language use, is equally as important as grammatical competence-the linguistic rules of a language. "The acquisition of linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge is integral to one another." Poole (1992:593) concludes. Therefore, an ideal EFL program should seek both linguistic and sociolinguistic acquisition which complete each other and form a cultural value system. Moreover, According to Robinett (1978:113), "each word used in the EFL classroom is conditioned on the part of 'both speaker and the hearer' by each person's own particular, personal experiences and those experiences that are common to the culture of which he or she is a part." Thus, the language teaching classroom will be pervasively influenced by the target culture since "classroom discourse features encode cultural norms and beliefs." To illustrate, the pictures are used as semiotic signs and symbols to present the particular social aspects of the Western culture like; boyfriend/girlfriend, dating, double-decker buses and flags, etc. Moreover, the books, also comprise a set of symbols which tell the teacher and the students to take further action in the upcoming sessions. For example, the cassette signs indicate the time of alistening activity, a smiling face indicates the success in the activity, the tick and the cross signs refer to a true/false activity and different colours in a textbook might represent different sections of language study like; speaking, reading, listening, etc.

To sum up, the students learn the linguistic and sociological aspects of language through methods. In this respect, the language teacher should pay attention to use these semiotic symbols as a part of his/her language course. It should be borne in mind that the more the teachers activate the use of these symbolic signs and symbols through activities in methods, the better the students achieve the social and linguistic aspects of the target language and are able to melt them in the same spot.

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