THE “LANGUAGE IS A MIRROR” METAPHOR
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world.
Raymond Williams

1. INTRODUCTION

What is language? A rough-and-ready answer to this question is: language is a means of communication, or more precisely (setting aside sign language used among the deaf) “language is a means of verbal communication”. While this functional definition of language may satisfy the general public, linguists want to know more about language. An integrative view combining aspects and functions of language in the definitions given by Sapir (1921), Francis (1958), and Finochiaro (1974) would lead to the following technical definition:

*Language is a system of arbitrary vocal and visual symbols used by people in a given culture to carry on their daily affairs.*

This definition covers three important components: (a) internal structure, (b) speech community in a given culture, and (c) communicative function of language.

The internal structure of language is expressed by the phrase “a system of arbitrary vocal and visual symbols”. The modifier “arbitrary” was first introduced by the father of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1916 [1959]), suggesting that in general there is no logical connection between form and meaning. Therefore, the same object is called differently across languages: a building where people live is called *rumah* in Indonesian, *house* in English, and *bait* in Arabic. The term “vocal symbols” refers to the verbal language used by the hearing people, in contrast with the term “visual symbols” which refers to sign language used by the deaf people. In addition, these two different terms may also be used to refer to the spoken form and the written form of language respectively.

The term “speech community in a given culture” is the major concern of both Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics. Sociolinguistically, a “speech community” refers to a group of people speaking the same language—different from another language spoken by a different speech community (Gumperz 1972: 218). This definition is meant to serve as a theoretical construct, not a portrait of the real sociolinguistic situation. The real picture in the society is a lot more complex, since most people all over the world speak more than one language. Bilingualism or multilingualism is often the norm rather than the exception. Instead of finding an ideal monolingual speech community in our sociolinguistic environments, we usually find bilingual or even multilingual speech communities.

Ethnolinguistically, the relationship between “culture” and “language” is expressed in the well-known saying “language exists in culture, and culture exists in language”. In effect, there is always mutual influence between culture and language (see Becker 1995).

The “communicative function of language” is most obvious in the use of language to convey a message. This is known as the referential function, that is, the use of language to refer to a particular object, whether concrete or abstract (Jakobson 1960; Hymes 1974). However, people also use language simply to maintain good social relations, because
humans are social beings. When we accidentally meet and I say to you, “What’s up?” and you reply “Nothing new”, we simply want to show that we care about each other. In terms of message, there is nothing truly important in our utterances. This is the phatic function of language—in a sociolinguistic sense; we maintain our good social relations by means of language. Today the countless functions of language have been the objects of investigation not only in Sociolinguistics, but also in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis (Grundy 2000; Thornbury 2005).

This introductory remark on the definition of language points out the internal structure of language as a coherent system, and simultaneously reveals the sociocultural function of language in the human society. As related to the title of this paper, the remark implies that language as a coherent communicative system can be seen as a mirror of the society as well as the culture. However, the emergence of Generative Grammar during the 1960s has brought out a completely different way of looking at language: language is a mirror of the mind (Chomsky 1972: x). Taking the metaphor “language is a mirror”—of the human mind, of the human society, and of the culture, this paper intends to present brief theoretical overviews of these different vantage points, and to show their practical implications on the field of foreign language teaching.

2. LANGUAGE, A MIRROR OF THE MIND

In the Chomskyan school, the metaphor “language is a mirror of the mind” lurks in the background rather than looms in the foreground. During the early development of Generative Grammar, Chomsky’s book *Language and Mind* was first published in 1968, three years after the publication of his now monumental classics *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) and eleven years after the first classic *Syntactic Structures* (1957). The second, enlarged edition of *Language and Mind* was published four years later, in 1972. It is in this second edition that Chomsky (1972: ix-x) explicitly states, “Human language should directly reflect the characteristics of human intellectual capacities, that language should be a direct ‘mirror of the mind’ in ways in which other systems of knowledge and belief cannot”. He further argues that the study of human language is nearly equal to the study of the “human essence”, the distinctive qualities of mind that are unique to man and that are inseparable from any critical phase of human existence (ibid.: 100).

Taking the “language is a mirror of the mind” metaphor as a lead, this second part of the paper will, first, uncover the corollary of the “mirror” metaphor on Chomsky’s linguistic theory, and secondly, outline the implications of the theory on foreign language teaching.

2.1. Chomsky’s Linguistic Theory as a Reflection of the Creative Mind

Both editions of *Language and Mind*, published in 1968 and 1972 respectively, are obviously intended to set up philosophical grounds on which to establish the theory of Generative Grammar. The mechanisms and technicalities of Generative Grammar were first introduced in *Syntactic Structures* (1957), and theoretical foundations were laid firm in *Aspects* (1965). It was in *Aspects* that Chomsky provided the theory with the new vocabulary of concepts, such as *generative grammar*, *competence vs. performance*, *deep structure vs. surface structure*, *language acquisition device* (LAD), *universal grammar* (UG), *descriptive and explanatory adequacy*. (Explanation of each key concept is given in the course of the discussion throughout this section.) In the context of discussing language as a mirror of the mind, how do these key concepts in Generative Grammar relate to the mind?
The human mind is first and foremost characterized as being creative, and thus human language by necessity is creative too. Chomsky’s theory accounts in a brilliant manner for the creative aspects of language use (1965: 6; 1972: 100). The term Generative Grammar means a grammar that generates all and only grammatical sentences in any language. In a psychological sense, it is a mental grammar existing in the mind of every adult speaker of any language. Thus “grammar” is a near synonym of language competence: a specific mental ability in our mind which enables us humans to produce and understand novel or new grammatical utterances. It is used in contrast with language performance, which is language competence in operation in actual language use. That is, in the act of using a particular language (i.e., when we are listening, speaking, reading, or writing), the language competence in our mind is in operation. Now, while you are reading the sentences in this paper, the language competence in your mind is in operation. Similarly, while I keep on writing this paper, my language competence in my mind is also in operation.

In a linguistic sense, Generative Grammar is a theory of grammar which purports to describe and explain the real nature of language competence: how it produces all and only grammatical sentences in a particular language (1965: 4). In this respect, Generative Grammar excels in description and explanation by providing a well-built mechanism showing how the language competence operates. For instance, when I say Birds fly, I ‘pick up’ from my mental lexicon (the dictionary in my mind, part of my language competence) the words bird and fly. Since I want to convey the generic sense that most birds fly, my “morphological competence” adds the plural suffix –s to the word bird, producing birds. Then my “syntactic competence” produces the sentence by observing the Phrase Structure (PS) Rules:

(1) \[ S \rightarrow \text{NP} \text{ VP} \]
   \[ \text{NP} \rightarrow \text{N} \]
   \[ \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V} \]
   \[ \text{N} = \text{birds} \]
   \[ \text{V} = \text{fly} \]

The PS Rules in (1) are equal to the tree structure in (2), which represents diagrammatically the mental process of producing the sentence.

(2) \[ S \]
\[ \quad \text{NP} \quad \text{VP} \]
\[ \mid \mid \]
\[ \text{N} \quad \text{V} \]
\[ \text{Birds} \quad \text{fly} \]

The PS Rules in (1) or the tree structure in (2) says the following: Every sentences (S) consists of an NP subject and a VP predicate. In this particular case, the NP subject consists of only the N birds, and the VP predicate consists of only the V fly. The tree diagram in (2) can produce not only the sentence Birds fly, but also any other sentence with the same internal structure such as Dogs bark, Plants grow, or Stars twinkle.

If I produce the sentence Birds fly, then no transformation rule applies. This means that the deep structure is the same as the surface structure. The “deep structure” is the basic structure in the mind of the speaker containing the basic meaning of a sentence; and the “surface structure” is the sentence actually produced by the speaker in his/her verbal act. On the other hand, if I ask a question Do birds fly? then a yes/no question
transformation applies. The diagram of my question, covering both the deep structure and the surface structure, is presented in (3).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{diagram.png}
\caption{Diagram of the question structure.}
\end{figure}

To produce the question, the verb *fly* is broken down into the Auxiliary *do* and the verb *fly*. Then the Aux *do* is moved to the front of the sentence, shown by the dotted line with an arrow head, leaving a trace (t) behind. The tree diagram in (3) shows simultaneously that the “surface structure” *Do birds fly* is derived from the “deep structure” *Birds fly*. Similar transforms, taking the previous examples, are *Do dogs bark? Do plants grow? Do stars twinkle?*

Three cautionary notes are in order. First, the tree structures in (2) and (3) are a combined model, based on the 1957 and 1981 Chomsky’s tree structures. During the fifty years of the generative enterprise, there have been numerous models of tree structures. The simple model used in this paper is chosen for its clarity and comprehensiveness. Secondly, the model is confined to showing the productive act of language use. The “productive act” here is in accord with the term “generative”, which has two meanings: producing and specifying the rules. The term “producing” implies that when we speak or write, we usually produce novel grammatical utterances or sentences. The term “specifying the rules” means making the hidden rules (constituting the language competence in the mind) explicit. The PS Rules in (1) are examples of hidden rules made explicit. This means that language is not a set of habit, but a rule-governed behavior. Thirdly, the model is meant to provide illustrative examples of how language competence operates, and how the surface structure is derived from the deep structure at the syntactic level.

The first step in the PS Rules is $S \rightarrow NP \ VP$. This reminds us of the semantic-syntactic definition of the sentence in Traditional Grammar: a sentence is a complete thought consisting of the NP subject and the VP predicate. To the best of my knowledge, it is Pinker (1994: 197-200) that points out the implication of “complete thought” on the configuration of a tree structure. To illustrate, consider example (4).

\begin{enumerate}
\item [4] [The child]$_{NP}$ [likes [ice cream]$_{NP}$]$_{VP}$
\end{enumerate}

Sentence (4) consists of the NP subject *the child*, and the VP predicate *likes ice cream*. The VP consists of the transitive V *likes* and the NP object *ice cream*. Upon hearing or reading sentence (4), there is a mental “click” in our mind, signaling that we have just heard or read a complete grammatical sentence. This mental click is a psycholinguistic experience, that is, a mental experience in the course of processing a language. To prove the presence or absence of this mental click, read the following NP subjects:

\begin{enumerate}
\item [5] a. The child …
\item b. The child standing in the shade …
\end{enumerate}

There is no mental click in our mind, because the NP subject, regardless of their lengths, still needs a VP predicate to produce a “complete thought”. Diagrammatically speaking,
the VP is still hanging there in our mental space, waiting to be filled up by a predicate. A simplified tree diagram of (5)b looks as follows:

\[(6)\]

\[
S \\
NP \\
\text{The child standing in the shade}
\]

\[VP \}

The tree structure in (6) helps to explain why there is no mental click in our mind. Similarly, if we go back to sentence (4) and drop the NP object ice cream, the mental click will be absent too. The incomplete sentence (7) has a tree structure in (8).

\[(7)\]

\[
S \\
NP \\
\text{The child likes }
\]

\[VP \}

The reason for the absence of the mental click is psycholinguistically obvious: the NP is hanging there in our mental space, waiting to be filled up by an object.

\[(8)\]

\[
S \\
NP \\
\text{Det} \\
\text{N} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{NP}
\]

Of course, in actual verbal communication people rarely produce utterances like (6) or (8), unless in the case of hesitation. They stop speaking in mid-utterance, producing an incomplete sentence which fails to trigger a mental click in the mind of the hearer. A better example may happen in our reading experience. When we are reading part of a sentence on the bottom of a page and the following page is missing, we may have a hanging VP or NP experience. Our linguistic competence is looking for a syntactic component to make the sentence complete: our mind keeps on anticipating the clicking experience.

Now, let’s go back to the creative aspect of language use. While producing or interpreting utterances, we are endlessly engaged in a creative linguistic act. In the act of verbal communication we keep “creating”—in the sense of producing and interpreting—novel grammatical utterances, or utterances that we have never encountered before. As a result, there is no longest phrase or sentence in human language. A peculiar example is noted by Pinker (1994: 86-7). The Guinness Book of World Records claims that the longest English sentence is found in William Faulkner’s novel Absalom, Absalom!; it is a sentence consisting of 1,300 words that begins with

\[(9)\]

they both bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation ...

The claim is certainly false; for anyone can continue making the sentence endlessly longer by adding words or phrases while keeping the sentence grammatical.

\[(10)\]

a. Faulkner wrote, “They both bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation ...”

b. Pinker wrote that Faulkner wrote, “They both bore it ...”

c. Who cares that Pinker wrote that Faulkner wrote, “They both bore it ...”

Referring back to the PS Rules in (1), generative linguists state that each rule in the PS Rules is potentially recursive in an endless manner. Hence in theory, any phrase or any sentence can be made endlessly longer by repeating a PS rule:
The phrase (11)a is produced by applying rules (12)a, and the phrase (11)b is produced by applying rules (12)b, and so on for (11)c and (11)d.

Here we have to distinguish between what is potential and what is actual. The phrase (11)a is likely to occur in an utterance; the phrase (11)b is less likely; the phrase (11)c is much less likely; and the phrase (11)d is the least likely. Note also that (11)d can still be made longer and longer indefinitely. The reason why people never produce utterances like (11)c and (11)d is obvious: they speak or write to convey a message, not to demonstrate their language competence. Briefly, Generative Grammar not only investigates utterances actually produced by speakers of a language, but also posits their language competence which allows them to produce limitless number of utterances with indefinite length.

Counter arguments against principles underlying Generative Grammar abound, especially from linguists studying language in its sociocultural context. However, these counter arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. My own critiques of Chomskyan theory (Kadarisman 2004; 2007) are directed against the claim of universality pertaining to principles and parameters in the so-called Universal Grammar (UG). UG, as succinctly defined by Smith (1999: 42), is “the set of linguistic principles we are endowed with at birth in virtue of being human”. In my previous papers I argue that some of these principles are empirically justified and hence universally true; but others are not, and therefore they are false.

In spite of the critiques and counter arguments, why does Chomsky’s theory remain appealing? There are two well-built reasons why Chomsky remains very influential within and outside the field of linguistics. First, his theory is distinctly original and comprehensive; and thus it brings deeper insights into human language—especially “language as a mirror of the mind”. Secondly, Chomsky is best at linguistic theorizing, without necessarily suggesting that his linguistic theory is the best theory. Internally, his theory of language is intended to be simple and elegant (i.e., consisting of a few principles but with great power of generality); and externally it is intended to meet two conditions of adequacy: descriptive adequacy and explanatory adequacy. Descriptive adequacy means a complete and accurate description of the native speaker’s language competence; and explanatory adequacy means providing a logical explanation of how humans are able to acquire language. Toward this end, early on Chomsky (1965) posits the LAD (language acquisition device) hypothesis—the LAD being a “black box” which makes language acquisition possible. In his latest theories (Chomsky 1981, 1995), he posits a theory of UG—a “blueprint” of human language which develops into an actual language as it is exposed to primary language data. In short, his greatest achievement in linguistics is in bringing out the explanatory power of linguistic theory.
2.2. Implications of Chomsky’s Linguistic Theory on FLT

Direct application of Chomsky’s theory in the field of foreign language teaching (FLT) is not easy, for the following reason. Chomsky’s theory is mainly concerned with how the mind produces and interprets grammatical utterances; the major concern is thus grammaticality of sentences, not the communicative function of language. The term “linguistic competence” in Generative Grammar refers to competence in a micro-linguistic sense—covering syntactic competence, semantic competence, morphological competence, phonological competence, and phonetic competence, with syntax taking the central position in the theory. Of course, syntax in theoretical linguistics may help highlight pedagogical grammar or L2 grammar in FLT, but this is inadequate. The mastery of L2 grammar and vocabulary is to be geared toward what Hymes (1972) calls “communicative competence”, a functional mentalistic term for “L2 proficiency”.

Chomsky’s influence on FLT is most obvious through the mediation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The key word here is “acquisition”, suggesting that SLA is the study of what is going on in the minds of the learners while they are acquiring an L2 (Saville-Troike 2006: 2). Notice the mentalistic flavor in SLA, although it is directed toward the acquisition of L2 proficiency. In this context, the generative terms “LAD” and “UG” have been used to explain the nature of L2 acquisition. In Krashen’s Monitor Theory (Krashen 1981), the LAD is posited there as a “black box”, assumed to be operating in the same way as it does in L1 acquisition. This implies that L2 acquisition is possible because the LAD is there in the mind of the learner. Along the same line of reasoning, White’s book Universal Grammar and Second Language Acquisition (1989) is an example of how Chomsky’s UG theory is believed to be one best explanation of how L2 acquisition proceeds in the mind of the learner, although it is limited within the domain of L2 syntax. My point here is not to argue whether or not the LAD or UG operates in L2 acquisition—a topic beyond the confines of this paper, but simply to point out that Chomsky’s theory, for its explanatory power, has been strongly appealing to SLA scholars.

Moving down toward L2 competence (in the sense of L2 proficiency) in our everyday experience, three anecdotal accounts are in order. Two years ago I was introduced by a colleague at the Arabic Department FS UM to a visiting lecturer from Egypt. When he spoke to me in Arabic, I said to him, “I understand every thing you say in Arabic. If you understand English, you can speak to me in Arabic and I can speak to you in English”. Unfortunately he does not speak English, and so a conversation between us was impossible. What does this failure of verbal event tell us? Upon reflection on my Arabic proficiency, my listening skill (part of the receptive skill) is better than my speaking skill (part of the productive skill). Indeed our receptive skill (consisting of “passive” L2 grammar and vocabulary) is usually better than our productive skill (consisting of “active” L2 grammar and vocabulary). Part of the L2 learning process is how to “activate” our L2 grammar and vocabulary so that we are able to produce utterances in actual verbal communication through speaking and writing.

The second and third anecdotes are from a phonology professor at the University of Hawaii, Kenneth Rehg. One is a sad story; the other is a happy one. The sad story is about a linguistics professor in America who suffered a stroke. He is an expert in Ponapean, a language spoken in a small island in the Pacific. The direct impact of the neural disease was on his Ponapean, but not on his English. His Ponapean was completely gone, but his English remained intact. As he was getting better, he had to re-learn Ponapean; and after one year or so he regained his competence in Ponapean. What is the “moral” of the story? We may conclude that L1 and L2 are “wired” differently in the neural system of the brain.
L1 goes much deeper than L2 does in the neural system, causing the loss of L2, but not L1, in the event of brain malfunction. The fact that L1 goes very deep in the neural system also shows up when we exclaim in pain or swear in anger. When you touch a very hot object, you’ll probably exclaim *Aduh!* rather than *Ouch!* When you get very angry, you’ll probably swear in your first language rather than in English—although you know a few four-letter words in English. Our L1, so intimate mentally with our inner selves, gives better relief to our pain and anger.

The happy story is about a girl in a Korean family living in America for a few years. The very young girl acquired English in a natural setting. At the age of 6, she and the family went home to Korea. During her school years, she practiced very little English. As a result, her English, being neglected, became a “foreign language” again for her. Upon graduating from high school, she was sent back to learn at an American university. After one semester, she “recovered” her L1 competence in English, which had been “buried” for more than ten years in the Korean linguistic environment. Cases of recovering L1 competence may vary across individuals; but this Korean girl’s case seems to relate to the so-called critical period hypothesis (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991: 156). According to this hypothesis, after the age of six a complete mastery of L2, particularly its phonology, is impossible. Adults acquiring an L2, no matter how fluent they are, always carry along some foreign accent. L1 acquisition goes together with the maturation process of the brain, which does not occur in adult L2 acquisition. Foreign accent is, phonetically speaking, a failure to produce the complete set of phonetic features of L2, pertaining both to segmental and suprasegmental phonology. There is nothing bad about foreign accent, so long as it does not impede oral communication.

Going into some details of Chomsky’s theory, it would be better if L2 learners become fully aware of language use as a creative act and a rule-governed behavior. They have freedom to produce their own utterances, but within the confines of L2 grammar—in the sense of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic rules. L2 grammar books should be very helpful references for them. Their need to consult grammar books should be adjusted to their proficiency levels. Grammar is the skeleton, and vocabulary is the flesh. A living L2 needs both of them, and therefore good dictionaries—starting with bilingual moving to monolingual dictionaries—are equally important. Proficiency in L2 includes proficiency in using grammar books and dictionaries, since L2 mastery is an endless process. In fact, learning a foreign language is a life-long process (Brown 1994: 425f).

The mental “click” signaling a complete thought of a good sentence reminds me of my experience in teaching writing and supervising theses. Students need to become sensitive to the mental click feeling, especially in writing. *Fragments*, usually in the form of sub-clauses or phrases, are constructions with the hanging syntactic components which fail to produce a complete thought.

Example (13) is a fragment; it is a long NP ending in an NP, the latter modified by a non-defining adjective clause. The (girl) student writing this phrase quotes from a reference book but lacks the mental click feeling, hence leaving the VP predicate hanging in the mental space of the reader. I would assume that the absence of her sensitivity to the mental click feeling is caused by her lack of semantic competence, resulting in poor comprehension. Since she does not fully understand what she is quoting, she has no
feeling that the long NP subject stands by itself without the VP predicate. The opposite of fragments are run-on sentences. L2 learners who write fragments stop before the “full stop”, whereas those who write run-on sentences speed up, breaking the barrier put up by the “full stop”.

Example (14) is ungrammatical for the following reason: the phrase two perspectives in both sentences bears double syntactic roles. In the first sentence, it serves as the object of the preposition from and the subject of the VP predicate are function and form. In the second sentence, it serves as the object of the verb has and the subject of the VP predicate are traditional grammar and functional grammar. To correct the errors, each phrase two perspectives must bear only one syntactic role: as an object of the preposition from in the first sentence, and as an object of the verb has in the second. This can be done by deleting the verb are in both sentences and replacing them with a colon (:). Also, the “splice comma” separating the two sentences should be replaced with a semi colon (;) to prevent producing a run-on sentence.

(15) Language can be viewed from two perspectives: function and form; and grammar may have two perspectives: traditional grammar and functional grammar.

Other than fragments and run-on sentences, there are many other problems that writing teachers have to solve. In this regard, we EFL teachers are reminded by Error Analysis (Richards 1974) that errors are natural part of L2 acquisition, and need to be dealt with accordingly. In contrast with “mistakes” that occur erratically, “errors” occur systematically and reflect the imperfect L2 competence, also known as interlanguage (IL) competence. Notice that both terms (“imperfect L2 competence” and “IL competence”) rely heavily on the key word “competence”, which never fails to show Chomsky’s influence on SLA and FLT.

3. LANGUAGE, THE SOCIOCULTURAL MIRROR

Language is a multi-faceted phenomenon. For Chomsky, as discussed above, language is the human essence, ‘a mirror’ reflecting the natural creativity of the mind. However, language, with its rich variation, can also be seen as ‘a mirror’ reflecting the miscellaneous nature of the society or the distinct locality of a culture. In her book, Language, the Social Mirror (1982), Chaika states that “language and society are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other” (p.1). The mutual dependence, mutual influence, and mutual shaping between language and society are inevitable. Similarly, language and culture are intimately interrelated. Instead of thinking of language and culture, Duranti (1997: 336-7), following Harry Hoijer (1953), suggests that we should think of language in culture. He further states,

The linguistic system interprets all other systems within the culture. To expand this idea, we could say that language is in us as much as we are in language. This statement reminds us of linguistic relativity contained within the Whorfian Hypothesis, and at the same time suggests that “language is a mirror of the culture”. The following sections will look at language from a sociocultural perspective, and point out the implications of this outlook on foreign language teaching.
3.1. Language from a Sociocultural Perspective

In theoretical linguistics, uniformity is the norm; for a formal theory of language intends to reveal the regularity of forms and rules. Toward this end, linguistic data are limited to sentences (as the biggest linguistic units) taken from standard language. Generative Grammar is a perfect example of theoretical linguistics. By contrast, in the study of language in its sociocultural context, best represented by Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics, variation is the norm. As noted in passing, linguistic variation is better known as linguistic relativity. In the latest development of the discipline, there has been a pull-and-push tension between relativity and universality in the study of human language. In a previous paper (Kadarisman 2008), I present a brief overview of linguistic relativity from von Humboldt to Sapir. In terms of degree, setting the chronological order aside, linguistic relativity is partly visible in Saussurean structuralism, quite visible in the Bloomfieldian school, highly idealized in the Humboldtian framework, strongly dominating in the Boasian tradition, and well established in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. In my opinion, linguistic relativity is best captured by the neo-Bloomfieldian postulate: Every language is unique, structurally and culturally.

In spite of its long history, linguistic relativity was overshadowed during the 1960s by the “Chomskyan revolution” in linguistics and subsequently during the 1970s by the ‘hegemony’ of Generative Grammar. The pendulum started swinging back during the 1970s and 1980s through the study of language in context, where Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics moved back to the foreground, and Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis began to gain strong foothold—all as reaction against the Chomskyan school, a context-free linguistics, which puts centrality in syntax. In addition, since the very beginning of his long career in linguistic theorizing, Chomsky (1965) has given prominence to universality, best revealed by his theory of Universal Grammar. Until today, the push-and-pull tension between universality and relativity in linguistics still gives strong reverberation and thrill to the discipline.

Within this seemingly endless controversy, a student of language should be fully aware of what is going on in the discipline. Familiarity with both context-free and context-bound linguistics is equally important, before making a decision to delve into a particular sub-field of linguistics. Practitioners, such as foreign language teachers, are placed in a very difficult situation. During the Bloomfieldian era, the relation between linguistics and foreign language teaching (FLT) was very simple and clear. The Audiolingual Method (ALM), in my opinion, is the best example of Applied Linguistics—it was a direct application of linguistics (i.e., the Bloomfieldian principles) in the field of FLT. Today, making a replica of the ALM is almost impossible, since there are too many diverse schools of linguistics. The problem is not simply in choosing which school provides reliable principles for the FLT purposes. It is worse, since Applied Linguistics claims its own ground (Widdowson 1984; McCarthy 2001). Applied Linguistics is no longer the direct application of linguistics in the field of FLT, but rather an independent discipline building its own theoretical stance (not theoretical allegiance to any linguistic theory) for the purpose of solving problems in FL teaching and learning. Hidden rivalry between (Theoretical) Linguistics and Applied Linguistics—incited by some scholars in the latter discipline—becomes unavoidable, albeit unnecessary and counter-productive. As a consequence of this rivalry, some books on Applied Linguistics become very difficult for language teachers to read, since they do not simply concentrate on how to solve instructional problems, but also launch attacks on linguistic schools, particularly the Chomskyan school, for its ‘obstinacy’ on propagating context-free linguistics.
Going back to the study of language in its sociocultural context, I believe that the most fruitful discussion of linguistic relativity should be related to linguistic universality. The notion of universality is very popular in the Chomskyan school, but less popular in the Greenbergian school. The former, formulated in the theory of Universal Grammar, is essentially universality in micro-linguistics, mostly pertaining to “abstract” syntax. The latter, formulated in “Universals and Typology” (Comrie 1989), is universality measured across universal parameters in phonology, morphology, and syntax, resulting in typologies across languages. While the approach in the former is more theory-driven and the approach in the latter is more data-driven, both the Chomskyan and Greenbergian schools are confined within the domain of context-free linguistics. Therefore, both types of universality are inadequate for the purpose of explaining linguistic relativity in context-bound linguistics.

To the best of my knowledge, the most appropriate universal parameters to explain linguistic relativity are those proposed by Clark & Clark (1977: 516-17), a rather obscure reference since they are not theoretical linguists but scholars in Psycholinguistics. In fact, Clark & Clark do not give much elaboration to their parameters. Despite the marginal position of the following parameters in linguistic theory, they should prove very useful in explaining linguistic relativity.

(15) **Universals in Human Language:**
- a. Every language is learned by children.
- b. Every language is spoken and understood by adults easily and efficiently.
- c. Every language embodies the ideas people normally want to convey.
- d. Every language functions as a communicative system in a sociocultural setting.

These universal parameters seem to be observation-based and hence empirically verifiable; and they are on par with the layman’s definition of language, i.e., “language is a means of verbal communication”. Not the structural feature but the functional nature of language is presupposed in each of these parameters. The question is: how do these universal parameters explain linguistic variation? Parameter (15)a implies that L1 acquisition is part of cultural transmission, or from the Chomskyan perspective the “exposure” of the LAD to primary language data. In acquiring their L1, children simultaneously acquire the sociocultural values. Parameter (15)b is true with mono-level languages, like Indonesian or English, but not necessarily true with multi-level languages, such as Balinese, Javanese, or Sundanese. As a native speaker of Javanese, I observe that the mastery of Javanese varies considerably across speakers: all of them are fluent speakers of the *ngoko* ‘low’ form, but not many of them, particularly among younger generations, are fluent speakers of the *krama* ‘high’ form. Parameter (15)c is universally true at the functional level, but variation occurs at the structural level and in the manner of conveying ideas. Parameter (15)d, like (15)c, is universally true with reference to a language as a whole communicative system, but languages vary structurally across cultures. The neo-Bloomfieldian postulate stated above (i.e., Every language is unique, structurally and culturally) modifies parameters (15)c and (15)d.

Owing to space limitation, I will highlight linguistic relativity pertaining to parameters (15)c and (15)d only, confined to the universal concepts of (a) time and (b) politeness. By “universal concepts” I mean that the concepts of “time” and “politeness” are there in every culture, but cross-culturally they may be verbalized or expressed through language in different ways and hence perceived differently too.

**Time.** In discussing time, upon mentioning English words I will add their Indonesian equivalents and later point out their similarities and differences. We
Experience time as day (siang) and night (malam), and in smaller divisions as morning (pagi), noon (siong), afternoon (sore), and evening (petang). In addition to these conventional divisions of time, we modern people also experience time in terms of “hours”, thanks to the invention by modern technology. Notice that English has day and noon, both combined into siang in Indonesian. This slight difference is of little significance. Significant differences show up in Table 1.

Table 1. “Time” Greetings in Indonesian and English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selamat pagi</td>
<td>Good morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selamat siang</td>
<td>Good morning /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selamat sore</td>
<td>Good afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selamat petang</td>
<td>Good evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selamat malam</td>
<td>Good night</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

greetings related to these time divisions. A comparison of “time” greetings in Indonesian and English is presented in Table 1. This comparison is almost straightforward, except for selamat siang in Indonesian, which has double equivalents in English: good morning or good afternoon.

More subtle differences are related to “when” we say each of the greetings, and how it relates to the occasion of “meeting” or “parting”. These differences are shown in Tables 2.a and 2.b. Descriptions in these two tables are not intended to prescribe rough-and-ready rules of when to say the greetings; but rather they are meant as approximation to the time of their uses in actual verbal communication. In addition, the “hours” for English greetings are relative to geographical locations. The time given in Table 2.b is based on my experience of living in Hawaii for several years. In Canada or northern part of England, for example, which are closer to the north-pole, the time may differ accordingly.

The comparison between the “time” columns in Tables 2.a and 2.b reveals that Indonesian and English speakers perceive “conventional time divisions” in rather different ways. Pagi lasts from 4 p.m. to 10 a.m., but morning lasts from 1 a.m. to before noon. Accordingly, Indonesians say jam 1 malam and jam 11 siang, but English speakers say 1 o’clock and 11 o’clock in the morning. Thus selamat pagi and good morning are synonymous greetings with different timings. Similarly, siang lasts from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.,
but noon is a point of time: 12.00 noon. The time coming before noon is morning, and the
time coming after noon is afternoon. Notice that afternoon truly comes right after noon.
Logically, Indonesians can say selamat siang, because siang is a stretch of time.
Conversely, English speakers cannot say good noon, because noon is a point of time. As
soon as 12.00 noon slips away, it becomes afternoon. There is no good day either, because
the first half of the day belongs to morning and the second half belongs to afternoon. Of
course, there is the expression have a nice day, spoken in parting during the day, which has
no equivalent in Indonesian. The word petang (in the phrase rembang petang) has for long
been there in Indonesian, but selamat petang is a new invention. It is used by TV
newscasters in the early evening to greet the unseen audience. In face-to-face
communication, Indonesians never say selamat petang, but selamat malam instead. On the
contrary, good evening and good night have opposite communicative functions: one for
meeting and the other for parting. In addition, have a nice evening, which has no
equivalent in Indonesian, is said to someone in parting who is supposed to have another
activity during the night. It should be noted, however, that in many parts of Indonesia—
where Islam is the religion of major population—the Islamic greeting assalamu alaikum
‘peace be upon you all’ sounds more common than the “time” greetings noted in Table 2.a.

Any significant object in human experience is recognized through names or by
naming. Days in our lives are part of significant human experience; therefore they are
given names. In English, names of days in the week (listed in Table 3), as I have noted in
a previous paper (Kadarisman 2005), carry with them old myths—probably from Roman
mythology (Webster 1989), although modern English speakers may be unaware of these

Table 3. English Names of the Days in a Week and the Myths Contained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Days</th>
<th>Myths Contained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>the day of the Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>the day of the Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>the day of Tiw, the God of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>the day of Odin, the supreme god and the creator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>the day of the Thunder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>the day of Friga, the wife of Odin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>the day of Saturn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

myths. Examining these names, we can say that three days in a week (Tuesday,
Wednesday, Friday) belong to three Gods: Odin, Friga, Twi; three other days (Sunday,
Monday, Saturday) belong to three heavenly bodies: the Sun, the Moon, and Saturn; and
one day (Thursday) belongs to heavenly power: the Thunder. Thus the seven days of the
week in English all belong to the “Power of Heaven”, not in an astronomical but in a
mythological sense. Note that remnants of myths are there in English culture, regardless of the
remarkable progress of modernism.

Names of days in the week in Indonesian, listed in Table 4, are clearly borrowings
from Arabic. The spread of Islam in “Indonesia” (the then Nusantara) which began in the
13th century not only introduced new religious doctrines to the indigenous people but also
brought along “new language”, including names of the days. As shown in Table 4, names of the days in Indonesian, referring to their meanings in the Arabic origins, indicate basic
numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), followed by two activities: “get-together” and “retreat”. The
meaning of “get-together” is still preserved today in the act of Islamic congregational
prayer on Friday; and the meaning of “retreat” is preserved on Saturday being part of the
weekend holidays. In this regard, Indonesian names of the days in a week are historically the results of cultural contact in the form of religious propagation.

Table 4. Indonesian Names of the Days in a Week and their Meanings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Days</th>
<th>Arabic Origins</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
<th>English Equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minggu (Ahad)</td>
<td>al-Ahad</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senin</td>
<td>al-Ithnaani</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selasa</td>
<td>ath-Thulathaa‘u</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabu</td>
<td>al-Arbi‘aa‘u</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamis</td>
<td>al-Khamiesu</td>
<td>five</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumat</td>
<td>al-Jumu‘atu</td>
<td>get-together</td>
<td>Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabtu</td>
<td>as-Sabtu</td>
<td>retreat</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While English and Indonesian names of the days in a week have different historical origins, they are now considered to be very close, if not exact, equivalents. Both cultures have five working days, followed by a two-day weekend. (Indonesian schools have six instructional days and a one-day weekend.) In Indonesia, Friday is the shortest working day, to allow the Moslems to attend Friday prayer. In English-speaking countries, Friday gives people “TGIF” (thank God, it’s Friday), an expression of excitement for the coming weekend. They usually say to each other, “Have a nice weekend”. In Indonesian it becomes “Selamat berakhir pekan;” but it still sounds ‘translationese’ and very few Indonesians are accustomed to using this ‘imported’ expression.

What about people’s attitudes toward time? Cultural wisdoms are preserved in proverbs. The Indonesian proverb says Biar lambat asal selamat ‘Slow but safe’; but the English proverb says Time is money. (The Arabic proverb says Al waqtu kas-saifi, in lam taqta’hu yaqta’ka ‘Time is like the sword; if you don’t cut it off, it will cut you off.’) The Indonesian proverb, given wrong interpretation, would yield sloppiness with time. In Indonesian context, this shows up in many government offices, resulting in time inefficiency, no sense of urgency, and strong impression of laziness. Consider example (16), a reminder given by the Dean of FS UM in an invitation (dated April 22, 2008) sent to the members of Senat Fakultas Sastra.

(16) Mengingat pentingnya acara ini, kami mohon Saudara dapat hadir tepat pada waktu yang ditentukan.
    ‘Considering the urgency of the [meeting’s] agenda, we plead that you can come exactly at the time designated.’
Rhetorically speaking, sentence (16) sounds rather too wordy. One might wonder why the remark is not shortened into (17).

(17) Mengingat pentingnya acara ini, kami mohon Saudara dapat hadir tepat waktu.
    ‘Considering the urgency of the [meeting’s] agenda, we plead that you can come on time’
While example (16) is somewhat wordy in rhetoric, socio-pragmatically it nicely fits the sociocultural context. Underlying the reminder is an assumption that being sloppy with time may still be there in the culture of the invitees. Thus it is an example of a psychosocial move from the “biar lambat asal selamat” attitude to the “time is money” attitude, or alternatively to the “time is like the sword” attitude. Interpreted literally and orally, sentences (16) and (17) would read as (18)a and (18)b.

(18) a. Be on time, pleease!
    b. Be on time, please.
Time efficiency is one requirement for achieving an institutional success, and the present Dean of FS UM, Dr. Dawud, has been exemplary with regard to time efficiency in his leadership and managerial system.

By comparison, in an invitation or a notice in English, remarks like (16) or (17) would be unnecessary; for punctuality is assumed to be part of the culture, especially in the academic environment. In Indonesia, the “time is money” attitude is the attitude of foreign companies operating in this country. In the UM educational environment, I should be proud to mention that the English Department, since its foundation in the mid 1950s, has been a leading department in time efficiency: for nearly six decades strong self-discipline and punctuality have been the inherent characteristics of both the teaching staff and the students. Nowadays, many other departments at UM have joined this “be on time” attitude.

To recapitulate, I need to go back to parameters (15)c and (15)d. While “time” is a universal concept, it may be perceived differently across cultures. As a result, “time” greetings which sound synonymous in Indonesian and English may be used differently in verbal communication in terms of timing. In addition, what is expressible in one language is not necessarily expressible in another. Names of days in the week in English and Indonesian, despite their different historical origins, have equivalent cultural values. Attitudes toward “time” also differ in both cultures. “Being on time” has been an inherent part of English culture, but Indonesians are still struggling to acquire the “be on time” attitude. A few have been quite successful, others are still on the way to success, and some others are even unaware of the value of punctuality.

**Politeness.** Universal politeness in language use has been an important object of investigation in the field of Pragmatics (Brown and Levinson 1987). In the language-use perspective, politeness, according to these two pragmaticists (1987: 3), means appreciation of other individuals’ self-esteem or “face” by means of three strategies: (a) the expression of solidarity (“positive politeness”), (b) the expression of restraint (“negative politeness”), and (c) the avoidance of unequivocal impositions (“off-record politeness”). Illustrative examples of these three strategies are given in (19).

(19)  
a. I fully agree with you.  
b. I’m afraid my question would sound rather personal.  
c. I wonder if you could spare me time.

By comparison, the paraphrases of (19) in (20), while conveying the same message, sound less polite or more threatening to the “face” of the addressee, because they do not observe the three above strategies of politeness.

(20)  
a. Your statement is in accord with facts.  
b. Can I ask you a personal question?  
c. Do you have time for me?

Examples (19) and (20) tell us implicitly that the same message or intention can be verbalized or expressed differently along the “ladder” of politeness, from the very bottom moving up to the top. Along this vein of reasoning, when one wants a particular room to be cleaned, s/he may say to the addressee:

(21)  
a. Clean the room.  
b. Please, clean the oom.  
c. Can you please clean the room?  
d. Could you please clean the room?  
e. I wonder if you could clean the room.
In terms of imposition, the move from (21)a to (21)e is a move toward greater “avoidance of impositions” on the part of the addressee. More clearly, it is a move from command in (a), to polite command in (b), to request in (c), to very polite request in (d), and finally to doubtful, very polite request in (e). In terms of politeness, it is an upward move from the bottom to the top of the politeness “ladder”. This is true across languages, as proved by the translatability of English utterances in (21) into Indonesian.

(22)

a. Bersihkan kamarnya.
b. Tolong, bersihkan kamarnya.
c. Bisa dibersihkan kamarnya?
d. Bisa ya dibersihkan kamarnya?
e. Gimana ya kalau kamarnya dibersihkan?

Utterances in (22) are not the literal translation but the closest natural equivalents of utterances in (21). The absence of subjects and the use of passives in (21)c, d, e are typical of Indonesian spoken discourse, especially for politeness purposes. Referring back to universal parameters (15)c, I should point out that this is an example of “language-specific” relativity without being culture-specific. That is, the deletion of subjects and the use of passives here are not culturally determined, but pragmatically driven and linguistically permitted.

Moving ahead from “language-specific” expressions (exemplified by (22)c, d, e) to “politeness” expressions, I have argued elsewhere (Kadarisman 2005) that “politeness” penetrates the 2nd pronoun system (presented in Table 5, limited to subject pronouns) in Indonesian but not in English, producing “culture-specific, language-specific” expressions. As shown in Table 5, the 2nd pronouns in Indonesian fall into three different categories: (a) true 2nd pronouns, (b) 2nd pronoun substitutes, and (c) zero 2nd pronouns.

In contrast,

Table 5. Indonesian 2nd Pronoun System and its English Equivalent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. True 2nd Pronouns</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1. kamu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2. (eng)kau</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. Anda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. 2nd Pronoun Substitutes</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1. Bapak/Ibu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2. Pak/Bu + name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3. Kakak/Adik</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4. Kak/Dik + name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5. Saudara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5. name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Zero Pronoun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English has only one 2nd subject pronoun: you. In classical texts and in poetry, English also has two kinds of 2nd subject pronouns, singular and plural: thou and ye. However, modern English recognizes only you in everyday usage. In actual use, the contrast between Indonesian and English in terms of their 2nd pronoun systems is shown in (23).

(23)

a. Kamu tinggal di mana?
b. Engkau tinggal di mana?
c. Anda tinggal di mana?
Notice that in example (23) English you has 9 lexical equivalents plus one zero equivalent in Indonesian. Across the country, these lexical equivalents may expand considerably, keeping mind that that each regional language in Indonesia has its own kinship terms; for example for the notion ‘older brother’ there are Mas in Javanese, Aa ’ in Sundanese, and Uda in Padangese. Sociolinguistically, each of the 2nd pronoun substitutes has the same referential meaning ‘you’, but has different social overtones—suggesting kinship or familial relations. Thus the reasons for replacing the true 2nd pronouns with 2nd pronoun substitutes in verbal communication are the following: (a) the true pronouns kamu and engkau are not polite enough for addressing older people or people with higher status; and (b) the true pronoun Anda sounds distant to most Indonesian speakers. Consequently, there is strong need for 2nd pronoun substitutes which are appropriate for Indonesian sociocultural context.

Another question arises: what is the significance of using kinship terms in place of the true 2nd pronouns? This is probably due to the fact that Indonesian culture is a collectivistic culture. By comparison, English culture is an individualistic culture. Comparing these two types of cultures (see Chaudhary 2004), I propose the following parameter:

(24) Individuals live together in a community.

In an individualistic culture, prominence is given to “individuals”, resulting in the high cultural value of individual freedom, individual rights, and individual responsibility. Privacy and independence are essential for individual lives; egalitarianism serves as the basis for social relations; and democracy is the back-bone for political life. The logic is that with freedom and rights granted to individuals, there comes out their responsibility. In an individualistic culture, such as English culture, people live in a nuclear, not extended family. The kinship terms such as father, mother, brother, and sister are used to refer only to members of the family.

In contrast, in a collectivistic culture—referring back to parameter (24), prominence is given to “living together”. As a result, social harmony is valued higher than individual freedom or rights. “Socially harmonious” is locally expressed by the word rukun. Government administration goes down to the lowest level of the society, combining families into Rukun Tetangga (RT), and combining several RTs into Rukun Warga—suggesting respectively ‘neighbors’ and ‘citizens’ living together in social harmony. Familial and social ties are very strong. The term keluarga besar has literal and metaphorical meanings. Literally, it refers to an extended family; metaphorically it refers to any community, such as people working in the same office, teachers and students in same school, or lecturers and students in the same university. Consider examples (25).

(25) Kita semua, keluarga besar Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Negeri Malang ...

Expression (25) is an Indonesian-specific expression, a verbal manifestation of collectivism in our culture. Direct, literal translation of the metaphor “keluarga besar” in
(25) into English *(26)a is impossible, and so a simile replacing the metaphor is the best way out.
(26) a. *All of us, the big family of School of Letters, State University of Malang ...
    b. The School of Letters, State University of Malang, is like a big family.
In Indonesian culture, the metaphorical use of big family is further extended into picking up kinship terms bapak ‘father’, ibu ‘mother’, saudara ‘brother/sister’, kakak ‘big brother/sister’, and adik ‘younger brother/sister’ and using them as terms of address. Opening a public speech, an Indonesian would address the audience:
(27)  Bapak-bapak, Ibu-ibu, dan Saudara-saudara sekalian yang saya hormati, ...
The literal translation of (27) into (28)
(28)  *Honorable fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, …
does not make sense, because, as noted earlier, in the individualistic English culture, kinship terms are used only literally to refer to members of the nuclear family, never metaphorically to refer to members of the “big family”. Again, example (27) is an example of Indonesian-specific expressions, whereas example (28) makes clear that culture-specific expressions may be translatable literally, but rejected culturally—because the literal translation has no reference in the target culture. The closest possible equivalent of (27) is (29).
(29)  Ladies and gentlemen,
The vocative or address expression in (29) implies the speaker’s respect toward the male and female members of the community. A backward translation of (29) into Indonesian given in (30)
(30)  Tuan-tuan dan Nyonya-nyonya,
would sound very strange to Indonesian speakers, because expression (30) lacks familial ties which are so deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture. To the best of my recollection, the words tuan and nyonya are commonly used—together with the words nona and anak—in a drugstore, with the major purpose of preventing the possibility of giving the prescribed medicine to a wrong patient.

This discussion should lead to answering the question why Indonesians use kinship terms in place of the true 2nd pronouns. The speech community is metaphorically a big family. A much older male person is addressed as bapak, a much older female person as ibu, a slightly older male/female person as kakak, and a younger male/female person as adik. Like the previous culture-specific expressions pointed out in the section, the use kinship terms as 2nd pronoun substitutes constitute both a culture-specific and language-specific phenomenon. The best evidence for this, as the modifier “culture-specific, language-specific” implies, is that they are all untranslatable into English.

To summarize, politeness as a pragmatic sense is a universal linguistic phenomenon. Pragmatically, there might be slight variation of politeness strategies across cultures. In Indonesian, the variation shows up at the structural level through subject deletion and the use of passive constructions. In a sociocultural sense, however, politeness varies across cultures. For example, Indonesian-specific politeness manifests itself, among other things, through the use of kinship terms in place of the true 2nd person pronouns and as vocative expressions used to address the audience in a public speech. Closer examination of these linguistic phenomena reveals that the metaphorical use of kinship terms in verbal communication is motivated by the collectivistic culture that highly values familial ties and social harmony. Translation of these Indonesian-specific expressions into English is culturally impossible, owing to the absence of reference in English individualistic cultural setting.
3.2. Implications of “Sociocultural Linguistics” on FLT

The term “Sociocultural Linguistics” is used here to combine the “social nature” of Sociolinguistics and the “cultural nature” in Ethnolinguistics. More clearly, language as a social phenomenon can be explained by referring to both the determining social factors and the underlying cultural assumptions. By combining the “power” of both Sociolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics, we may expect to achieve—using Chomsky’s terminology—descriptive adequacy and explanatory adequacy in the study of human language. That is, the right investigation of any linguistic phenomenon should be characterized by descriptive breadth and explanatory depth.

The heading of this section may probably remind the reader of Lado’s *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957). Referring back to the neo-Bloomfieldian assumption (i.e., Every language is unique, structurally and culturally) and its application in foreign language teaching (FLT), *structural differences* lead to the well-known Contrastive Analysis (CA) as well as Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), whereas *cultural differences* lead to Cross-cultural Understanding (CCU). CA is the analysis of L1 and L2 structures to find out their similarities and differences; and the CAH is a hypothesis predicting that the similarities will facilitate FL learning, while differences may interfere with FL learning. Since the decline of the Audiolingual Method, there have been critiques of CA and CAH (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991), especially with the advancement of Error Analysis (EA). That is, errors are not necessarily caused by negative transfer as predicted by CAH, but they occur naturally as part of the process of acquiring L2 (Richards 1974). Errors, as noted earlier, could be seen as reflection of imperfect L2 competence or interlanguage (IL) competence.

From my own observation of learners’ errors, I would say that both CAH and EA are useful—in different ways. CAH should make us FL teachers fully aware of L1 and L2 differences at any level of linguistic structures. Taking English as an L2, these differences may show up as language-specific structures (e.g., the final cluster [rdz] in English words *birds* and *lords*), as language-specific expressions without being culture-specific (e.g., the complex system of English verb forms as related to tenses), or as both culture-specific and language-specific expressions (e.g., the use of *How do you do?* as part of formal introduction). Errors can be caused by the structural and cultural complexity of L2, which is different from that of L1. Here we look at the errors from the language-and-culture perspective. On the other hand, EA should remind us that FL learning means an active mental process of acquiring L2 that is going on in the mind of the learner. Errors occur as the result of imperfect or on-going acquisition of L2 rules. Here we look at the errors from the learner perspective. In addition, CCU, based on the assumption that every culture is unique, can be seen as “CA” projected at the cultural level. Diverse cross-cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions should explain why people from different cultures behave differently, including in the way they use language.

Referring back to “time” greetings discussed earlier, the following errors are of special interest to us FL teachers. An Indonesian student studying at Ohio State University came to an evening party. Upon entering the hall, he cheerfully greeted those who came earlier,

(30) *Hallo, *good night everyone!

Obviously, this is a negative transfer, known as a problem of “divergence” (Lado 1957)—summed up in Table 6. “Divergence”, as the term suggests, refers to one item in L1 having two or more equivalents in L2. As shown in Table 6, *selamat malam* in Indonesian is used on
Table 6. “Time” Greetings: Problem of “Divergence”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesian Greeting</th>
<th>Occasion</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Occasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selamat malam</td>
<td>meeting</td>
<td>Good evening</td>
<td>meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parting</td>
<td>Good night</td>
<td>Parting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the occasion of meeting and parting. In contrast, English has two separate equivalents: *good evening* for meeting, and *good night* for parting. The EFL learner producing the error lacked this knowledge of greeting “divergence”. As a result, being familiar with *good night* (a nice literal translation of *selamat malam*) and assuming that it had the same double functions, he wrongly produced *good night* in place of *good evening*.

The second example is an error made by an American learning Indonesian. He sent a short message by way of SMS, ending with the following expression:

(31) *Punya hari baik.*

Obviously, his Indonesian friend got confused. Expression (31) does not mean anything in Indonesian. Being proficient in English, the message receiver figured out that (31) must be the literal translation of *Have a nice day*, which has no equivalent in Indonesian. The error was probably due to the assumption that “whatever can be expressed in L1 can equally be expressed in L2”—which is false. Sometimes, the equivalence of a “particular expression” in one language is simply “silence” in another. The expression is thus a culture-specific, language-specific expression.

With regard to “culture-specific expressions” vs. “silence”, I remember being always the latest guest to give compliments on the foods whenever I was invited to dinner during my stay in Hawaii. Upon reflection, this must be due to my being brought up and growing up in Javanese culture. As a guest at table for lunch or dinner, I would never give any comments on the foods, because adults around me never did so. I would conclude that commenting on the foods was and is a verbal taboo. As a result, in an American setting where giving compliments on the foods means showing appreciation, my culturally acquired “silence” subconsciously prevents me from doing so.

On the phone conversation between two members of an American family, ending a conversation with the following routines (32) sounds quite natural:

(32) Daughter : I love you, Dad.
Father : I love you too, Diana.

A literal translation of the formulaic expressions in (32) into Indonesian (33) would sound perverse.

(33) Daughter : *Aku sayang padamu, Ayah.*
Father : *Aku juga sayang padamu, Diana.*

Feelings of mutual love between family members are verbally expressible in English culture, but not in Indonesian culture, yielding “silence” in the latter.

Going back to “time” greetings, another Indonesian student in Hawaii met an American friend a few days after Christmas (December 25), and said to him “Merry Christmas”. The American was confused, because Christmas was over. Learning from the habit of saying *Selamat Idul Fitri* ‘Happy Eid’ many days or even a few weeks after the *Eid* (ritual celebration right after the end of the fasting month of *Ramadan*), the Indonesian student assumed that *Merry Christmas* applies the same way. It turns out that, in American context, Christmas greeting occurs only before or right on Christmas, but never after Christmas.

In addition to errors related to “time” greetings, there are also errors related to the complex 2nd pronoun system and terms of address in Indonesian. At the University of Hawaii, there is a Program of Indonesian Instruction, where I taught Indonesian from 1994
to 1999. At a small potluck party (a party where everyone brings food or beverages), an American student whom I never taught asked me,

(34)  *Sudah berapa lama kamu tinggal di Hawaii?*

‘How long have you been living in Hawaii?’

I was a bit shocked being addressed as *kamu*. While the question is linguistically right, socioculturally it is inappropriate. A student is not supposed to address his/her teacher using *kamu*, which is appropriate only for addressing people of lower status or truly intimate friends. (In Indonesia this “sociolinguistic rule” varies across geographical locations and across generations.) Again, this is another example of “divergent” problem: *you* in English has so many equivalents in Indonesian. However, in comparison with the “good night” error in (30), this “*kamu*” error in (34) is more serious. The former simply causes confusion, but the latter causes impoliteness, not in a pragmatic but in a sociocultural sense.

Indonesians learning English are to be expected not to experience any 2nd pronoun problem, since every second person is addressed as “you”. In general this is true, but the sense of “sociocultural politeness” pertaining to Indonesian 2nd pronoun system sometimes causes politeness transfer. One student who wanted to see me for consultation sent the following short message:

(35)  a. Excuse me, Sir. Can I see Pak Effendi today?

   b. (*Maaf, Pak. Saya bisa bertemu Pak Effendi hari ini?*)

Obviously, (35)a is a direct translation from (35)b. While in (35)b Pak Effendi refers correctly to the addressee, in (35)a it refers wrongly to a third person. The reason for politeness transfer is probably the “imperfect acquisition” of the socio-semantic range of *you*. The student might think that addressing a lecturer as *you*—which may sound like *kamu* or *Anda*—would be impolite, and hence the transfer. The same politeness transfer also occurred once at Professor Ali Saukah’s class, as shown in (35)—S: student, L: lecturer.

(35)  S: As Pak Ali told us last week, ...

   L: Who is Pak Ali?

   S: You. I think it would be impolite ...

   In addition to transfer causing wrong interpretation of “*Pak* + name” as a third person, I also notice a refined blending, mixing the use of English with some Indonesian politeness. Examples (36) and (37), two short messages sent to me very recently by one student on two different occasions, serve as great illustration.

(36)  *Pak*, I apologize for not informing *Bapak* everything related to my thesis.

(37)  *Pak*, to inform you that I have put my proposal in your box as *Bapak* told me to.

The use of *Pak* as a vocative (word addressing the hearer) at the beginning of the two utterances convey both “respect and intimacy”. In contrast, the use of Sir would convey “respect and distance”. The socio-semantic sense of respect and intimacy is preserved by the use of *Bapak* in the middle of both utterances, without causing any misinterpretation. Replacing *Bapak* with *Pak Effendi*, as in (35), would cause misinterpretation: referring wrongly to a third person.

My statement of “a refined blending, mixing the use of English with some Indonesian politeness” finds support in the translation of *Bumi Manusia* (by Pramoedya Ananta Toer 1980 [1990]) into English, *This Earth of Mankind* (by Max Lane 1982).

Examples (38) and (39) each present the Indonesian original with its English translation.

(38)  a. *Mama, pernah Mama berbahagia?* (p.67)

   b. Mama, has Mama ever been happy? (p. 75)
The kinship term “Mama” is used in the Indonesian original as a vocative—at the beginning of (38)a, and as a 2nd pronoun substitute, i.e., as the subject in both (38)a and (39)a. Notice that the English translation preserves Mama as the subject in both (38)b and (39)b. Accordingly, since Mama in place of you sounds like a third person, a syntactic adjustment is necessary: the subject Mama takes the auxiliary verb has in (38)b and the verb refuses in (39)b. Here socio-semantic consideration wins over syntactic rules.

Examples of learners’ errors presented above are not meant to list L2 learning problems, since there are myriads of learning problems. Listing them would be pointless. But rather they are intended to point out that L2 learning errors can be either structurally or culturally related. Linguistics, with its remarkable progress in the last five decades, should help explain the nature of both types of learner errors. As noted earlier, CA, which is structurally motivated, and EA, which is psycholinguistically motivated, are systematic attempts to solve learning problems. In the field of FLT, CA bears strong imprint of Bloomfieldian structuralism; and EA shows mentalistic influence of the Chomskyan school. In other words, linguistics never stops giving significant contributions to FLT. The recent advancement of the study of language in context should also give more practical contributions to CCU, especially to help L2 learners understand “unusual” linguistic behaviors in L2. Briefly, looking at language as a mirror of the culture and the society, “Sociocultural Linguistics” should help learners acquire L2 as an effective means of cross-cultural communication.

4. CLOSING REMARKS

In this paper, I look at language in an integrative manner, while fully aware of the endless controversies between context-free linguistics and context-bound linguistics, as can be seen—to mention just a few in a chronological order—in the works of Hymes (1974), Hudson (1980), Becker (1995), and Hanks (1996). These scholars believe that the study of human language must be placed in context, without which the functional and social significance of language can never be revealed. On the contrary, Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1981, 1995), in his long career in the discipline, has remained in the conviction that the study of language is part of the scholarly investigation of the human mind. For him, linguistics simply means context-free linguistics, whose aim is to reveal “abstract” universal principles which reside as “blueprints” in the human mind. There will never be any compromise between the two approaches. However, as exposed earlier, language is a multi-faceted phenomenon; and therefore it can be seen from many different perspectives. This paper, I hope, has amply demonstrated the strengths of the two major approaches, without driving them both into a head-on collision. Moreover, insights given by each approach should make us—linguists and FL teachers alike—better understand the psychological as well as the sociocultural nature of human language.

Chomsky’s metaphor deserves a special comment. The metaphor “language is a mirror of the mind” can be extended and applied in many different disciplines. In philosophy, language is a mirror of the deeply reflective, truth-seeking mind. In the novel, language is a mirror of the exceptionally imaginative and exploratory mind. In poetry, language is a mirror of the highly creative, poetically gifted mind. In rhetoric, language is a mirror of the socio-interactive, critical, and persuasive mind. In religious discourse, language is a mirror of the spiritually guided and enlightened mind. Indeed, the essence of
man lies in his mind, as aptly expressed in the gist of Cartesian philosophy: *I think therefore I am*. My power of reasoning is the hallmark of my existence as a human being.

Finally, as for the relationship between linguistics and the field of FLT, the latter may freely pick up from any linguistic theory a principle, a method, or a technique which best suits its own purposes. If this sounds like eclecticism, the fact is indeed *this is eclecticism*. Of course eclecticism has its own bad and good faces (Hammerly 1982: 24-5). The bad or *misguided eclecticism* looks like a desperate attempt to solve an L2 teaching or learning problem: trying everything in the hope that something will work. On the other hand, the good or *enlightened eclecticism* is an effective, well-guided attempt to select a method or a technique from any linguistic theory the teacher is truly familiar with for the purpose of solving a teaching or learning problem at hand. I do not mean that the field of FLT is dependent on linguistics. *It was* when Lado (1964) published his *Language Teaching*, but it is *no* longer so when Brown (1994) published his *Teaching by Principles*. Today the field of FLT is an autonomous and independent discipline; and when linguistics contributes something, it is intended to support FLT autonomy and independence.

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