

# SEMIOTIKA

## Jurnal Ilmu Sastra dan Linguistik

MOTIF ANAK DURHAKA :  
antara Didaktik dan Kreativitas

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH THROUGH DRAMA :  
An Alternative Activity

SUARA LOKAL  
DALAM TEKS-TEKS DRAMA MUTAKHIR INDONESIA

PORNOGRAFI DAN ASOSIASI PORNOGRAFIS  
JUDUL RUBIK ARTIS HARIAN BERITA NASIONAL YOGYAKARTA

BAHASA RITUAL TENGER :  
Sebuah Serpihan Bahasa di Masa Lalu

ANU REPRESENTS DIFFERENT KINDS  
OF IMPLICATURE IN BAHASA INDONESIA

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..... sastra rakyat peraslian tentang anak durhaka tidak ketinggalan  
 disarankan oleh pengarang. Watak pendurhaka bukan saja dimatikan  
 yang diterimanya lebih parah, karena mereka sering tali dikutuk

..... Staf Pengajar Program Persurutan Melayu, Pusat Pengajian Bahasa,  
 Sastra dan Kebudayaan Melayu, Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemasyarakatan,  
 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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# THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH THROUGH DRAMA: An Alternative Activity

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Hairus Salikin\*

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## **Abstrak**

*Tulisan ini bertujuan menawarkan sebuah alternatif pengajaran bahasa Inggris melalui permainan drama. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan pragmatik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa drama sebagai salah satu karya sastra tidak hanya untuk dinikmati tetapi juga dapat digunakan sebagai sarana belajar bahasa. Dengan drama diharapkan peserta didik akan lebih rileks dan suasana belajar mengajar akan lebih menyenangkan. Drama yang dipilih seharusnya drama modern sebab bahasa yang dipakainya lebih mudah dipahami oleh pembelajar. Dengan suasana yang demikian para pembelajar akan termotivasi untuk belajar lebih lanjut.*

**Kata kunci:** cara mengajar, alternatif, drama

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, we cannot avoid the fact that generally speaking our university graduates, even from English departments, are still not very good and fluent in communicating in English, though they have learnt English for more than six years, starting from junior to senior high schools. This phenomena can be due to some factors e.g. uninteresting materials and method of teaching, teachers' role, syllabus design and students' motivation. Of course, there is always a special case in which students are able to communicate using good command of English.

This concise paper does not propose the entire solution and try to find out the "scapegoat", either the teachers or materials, but it offers an insight and alternative to apply in the classroom in the context of teaching English. This is also meant to make the teaching of English in more relaxed

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\* *Doktorandus, Master of Education, Staf Pengajar Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Jember.*

atmosphere and more communicative. In this case, drama as the representative of real life, where actual communication takes place (Reaske, 1966) can be a potential source for the teaching of English. In other words, a drama is all communication; every word in it is communication—communication among actors, or even communication between the actors and the audience as they watch the play (Via, 1970). Furthermore, in drama, language is semantically grouped instead of grammatically juxtaposed (Newmark, 1970), meaning that language in drama is presented in meaningful way though it might not be grammatically well formed.

## **2. Problems of Foreign Language Learning**

It is common knowledge that everyone (normal person) learns his first language with a fair degree of success, the reason being that everyone is born with the ability to learn a language and then grows up in the community (Rubin, 1975). Chomsky's Language Acquisition Devices (LAD) plays an important role in the process of first language acquisition. He says that normal children will speak the language of the society where they grow up. So, learning a foreign language is different from that of the first one. Foreign language learning is not an easy step that can be programmed in a quick do-it-yourself kit. No one can tell how to learn a foreign language without really trying (Brown, 1981). The process of learning foreign language is very complicated since learners should be familiar with not only words, pronunciation of the target language (TL), but also with non-linguistics aspects; feeling, values and acting. In other words, learners will face two sets of problems when learning foreign language; linguistics phenomena and non-linguistic ones.

Interference from their first language and intralingual transfer (Corder 1981) are examples of the problems of foreign language learning.

The former refers to the deviant that is influenced by their mother tongue while the latter refers to items produced by the learners which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue: generalization based on partial exposure to the TL. He also believes that context of learning, which refers to classroom with its teacher; facilities and environment might also be the potential problems of a foreign learning language.

The lack of general success is another problem of foreign language learning. In countries (like Indonesia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam) where English is taught as a foreign language it is very rare the learners reach complete success especially on "accent" and cross-cultural understanding. In this case, their accent will remain the accent to their native language. This could happen due to the fact that in those countries English is learnt after they have acquired their mother tongue.

Talking about culture is interesting because very often communication breakdown happens because the learners might be more familiar with the structure and pronunciation of the TL rather than the more abstract and less accessible; culture. In intercultural interaction for example, meaning is often transferred through non-verbal communication. Birdwhistell in Irving, (1984) estimates that in normal, two-person conversation the verbal bands (that is, the actual words spoken) carries less than 35 % of the social meaning of the situation. This means that there is 65% of the meaning that is transmitted via non-verbal bands. These non-verbal bands relate to "culture".

We often hear our students say expressions that are grammatically accepted but not culturally. Once I heard one of my students greeted me warmly "Good afternoon Pak, Where are you going to go?". I did not feel shock with this expression but I wonder if the English native speakers who do not know Indonesian culture heard that expression. They might answer "That's none of your business". What is wrong with this expression? The

expression is syntactically well formed but culturally ill formed. The convention of English speaking societies will not accept the above utterance.

Other examples of the cross-cultural misunderstanding can be seen from the following events. Once Indonesian studying in Australia asked by his Australian friend when they were reading in their University Library, "What are you doing"? said Australian. "I am reading", the Indonesian student answered. His answer is not appropriate for that question because the Australian student did not ask what he is doing at that time. It seems that the Indonesian student translate that question verbally not culturally. What his Australian friend means is what field of study are you doing. The other event happened when one of Indonesian students was standing in line in the bus stop. The old lady came and asked "Are you going to University"?. The Indonesian student answered "No, I am going home". The old lady was confused because in that context she did not ask him where he was going to go, she asked whether or not he studied at University.

All cultural problems in this part tell us that foreign language learners (also teachers) often neglect the inclusion of socio-cultural aspects when they are communicating with the native speakers of the TL. This might be because the language program did not include socio-cultural knowledge. As the consequence, the learners often make the expressions that can give rise to misunderstanding because they might use expressions that are not appropriate for a certain context.

Based on the above problems, the writer believes that learning a foreign language involves the linguistics and cultural aspects. That is why, foreign language teachers should be aware of the influence of the social cultural aspects of the language. Foreign language teachers and learners are encouraged to include the social cultural aspects in foreign language

learning and teaching if it is hoped to be fruitful. To include the social cultural aspects, providing drama as the material for teaching English might be of useful due to the fact that drama is culture-bound, and one of the major functions of literature (including drama) is to serve as medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written (Valdes, 1990).

### **3. Linguistic Features of Drama**

As mentioned before, drama is the reflection of life and the language used in drama are semantically related though seldom ~~and~~ grammatically-grouped. Littlewood (1987) claimed as one genre of literature, drama used limited number of linguistic structures in order to achieve communication. Drama shows how people interact with each other and the language used in drama varies from asking questions, giving orders, making statements, agreeing and disagreeing. In drama an expression may have different functions and purposes. For instance, "it is very hot here", could mean "let's go out", "open the window or door" or "turn on the fan". Take another example, "Rudi, the towel is on the floor". If it is seen from the form, it can be said that the utterance is a statement but in fact it might not be that. The expression could mean a command that Rudi should pick up the towel before it becomes dirty. This is what actually happens in a real life.

Another linguistics features of drama is that it consists of dialogues (Reaske, 1966) and the dialogue is the social unit of speech. This can make students alert of a social context to practice the new language to make the language come a live. By dialogues, students are hoped to be able to use the language in a real life.

In addition, drama is culture-bound, and one of the major functions of literature (including drama) is to serve as a medium to transmit the



culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written (Valdes., 1990). Students learning a new language without touching the cultural aspects of the people whose language they are learning is like learning to drive a car with no experience behind the wheel; they will not be able to drive a car (Irving, 1984). Understanding cultural aspect of the people whose language being learnt is a compulsory due to the fact that very often communication problem is not because of the language code, but different cultural assumptions. Again, Littlewood (1987) stated that literature (including drama) is one amongst several means of access to the foreign culture in a wider sense. Having knowledge of one culture might make the learning of a particular language easier. It should be remembered though drama is written in the form of a script but the language used is not bookish, it is very practical since drama presents natural interaction of speakers as they adhere to prescribe cultural behaviors (Valdes, 1990). With regard to learning another language, Nunan (1991) states that learning another language is probably the most anxiety provoking activity an individual can undertake in the classroom. To make the learners relaxed enough and confident enough to se the TL, teachers should be sure that there are cohesiveness and trust built up among the members of the group. This situation might be presented when the students are studying drama.

#### **4. Students and Teachers**

The teaching of English through drama might only be applied to post-intermediate and pre-advanced students in which they are considered to have enough ability to communicate in the TL. The students must be at least at the *threshold* level or even higher that will enable the learner(s) to cross the threshold level into the foreign-language community (Van Ek, 1973). Without this knowledge, the students might find themselves difficult to express something convincingly since they are still in doubt to decide

which particular form should be used in a certain situation. When they are in the threshold level, they are ready to go into communication with ease because in this level they do not have to do mental translation; their thoughts will flow spontaneously in string of words.

This activity should be designed for those who are in university level and preferably for students from English departments especially for conversation class. Furthermore, this activity should be different from traditional drama class, in which it is more on the literary elements such as characters, plot, and theme. The focus of this drama class is more on communicative competence and the students must practice verbal communication in the TL. By studying drama the students probably will meet their need and therefore the syllabus for this course must be designed based on communicative competence.

This activity is mainly meant for the students of English department; however, it is not impossible to be used for non-English department students. When applying for non-English department students, some consideration should be taken into account: student motivation, class size, and classroom situation. Although there is a possibility of applying this activity for non-English department, the writer is convinced that it is not an easy job for the teachers considering non-English students study English just for two semester with a very big class (60 to 150 students in one class). In addition, their motivation to learn English is not strong enough; they learn English because it is a compulsory; meaning their motivation is "instrumental" rather than "integrated". The students are considered to have instrumental motivation when they learn a new language because of a certain pragmatic goal, for instance "to have grade", "to have a job". They have integrated motivation when they learn a new language because they want to use the language in the target community. People believe that

those with integrated motivation will be more successful in learning a new language rather than those with instrumental one.

Unlike the previous methods or approaches such as Grammar Translation Methods, Audiolingual Approach, in teaching English through drama, which adopts the Communicative Approach, the role of teachers shifts from master of knowledge in the classroom to facilitators to help the students when they have problems in the classrooms. Besides, in this activity, the learners and teachers might become relaxed by becoming friends, and as the consequence, the students will be more confident using the TL because the situation might not be frightening anymore.

Furthermore, Evan (1984) argues that in drama activity, teachers could create a climate, which includes security and trust, interest, relevance, and confidence. Those factors are actually obligatory for an English learning and teaching process. When the students feel secure practicing the TL, they will be confident and not be afraid to make any mistakes, which are normal in everyday situation. In contrast, when they do not feel secure, they will not be confident using the TL and their language production could be worse than when they are confident.

## 5. Syllabus Design

Syllabus, which serves as the guideline for implementing a certain method should be designed based on the goals of the activities. There are three stages logical sequence when designing a syllabus: 1). needs analysis; 2). content specification; 3). syllabus organization (Munby, 1983). Having this guideline, the teachers can do the teaching in more systematic way and it is hoped eventually they can achieve the ultimate end well. As long as syllabus is concerned, Welkin (1981) has proposed that the teaching of language should be started from the Grammatical Syllabus followed by Situational Syllabus and ends with the Notional syllabus. The

Grammatical Syllabus is the one, which accords priority to grammatical criteria and sees the structure of language teaching as being principally provided by an ordered sequence of grammatical categories. This syllabus focuses on grammar as the important aspect of language teaching. The Situational Syllabus, on the other hand, approaches the definition of learning and teaching through the analysis in which language may be used and organized language teaching in terms of certain situations. And the Notional Syllabus seeks to change the balance of priorities by putting emphasis on the meaning expressed or the functions performed through language – in broad terms of the speaker's (or writer's) desire or intention.

Since our students are preferably from English department and at intermediate level which an assumption that they have a fair command of English, they are expected to have minimal requirements of linguistic competence, the teachers can start with the Situational Syllabus although we still can refer to the Grammatical Syllabus when problems arise. However, when they do not have any serious problems, the teachers can use the Notional Syllabus, which enable the students to make modification in accordance with the setting and the students' needs.

As stated before that this activity is much more appropriate applied to speaking classes in English departments, drills and practice are inevitable. The problem to be answered is "what kind of drills and practices are necessary for this activity? Paulston (1965) argues that there are three kinds of drills and practices that can be implemented in this activity: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative drills. In mechanical drills and practices, there is a complete control of the response which means that there is only one way of responding to the question. In meaningful drills and practices, however, there is still a control of the response but there is a choice in the answer. In the Communicative drills and practices, there is no control of the response and the students are free to choose the answers. In

the classroom situation, the teachers should be wise enough to select which drills are suitable for our students based on their aims and needs. Since the activity is appropriate for speaking classes, the teaching English through drama might be more beneficial when applying communicative drills and practices. In this activity, where appropriate, the teachers can skip the mechanical drills and proceed with the communicative drill. The teachers must be aware of the fact that the results of the purely structural practice is the ability to produce a range of usages, not the ability to use the forms appropriately (Scott, 1981) which is contradictory with the actual goal of learning a foreign language.

## **6. Implementation**

The implementation of this activity could cover some considerations that should be taken care carefully such as teaching materials, teaching procedure, seats arrangement medium for instruction and assessment. Those things are of important in the teaching English through drama.

### **6.1 Teaching Materials**

The teaching materials used in this activity should be taken from modern drama due to the fact that old drama or classic drama are written in old English that might make students difficult to understand and even the materials might be boring for the students. That is why, it is worth considering Via's idea (1970) that the materials used in this activity should be taken mostly from drama produced within the last 25 years; the plays which were written in the late sixties and early seventies or current plays. Some plays like the ones written by Eugene O'Neill, an American writer, are still relevant and they can be used in this activity. Classical plays like Shakespeare's, on the other hand, should be avoided due to the difficult

language they used. They used old English which is not used to day in daily conversation (Via, 1970). However it does not mean that Shakespearean works are considered having no values, but they are simply difficult enough for the students, or even for the teachers to understand. If the classical drama has to be used in the activity, they have to be handled with certain condition e.g. the language should be adapted to the language of to day or the simplified version could be useful.

Topics of drama used in the classroom should be familiar to the students and the teachers because unfamiliar topics might not be interesting for them to discuss. To choose interesting topics the teachers should involve the students since they could choose the topics that they like best. And when this is the case, they will like the play and enjoy it to be discussed and it might promote learning. The topics that can be taken as the materials for teaching English through drama, considering their age as University level, could be love, music, sport, and career.

## **6.2 Teaching Procedure**

At the very beginning of the class, the teachers should make the students familiar with the plays that are used as the materials. They should be familiar with the characters, plot, setting and some other literary elements. By doing so, the students will have the general idea of the play and the teachers will understand how much the students have understood the play. In this stage the teachers should show how the language is demonstrated because the language use will be the point of departure for discussion. Then the teachers explain how and when to use certain expression in the play and from here the teachers could explain how language form is appropriately used. In this case, when the class focuses more on usage rather than use, the teachers should also discuss the importance of certain usage because it may have the effect of putting the

language being learned (Widdowson, 1978). In other words, usage serves its function to facilitate what use needs to express in communication.

Having explained the difference between use and usage and their function, the students can practice the dialogues with one another and the teachers should be able to demonstrate what are the differences between the two. Though Via (1970) argues that when the students memorize the words or lines, the production will not be natural and even the words will not communicate and as the consequence the students might not understand what is being said, the writer believes that the students may read and memorize the script, because based on the experiences, this activity is still useful particularly when people are learning a new language.

The next step, the very important stage in this activity, is to assign role-plays to the students based on the play. In this stage, the students do not need to produce the words verbatim, they are free to be creative and more imaginative as long as the meaning is well communicated and still based on the play. In this stage it is advisable for the teachers not to intervene during the activity to make the students more confident using the TL. Evans (1984) believes that when the students feel more confident using the TL, they will communicate well particularly through group cooperation and the sharing of ideas. Only after rehearsal can the teachers make comments on the students' performance in general without mentioning the individuals.

### 6.3 Seat Arrangement

For this activity, seats should be arranged in such a way that make communication easier to take place. Since the teachers are no longer the center of attention she or he might be seated amongst the students. There are some possibilities of seat arrangement in this activity that can be practiced. This depends much on the number of the students in the

classroom. They are face-to-face, semi-circle, and full circle. Whatever arrangements teachers choose in this activity, everybody is equal and no one is more outstanding than others

#### **6.4 Medium of Instruction and Assessment**

As mentioned before that the students should be at post-intermediate or pre advanced to joint this activity/class. Therefore, the medium of instruction should be English most of the time. However, for the sake of practicality the students native language (e.g. Indonesian) might be used to avoid misunderstanding.

In the middle and at the end of semester, the students will be evaluated and certain instrument will be applied to assess their performance. There are a number of possibilities to test the students ability in relation to oral communication. One of them is described in the following paragraph.

The students are assigned to study the drama studied in the classroom, and they are supposed to produce the dialogues and if possible they are encouraged to memorize the lines in the dialogues or they may paraphrase them. They are free to make modification or improvisation as long as they are still stick to the same topic. It should be noted that in this assessment, the class should be arranged in such a way that the students will feel at ease and comfortable.

#### **7. Conclusion**

Though there are a number of methods and approaches in the teaching of English, people might have a certain method that they like best. It is not wrong as long as they are not fanatic to one method and criticize others as being wrong. This is because every method and approach has its own strength and weakness. They are free to rely more on a certain



method knowing its supremacy. On the other hand they also can pick up the good things from the other methods and they might combine them.

As a matter of fact, linguistics and literature are not contradictory, as many laymen have usually assumed. They are actually cannot be separated one from another, so it is worth considering treating them as equal in the teaching of English especially for speaking classes. Some teachers who are completely and faithfully adopted the Communicative Approach think that drills and practice are harmful. Nevertheless, they are useful and helpful in dealing with fluency and gaining confidence.

Drama as one genre of literature can be a source of material for the teaching of English. It can be enjoyable not only for the students but also for the teachers. Drama presents life as it is and it reflects the socio-cultural values. This is of importance since learning a new language should also involve learning the culture of people whose language being learnt. Studying drama can have those things at the same time: language and culture. To sum up, it is our duty as teachers to make ourselves and our students to exposed as much as possible to the culture of the TL, in this case English. It does means that people have to forget their own cultures when learning foreign languages, they have to understand that the way people view the world is partly determined by their native languages. People should think globally but act locally.

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