CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF TIMORESE STUDENTS IN STUDYING ENGLISH IN SATYA WACANA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract
This is a study about cultural experiences encountered by Timorese English Department in Satya Wacana Christian University. The data of this study were collected through interviews with three Timorese English Department students. These students had spent between four and five years studying in English Department. The information gathered from the interviews was grouped based on the similarity of the topic. These participants’ comments were mainly divided into nine topics which were their problematic cultural experiences. The findings showed that most of them met cultural experiences mentioned in the questions of the interview. They also reported various reasons for problematic cultural experiences they encountered.

Keywords: cultural experiences, cultural differences, difficulties

INTRODUCTION
Culture and language have been inseparable in linguistics studies, especially in the field of Second/Foreign Language Acquisition. This correlation has triggered many experts to do research to find out the role and influence of culture on language learning. Some of them tried to figure out the relationship between inter-cultural contacts with students’ motivation in learning a foreign language. Take for example, Csizér and Kormos (2008) who
investigated Hungarian school children’s motivation in learning English and German in which the students learning English had the highest level of inter-cultural contact.

Some others paid attention on the correlation between cultural background and the process of language learning. A research carried out by Flores, Cousin, Teflt, and Esteban (1991) who took minority group in America such as Mexican American, African American, and Asian immigrants as the representation of the population of their study is a good example in this case. They held a study on the students of these groups who had been identified and stereotyped as English learning disabled.

Other experts devoted their study on the relationship between culture and students’ learning style in acquiring a second language. Kennedy’s (2002) research in the influence of Chinese culture on its students’ learning style is an instance of the study in this field. There are plenty other studies concerning culture and language learning, particularly Second/Foreign Language Acquisition. Those examples above are small representation of the study in this area.

These studies, as it is clearly indicated, were focused on two main elements: culture and language learning. They are also the research area of this study. Since these two big concepts are important in this study, it is obviously necessary to give further explanation about them.

As an integrated part of civilization, culture dominates the whole life of human beings in any society. But what is meant by culture? Each discipline which discusses culture has its own definition, and therefore the meaning of culture has been various. Culture, in turn, has no exact or definite meaning, although there are a lot of acceptable meanings among experts. The sense of the word “culture” in the first sentence of this paragraph, for example, is not clear enough because it is not bound to a certain context. William noted that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in English language” (as cited in Nakayama and Martin, 2007, p.81). Along with William, Samovar and Porter (2004) stated that the term culture is really complicated and is not easy to define (p. 32).
Considering the complexity of this concept, Nakayama and Martin (2007) provide the definition of culture in three different perspectives: social science in which culture is considered the form of conception, interpretative which culture is seen as symbolic meanings and critical perspective where they stated that culture is multidimensional and dynamic. The core of these perspectives is that culture is learned and shared (p. 84).

William (1994), on the other hand, pointed out three categories in the definition of culture. He called the first category as ideal. Culture is defined as a notion to human perfection concerning universal values according to this category. The second category or classification is documentary. He gave the meaning of culture in this category as the organization of human’s intellectual and imaginative work. He mentioned social category as the third classification in which he described culture as an expression of way of life with certain values and meaning (William, in Storey, 1994, p. 56).

Although it has various definitions, culture has some common characteristics. Experts figure out at least five features which usually appear in discussions about culture.

The first and the most significant characteristic for many experts is culture is learned. Throughout their whole lives, man look for the meaning of their world. The meaning they give to their experiences around their world is learned and based on culture. The whole process of learning their culture is called enculturation (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 21). In addition, Hofstede (1997) emphasized that culture is not inherited, but it is learned. It comes from a social setting (p. 5).

The second characteristic of culture is that it is shared. Nanda and Warms (2007) explained that members of a culture share the idea of values and norms. Norms related to how things should be done, while values contain the idea of what is true, right, and beautiful and lead the culture members to react to the physical and social environment (pp. 99-100). Culture, with its norms and values does not belong to certain members of a single society or a specific generation of a culture, but it is shared.

The third feature of culture is it is based on the symbol. Cultural symbols take many patterns, including dresses, flags,
religious icon and gestures. However, the most significant symbol of culture is language because people use words to represent objects and ideas in their culture (Samovar et al., 2007, p. 28).

Culture is dynamic. It is the fourth characteristic of culture. Culture is continuously changing, although with different speed from one culture to another. Modern cultures usually change more rapidly than the traditional ones. Cultural change can be caused by internal dynamic of a society or external influences. Conflict, persecution, consensus, and solidarity are issues that go along with cultural change (Nanda and Warms, 2007, p. 106).

Experts point out culture is an integrated system as the fifth feature. A culture contains combination of various parts that are connected one to another. When people deal with an aspect of the culture, it means they are tied to the whole culture (Samovar et al., 2007, p. 30). Nanda and Warms (2007), point out that composition of many parts that affect each other makes culture an integrated system. However, it is not necessary to cooperate smoothly among those parts (p. 99).

It has been stated in the third characteristic above that language is the most significant symbol of culture. It is used to verbalize the phenomenon within a culture and the thought of its members (Samovar et al., 2007, p. 28). Language is even useful in revealing the meaning behind other symbols. These statements imply that learning a language means study to know and be familiar with the culture of that language’s speakers (Brown, 2004, p. 193). Therefore, language learning, to some extent, can be defined as a study of culture.

With a bigger stress upon Second Language Acquisition, Brown (1994), noted that SLA, among other things not totally unlike first language acquisition, is a subset of human learning, involves cognitive variations, is closely related to one’s personhood, is interwoven with second culture learning; involve interference, the creation of new linguistic system, and the learning of discourse and communicative function of languages (p. 275).

As mentioned by Brown (1994) above, language learning involves interference. Language learners usually get confused when meeting complicated patterns of newly acquired language.
This confusion does not occur only because of the contradiction between the structure of the target language and learners’ mother tongues (Scovel, 2001, p. 21). It also takes place due to the contact with the new environment of new language. Language learners need to go through this challenge in order to acquire their second language. Language acquisition then can be referred to some sort of change happens in the organism as a result of its interaction with the environment. The change can reach high or low level of permanency (Kevin R. Gregg in Gass and Schachter, 1990, p.16).

There are some factors that affect students in their learning process to acquire a second language. Those factors are students learning expectations, students’ current circumstance, and students’ personalities. They expect to meet similar situation in their new second language classroom which in turns will affect their behavior and performance in language learning significantly (Senior, 2006, p. 105). They will take maximum advantage to access intensive language classes provided for them. In addition, Senior (2006) emphasized that “different personalities of students can lead them to acquire the target language or to some sort of culture shock” (pp. 111-112). The factors above, mainly the second one, reveals the importance of the role of culture in language learning. Different circumstances which means different culture in some extent, obviously affects the process of second language acquisition.

Concerning the significance of culture in language learning, Brown (2004) stressed that culture as an “ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception” becomes extremely important in second language learning (p. 189). Culture is deeply rooted in our existence, but we use language to express it: In Brown’s (2004) words “language is the most visible and available expression of that culture”. Therefore, interaction with other culture which has different language can create conflict because of the disruption of their identities. This disruption may lead them to culture shock (p. 94).

In multicultural contexts, especially schools, intercultural and interpersonal pressures are never a problem in many language classes. Students in these classes can get along with each other and enjoy the language learning process. To the contrary, students in some other language classes see their cultural difference as an issue (Senior, 2006, p. 113).
The English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University is an institution which runs language learning program in multicultural circumstances. Learning a language is a kind of experience in which the learners also find cultural experience due to the inseparability of language and culture. Therefore, it is obvious that language learners in this faculty meet various cultural experiences since they are studying with their friends and teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

Cultural experiences, especially those encountered by students often create difficulties for them. In other words, cultural experiences can bring about problems, either academic or nonacademic in their study (Seyabi, 2008). It is assumed that Timorese students of English Department also found these problems, especially at the beginning of their study. This study is aimed at finding cultural experiences encountered by Timorese English Department students, especially when they began to study in this faculty. It focuses on Timorese students because they are small in number, but as an integrated part of this faculty they have met various obstacles to make themselves accustomed to their new environment in English Department. It is important to see how they go through these challenging experiences. Therefore, the results of this study are the answers to this research question: What cultural experiences are encountered by Timorese English Department students in studying English in Satya Wacana Christian University?

By presenting the results of this study, it is hoped that it would be helpful for the readers with necessary information about cultural experiences in this university, mainly in English Department. A theoretical understanding about the link between culture and language learning is expected to be boosted after reading this paper. Besides, further study can be conducted to find out cultural experiences of students from different cultural backgrounds. More practically, the findings of this study can be a guideline for Timorese students, particularly those who want to study at English Department of this university to adjust themselves with the new situation in this campus.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term “cultural experiences” as the center of this paper has appeared many times up to this point. However, it does not clearly refer to any certain of experience. It is because this term is very closely related to the term “culture” which has no definite meaning and almost covers everything. Cultural experiences, therefore, is difficult to be defined in an exact meaning.

Nevertheless, the sense of the term cultural experiences used in this paper is mainly associated with some experiences encountered by Timorese English Department students which are discussed in the following section. The meaning of cultural experiences in this case is in accordance with that of Seyabi (2008) described implicitly in her paper. She noted that students who took part in Experiential Learning Program (ELP) had got profound cultural experiences. What students experienced in this program was that they saw the difference in the way people from other cultures dress, the language they use, the food they eat, their religions, and their norms. Besides, she also listed other experiences such as, the enhancing of confidence level, communication and team working skills of students who participated in this program which was a multicultural program (Seyabi, 2008, p. 9).

It is apparent that Seyabi (2008) implicitly defines cultural experiences as meeting and being involved in the different ways people do and use things in new environment. The effects of this meeting and involvement are also considered cultural experiences. Therefore, what Timorese students met in the first time they joined English Department such as dissimilarity of teaching techniques, language, and food, difficulties in understanding teachers’ explanation, doing team working, and lack of confidence are referred to cultural experiences.

THE STUDY

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University. It is located in Salatiga, a small town in the province of Central Java, Indonesia. The English Department
is an institution which runs language learning program in this university. The students and teachers of this faculty come from various cultural backgrounds. The Javanese dominate the number of students in English Department, but there are students from other places such as Sulawesi, Ambon, Sumatra, Timor, Sumba, etc. This multicultural circumstance offers a great chance for the students in this faculty to encounter cultural experiences, even the challenging ones.

Participants

The participants of this study were three Timorese students who had spent more than three years studying in English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University. There were two females among them and the other was male. The age of these students were between 21 and 24 years old and had been living in Salatiga between 4 years and 5.5 years. There were two students who had been studying for 10 semesters, while the other had spent 12 semesters studying in English Department. These students used Timorese dialect in their daily lives, but they often needed to switch to Javanese dialect since they came to Salatiga. They were randomly selected among other Timorese students as the participants of this study because they had spent a great deal of time facing cultural differences in English Department.

Instruments of Data Collection

The instrument utilized to gather the data in this study was interview comprising ten major questions. Semi-structured interview was used in this study in which a list of written questions played a role as framework, while additional comments from the interviewees were allowed. The questions in the interviews were delivered after the respondents were given an overview of the reason and intention of carrying out the interview. All three interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian to keep respondents feel comfortable in answering questions. Besides, more in-depth information can be gathered in Indonesian rather than English which is not their first language.
Data Analysis

The results of the semi-structured interviews were grouped according to the similarity of topics. The division of topics is based on the questions which actually were a list of cultural experiences. The respondents’ comments related to question one through five belonged to academic cultural experience, while the answers grouped in question six through ten were non-academic cultural experiences.

Although questions in the interview seemed to be categorized in two parts, it is not intended to separate them significantly as the goal of this study is to figure out cultural experiences (whether academic or non-academic) of Timorese English Department students. The data were descriptively analyzed further to find out the reasons where the respondents implied that they found these cultural experiences problematic (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2008).

DISCUSSION

The report in this section describes cultural experiences encountered by Timorese English Department students, particularly the first time they came to the English Department of Satya Wacana Christian University. The data from the interviews are displayed and interpreted based on the cultural experiences encountered by the participants. This part focuses more deeply on discussing problematic cultural experiences.

Difficulties in following the teaching techniques

The finding related to this small topic demonstrated that the students tended to compare teaching techniques they found in their senior high school with ones they had in English Department. Basically, all of the interviewees had a similar perception that teaching techniques applied in English Department were better than those in their senior high school. However, they informed that they faced troubles in the first time engaged in the classes with new teaching techniques.

Two of the interviewees gave different examples of difficult teaching techniques in to be followed English Department. One of them took story telling technique in Speaking class as the example.
She reported that she could not participate meaningfully in this class where story telling technique was used. It could be seen from what she said,

*Awalnya itu sangat sulit, ya. Soalnya kalau di sekolah sebelumnya saya tidak dibiasakan untuk kalau story telling harus di depan, harus pakai AVA, harus berbicara di depan teman-teman lain yang otomatis dari budaya yang berbeda, dengan background knowledge yang berbeda... Sedangkan dulu kan palingan tetap di tempat duduk langsung menyampaikan pendapat. Kadang-kadang menyampaikan pendapatnya ramai-ramai, jadi tidak takut.* (In her senior high school, the interviewee did not use to do the story telling in front of class. It made her difficult to do it in front of her friends from various cultural backgrounds) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

The other interviewee picked role play technique as an example of a difficult teaching technique. She described her experience as follow:

*Kalau misalnya role play itu sendiri kan melakukan di depan teman-teman; di depan kelas istilahnya. Jadi, masih ada.. masih ada rasa gugup, rasa takut karena di pengalaman sebelumnya di kelas Bahasa Inggris belum pernah ada metode seperti itu. Jadi masih sangat baru untuk saya.* (She was nervous to perform in the role play because she had to do it in front of her friends, and the method was new for her) (Maya, April 26, 2011).

From the data above, it is clear that the respondents had almost the same reason of why they did not take part meaningfully in the class with new teaching techniques for them. Both of them implied that they were nervous to speak in front of class since they did not use to do so in their previous schools. The unfamiliarity with teaching techniques was another reason behind this difficulty.

There is no wonder that what is called by Senior (2006) as students’ current circumstances factor gives effect to these students in language learning process. The presence of classmates from various cultural backgrounds and the newness of the applied teaching techniques were new environments for them. Timorese students experienced this obstacle in the first time they joined the English Department.
Difficulties in understanding foreign teachers’ explanation

Scovel (2001) points out that new circumstances of new language also results in confusion for language learners. Listening to the foreign teachers or native speaker teachers delivering the materials in the classroom was a new experience for them. It was the first time for all of the interviewees for this study to have class with foreign teachers. They reported the foreign teachers’ pronunciation and their speaking velocity as factors that caused them confused to follow their explanation when they were teaching.

About foreign teachers’ pronunciation, one of the interviewees simply said,

Pertama sulit. Sulit beradaptasi dengan pronunciation dosen asing . . . Tapi sebenarnya ada rasa bangga karena oh, akhirnya diajar sama dosen asing, bukannya dosen lokal . . . (Initially, the participant found it difficult to follow foreign teachers’ pronunciation; however, she was proud of being taught by foreign teachers) (Maya, April 26, 2011).

Related to the foreign teachers speaking velocity, one of the respondents said,

Ada kesulitan. Kami para mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan waktu mendengarkan pelajaran yang disampaikan oleh dosen asing. Itu cara bicara mereka terlalu cepat. Sampai kita lihat satu sama lain, “Apa artinya ini?” . . . (The teachers spoke too fast that students asked each other about what was being talked about) (Ronald, April 28, 2011)

The excerpts above revealed the difficulties of Timorese English Department students in following foreign teachers’ explanation. It can be inferred from the first quotation that the interviewee was not familiar enough with foreign teachers’ pronunciation that made her confused to understand materials delivered. The act of students asking each other in the second excerpt, on the other hand, proved that the participant could not follow his foreign teachers’ explanation. The velocity of their foreign teachers speaking was the reason behind this obstacle. The foreign teachers were considered speak too fast.
Difficulties in understanding local teachers’ explanation

The students pointed the domination of Indonesian using in their English classes in their previous schools brought about troubles to grasp local teachers’ explanation. The following excerpt from one of the participants reflected this evidence.

_Waktu awal masuk susah. Susah ngikutin dosen lokal yang ngajar... apa mereka menyesuaikan dengan anak-anak yang sudah ada di Jawa, atau memang seperti itu cara mengajar mereka... Tapi yang jelas, pertama masuk tu susah mengikuti karena kalau dibandingkan dengan sekolah sebelumnya kita bahasa Inggrisnya dari 100 persen mungkin hanya dipakai 20 sampai 30 persen. Sedangkan yang di sini, itu kan full English. Nah, itu yang awalnya sangat, sangat kesulitan..._ (The respondent found it difficult to follow local teachers’ explanation because in her senior high school the teachers mostly used Indonesian in English classes. They used English only around 20 to 30 percent when they were teaching) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

Considering that their English skill was lower than their Javanese friends, these students were stressed-out to find that local teachers treated them equally to their friends. These students expected to meet identically or resemble situation they experienced in their senior high schools where Indonesian was used mostly in their classes. They also hoped that local teachers would notice their limited ability and helped them with this problem. As suggested by Senior (2006), students’ expectation is another factor that has a significant impact on language learning. These Timorese students could not understand local teachers’ explanation in their early semester because their expectations were not fulfilled.

Lacking confidence in discussion sessions

Senior (2006), notices that cultural differences in a classroom can be an issue for its students. Timorese students who were interviewed for this study faced problems in taking part actively in discussion sessions when they first enrolled classes in English Department. Being among Javanese with a perception in mind
that students from this ethnic group were superior in the classroom, these students were reluctant to express their opinion. This result was in line with Csizér and Kormos’ (2008) in which they emphasized that to which extent the classmates respect their friends knowledge of English very significantly affect how students see their own potential in language learning. These Timorese students had a very high mental picture about their Javanese friends’ English knowledge which put them into a feeling of being underestimated. The statement of one of them below was the best description of this finding:

Sebenarnya bukan rasa saya tidak mau, tapi saya malu dan takut salah. . . Dan juga itu tadi saya bilang, di awalnya saya sudah bisa melihat, mengukur apa yang saya dapat di SMA dulu dengan di sini sangat berbeda jauh. Sangat ketinggalan jauh. Jadi saya benar-benar takut untuk berpartisipasi dalam berdiskusi. (The interviewee thought that what she got when she was in senior high school was too far left behind which made her afraid to participate in discussion) (Maya, April 26, 2011).

The tendency of Javanese students to use their local language in discussion sessions was also Timorese found to affect students’ confidence. The local languages of these two ethnic groups are totally diverse, and it is expected that Indonesian or English can bridge this gap in the discussion sessions. Ironically, Javanese students preferred to use their mother tongue to discuss materials in English Department’s classes. This made these Timorese students less confident to convey what they were thinking. One of the participants expressed this difficulty as she said,

. . . Soalnya karena mayoritasnya Jawa, jadi otomatis saya bergabung satu kelompok selalu dengan anak-anak Jawa. Mereka kalau berdiskusi lebih sering menggunakan bahasa Jawa yang saya sama sekali tidak mengerti. Dan juga mereka lebih sering...lebih mendengarkan pendapat teman-teman yang menggunakan bahasa Jawa itu. . . (As the Javanese were majority number in the classroom, the interviewee was always joined with them. They often used Javanese, and she did not understand at all. Moreover, they tended to listen to their friends who also spoke Javanese) (Maya, April 26, 2011).
Difficulties in doing group work with friends from different cultural backgrounds

English Department provided its students plenty of opportunity to work in group with their friends from dissimilar cultural backgrounds. This offered students a big chance to interact deeper with their group mates from other ethnic groups. As mentioned above that the number of Javanese students dominated classes in English Department and their local language was unlike Timorese students. This fact was a problematic situation for these students.

Brown (2004) noted that the interaction with other culture which has different language may create problems. Timorese English Department students also met obstacles in the context of carrying out group work with their friends, especially Javanese. It was not surprising that the main problem they got in this case was the same as one they encountered in the discussion sessions because in these methods they completed the task in groups. All of the students interviewed complained about similar thing: the tendency of their Javanese friends to use their first language. This habit often resulted in misunderstanding for Timorese students affected and their participation in their groups. One of them described her experience as follow:

Ya...ada tugas yang harus dikerjakan dengan teman-teman dari latar budaya Jawa dan itu awalnya saya kesulitan. Karena teman-teman saya itu, ketika mereka sudah berkumpul dengan sesama mereka, mereka bukan pakai bahasa Indonesia lagi. Pakainya bahasa Jawa. Itu sangat sulit buat saya untuk mengerti apa yang mereka omong. . . (It was difficult for her to participate in group work because she did not understand what her Javanese friends were talking about in their mother tongue) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

Difficulties in making friends with students from different cultural backgrounds

The excerpt below shows the students’ of experience related to this topic.

Awalnya terpaksa. Karena memang tidak ada teman lain, hanya teman-teman dari Jawa. Dengan terpaksa saya
harus ya. . .bersama mereka, berjalan dengan mereka. 
Tapi setelah ke belakang-ke belakang sekarang itu not a problem. (At the beginning of her study in English Department, the respondent felt like being forced to make friends with ones from other cultural backgrounds, especially Javanese) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

The data above obviously shows that the large number of Javanese students in English Department put these students in a situation where the participant had to make friends with students from this ethnic group. When Timorese students first enrolled in English Department, they saw intercultural and interpersonal pressures as a problem (Senior, 2006). Actually, they wanted to make friends with those from the same hometown, but the pressure of different culture and situation dragged them to the fact that they needed to make friends with students from other cultural backgrounds, especially Javanese.

**Difficulties in understanding Javanese friends’ accent when they speak Indonesian**

The excerpt from one of the participants below showed the evidence related to this topic.

*Kalau aksennya sih tidak terlalu mengerti, soalnya teman-teman Jawa sini kan “medhok” sekali istilahnya; istilah orang Jawa. Jadi masih sangat sulit. Tapi karena mereka bicaranya tidak terlalu cepat jadi bisa dipahami.* (The interviewee could not really follow Javanese accent, but she could understand it later because Javanese usually spoke slowly) (Maya, April 26, 2011).

The data displayed proved that although it was a problematic experience, Timorese students commonly needed shorter time to make themselves accustomed to Javanese accent. In their opinion, it was much easier to follow Javanese accent than their mother tongue. Moreover, Javanese usually speak more slowly than Timorese. This helped them get familiar with this accent faster.

As it is suggested by experts, language is the most significant symbol of the culture (Samovar et. al., 2007; Brown, 2004). Accent, on the other hand, is a small feature of the language as a whole,
but plays an important role in communication. Since these Timorese students joined English Department, they heard (and later used) Javanese accent everyday. It was because most of the people around them used this accent to communicate in their daily lives.

**Difficulties in adapting Javanese friends’ habits**

This was another non-academic problematic cultural experience encountered by Timorese students in English Department besides one mentioned previously. Take for example; they used to speak fast with high tone. When they came to this faculty, they met contrast manner in the way people talked to each other. Javanese, especially, usually spoke slowly and in a lower tone than Timorese did.

It was interesting to see that these students shared the same story about their Javanese friends’ perception towards their accent. They told that their Javanese friends were very surprised as they heard these Timorese students having conversation with their other friends from the same hometown. Related to this, one of the interviewees said,

*Sangat-sangat halus. Kadang kadang saya harus menyuruh mereka mengulang lagi... kalau ngomong sama mereka, mereka selalu bilang kalau saya ngomong sama teman-teman satu daratanlah, istilahnya satu rumpun, itu mereka bilang “Kalian bertengkar ya...” Padahal kita nggak bertengkar. Cuman lagi cerita-cerita tapi dengan tone-nya kita sendiri yang sangat tinggi.* (According to the interviewee, Javanese tone was very soft. She also told that her Javanese friends thought that she was arguing with her Timorese friends when they were talking, even though they were not) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

Javanese were generally reported to respond in the similar words when they were in this setting. They thought that Timorese students were quarrelling when they were talking to each other. In Javanese ears, the way Timorese students speak was too harsh. Realizing this difference, Timorese students tried to soften their tone especially when they were talking to Javanese friends.
Getting problems with food in Salatiga

The following excerpt was one of the parts of the interview that showed this problem:

_Kalau dari makanan....awalnya saya nggak suka. Karena makanan Jawa itu beda rasanya. Kalau bentuknya sih nggak mempengaruhi. ...Karena di Timor, kita lebih cenderung makan makanan yang pedis asin. Nah, kalau di Jawa, meskipun ada rasa pedisnya, tapi ada juga rasa manisnya. Itu yang saya benet. Saya nggak suka._ (The respondent compared the Timorese and Javanese food’s taste and admitted that she did not like Javanese food which was sweet) (Diny, April 14, 2011).

This was a small problem, but frequently happened to Timorese students as new comers in Salatiga. All of the interviewees experienced it when they first came to Salatiga. The finding of this study showed that the major factor affecting these students to have problems with food was the taste of the food itself. Timorese students, as they informed, used to consume salty or highly seasoned and spicy eat food in their hometown. When they arrived in Salatiga, they had to convert to sweet and oily food. Initially, they often got stomachache because of this change. This was another familiar non-academic cultural experience faced by Timorese English Department students.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of the study demonstrated that English Department students from Timor encountered various cultural experiences as they were studying in Satya Wacana Christian University. Those experiences belonged to academic and non-academic which in some cases were problematic. The most significant problematic cultural experience according to the findings of this study was related to the language. Two experiences were worth noted in relation to difficulties in this area.

The first one was the obstacle with English itself. New teaching methods, teachers and friends’ various cultural backgrounds were contributing to this problematic experience. Another factor caused this difficulty was the perception of Timorese students who
perceived themselves to have lower English skill than their friends. The last one was the use of Javanese in group work and discussion sessions. Due to inability to understand Javanese, it resulted in minimum participation of Timorese students both in group work and discussions.

All of cultural experiences discussed in the previous section depicted the most important characteristic of the culture that is learned (Samovar et al., 2007; Hofstede, 1997). These experiences also portrait the inseparability of culture and language learning because Timorese students went through them mainly in the context of English learning (Brown, 2004). In addition, multicultural classroom setting in English Department apparently could create problems for students (Senior, 2006). The finding related to this area was absolutely in line with this statement.

English Department as a multicultural institution has taken cultural differences into consideration in running its program. However, these Timorese students’ problematic experiences reveal that not all students who enroll this faculty feel comfortable particularly the first time they join English Department. There is no wonder that these experiences give impact on their academic performance. Pre-course program, therefore, is needed to bring fresh students closer to the faculty’s programs, and cultural differences and its implications in English Department.

REFERENCES


