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Teaching Descriptive Language for Communicative and Cultural Competence: Learning from CLS Malang In-Country Program 2010-2012

Peter Suwarno
(peter.suwarno@asu.edu)
Arizona State University, USA

Abstract

This article discusses possible reasons behind the success of Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Malang Indonesian abroad program 2010–2012. For this purpose, it will focus on the role of the teaching of descriptive Indonesian in the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching and in the learners' high achievement in communicative competence as shown in the Oral Proficiency Interview test results provided by the American Councils of International Education. This discussion is based mostly on observations of Indonesian teaching programs in various institutions in Indonesia in the past five years as well as my active participation and interviews with the learners, peer tutors, and instructors during the CLS Malang programs in the summers of 2010–2012. In addition, the examination of various Indonesian curricula, syllabi and teaching materials in various institutions that teach Indonesian to native as well as non-native speakers will hopefully help to provide insights for more successful language abroad programs.

1 Introduction

The increasing significance of global communication, which necessitates foreign language learning, and a strong interest in learning Indonesian have encouraged many institutions in Indonesia and abroad to offer Indonesian classes. Using different approaches, curricula, methods, and materials with creative activities, most of these institutions claim to have successful language programs. However, they also have different standards and methods of assessment to determine success.

If the focus of foreign language learning is on learners' ability to communicate in the target language, perhaps the most commonly agreed-upon and promoted method is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes communicative competence using a notional-functional syllabus and authentic materials (Lee & Van Patten, 1995). CLT has led to creative communicative learning activities using task-based, text-based, and content-based methods (Richards, 2006), the implementation of which varies from class to class (Hiep, 2007). Some emphasize fluency, while others focus on accuracy and formal language use without engaging the students in real-life communicative activities.

Ideally, if the goal of language teaching is communicative competence using authentic materials and employing the language commonly used in real-life settings (Littlewood, 1981), then teaching-learning activities should emphasize the use of descriptive and not prescriptive language. The terms "prescriptive" versus "descriptive" language are used here instead of the commonly

used "descriptive vs. prescriptive grammar", because in language teaching we focus on language use and not on grammar. Similar to "descriptive grammar," "descriptive language" in this article refers to a language that is commonly used in real-life, natural settings by native speakers which may be formal or informal, while prescriptive language, like prescriptive grammar, is the language that is considered standard and correct, not based on actual usage, but prescribed by textbook writers, grammarians, and/or government agents. It should be noted here that teaching descriptive language is by no means teaching informal language and avoiding teaching grammar. Instead, grammar is taught not through lecturing based on grammar books, but through practicing and using the grammar as well as vocabulary that is commonly used in real-life communication, which may or may not be different from prescriptive grammar, in as real a context as possible.

In practice, at least based on my observations, some Indonesian language teaching-learning activities for non-native speakers in Indonesia, even those employing CLT, seem to emphasize prescriptive language, lecturing grammar rules prescribed by grammarians. This, in my view, impedes students' real achievements in communicative and cultural competence, partly due to the possible discrepancies between the language prescribed by the grammarians and the one used in real-life communication, be it formal or informal.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the success of the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Malang Indonesian abroad program 2010–2012 and to describe why it is considered one of the most successful abroad programs. For this purpose, the paper will focus on the role of the teaching of descriptive Indonesian in successfully implementing CLT and in the learners' high achievement in communicative competence, as shown in the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test results. Other factors that may have been attributed to the success will also be considered.

This discussion is mostly based on library research and notes from my observation of Indonesian teaching programs in various institutions in Indonesia in the past five years as well as my active participation as CLS Malang Resident Director (RD) in the summers of 2010–2012. During this time, I conducted interviews and communicated with students, peer tutors, and instructors to monitors the activities and the progress of the students throughout the programs. In addition, I have examined various Indonesian curricula, syllabi and teaching materials, including textbooks used in various institutions that teach Indonesian to native as well as non-native speakers.

2 CLS Malang Indonesia

CLS Malang is an in-country Indonesian intensive summer program that is sponsored and funded by the United States Department of State and administered by the American Councils for International Education (ACIE). This program is carried out and implemented in Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, with the goal of enabling students to communicate in Indonesian the way Indonesians do. To achieve this goal, the program employs a communicative approach – with eclectic CLT that emphasizes real-life communication (Lee & Van Patten, 1995) – supported by the enforcement of immersion requiring learners' active interaction with native speakers (Genesee, 1985).

The program runs for eight weeks from mid-June through mid-August. Like many other intensive language abroad programs, the students live with host families, have extra-curricular activities after regular language class hours and participate in experiential visits or excursions during the weekends. However, CLS Malang is more intensive than other Indonesian abroad programs, because, in addition to the immersion and regular five-hour-a-day classes, the students have to spend time with staff members, Indonesian friends, and peer-tutors, and/or take cultural classes. Thus, the students spend practically the whole day every day engaging in formal and/or informal learning communicative activities with native speakers.

With regard to measuring the success of the program, assessment and evaluations were conducted several times weekly, through mid-term and final exams in the form of in-class written tests, students' oral presentations, interviews, and observations by the instructors and RD as well as site visits by ACIE officers. However, the most objective and independent measure of this success were the OPI pre-tests and post-tests conducted by a third party. While many programs attrib-

ute their success to pre-tests and post-tests that they had designed and/or administered themselves, CLS Malang OPI tests were independently conducted by the Language Testing International (LTI).[1]

OPI by LTI is a 30-minute oral exam via phone between trained OPI testers and the learners, where they engage in a live conversation. OPI measures oral communicative competence in a language that is rated based on the oral proficiency levels described in the guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)[2] to determine the students' ability to effectively and appropriately use the language in real-life situations, regardless of how the proficiencies were acquired. The validity and reliability of OPI has been tested and is maintained throughout the training, monitoring, and certification of the testers.

LTI pre-tested all CLS participants prior to the departure abroad, including those of CLS Malang Indonesia, and post-tested them toward the end of CLS programs abroad. The 2011 test results of the in-country programs for all 17 languages are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, which was a remarkable achievement according to the ACIE (see http://www.clscholarship.org/index.php/outcomes).

Table 1. Critical Language Scholarship Program: Pre-and post-program OPI scores – all languages (N=579)

Proficiency Levels	Pre-program		Post-program	
	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
NL – Novice Low	69	12	0	0
NM – Novice-Mid	59	10	5	1
NH – Novice-High	61	11	34	6
IL – Intermediate-Low	112	19	46	8
IM – Intermediate-Mid	138	24	147	25
IH - Intermediate-High	72	12	155	27
AL – Advanced-Low	34	6	96	17
AM – Advanced-Mid	29	5	71	12
AH – Advanced-High	4	1	19	3
S – Superior	1	0	6	1
Total	579	100	579	100

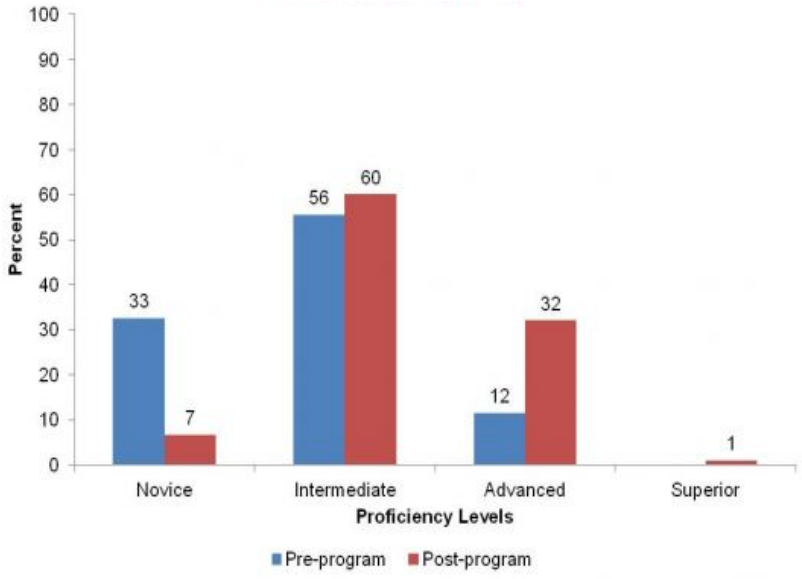

Fig. 1. Critical Language Scholarship Program: Comparison of pre- and post-program OPI scores – all languages (N=579)

The ACIE reported that the results shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 confirm that the 2011 CLS students' achievement is remarkable compared to typical intensive language programs, pointing to the larger number of hours required by other similar programs to reach the same achievements. The charts show that 301 (52%) of the total 579 students in the programs had started at the novice low to intermediate low levels, but by the end of the 8–10 week programs, only 85 students (15%) remained at the novice to intermediate low levels. The rest moved up to intermediate mid or higher. If such a result is considered more successful relative to many other similar programs (Davidson, 2012), then the data in Table 2 and Figure 2, provided by ACIE in Washington, DC, show that the CLS Indonesian students' achievements are significantly higher than the average of other CLS programs.

Table 2. Critical Language Scholarship Program: Pre- and post-program OPI scores – Indonesian (N=25)

Proficiency Levels	Pre-program		Post-program	
	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Novice Low	5	20	0	0
Novice-Mid	10	40	0	0
Novice-High	5	20	0	0
Intermediate-Low	1	4	0	0
Intermediate-Mid	3	12	5	20
Intermediate-High	1	4	16	64
Advanced-Low	0	0	3	12
Advanced-Mid	0	0	1	4
Total	25	100	25	100

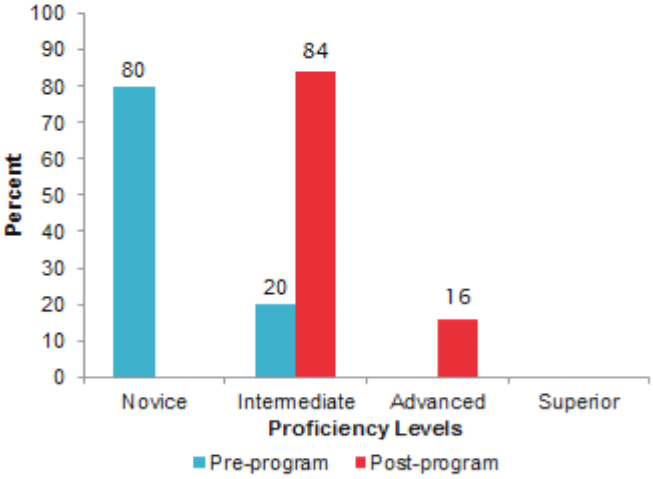

Fig. 2. Critical Language Scholarship Program: Comparison between pre- and post-program OPI scores – Indonesian (N=25)

Table 2 and Figure 2 show that 21 out of 25 students (84%) who started at the novice to intermediate low levels were no longer at these levels. The CLS Indonesian students' OPI test results show that they had moved up to at least intermediate mid (20%). The rest moved up to the intermediate high (64%) and higher (16%). The data confirmed that the Indonesian CLS program was better than the average CLS program. It should be noted that CLS Indonesian students were included in the program reports for all languages (Table 1 and Figure 1), which means that, if the Indonesian students were taken out of the data, the average rate of success of the other CLS students would be lower.

The success of CLS Malang may be attributed to many factors. Based on a variety of interviews and observations, the following section discusses the most likely reasons for the success of the CLS Malang program. First, the kind of students who participated in the program contributed greatly to the success of the program. In this case, the selection process was crucial in recruiting the best students, where the ACIE employed criteria based on predictors of successful learners as described in Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg's (1993) study that showed the criteria to include, among others, the students' past successes, experience learning another language successfully, being bilingual, and strong interest in the host country/culture that augments the students' motivation to use the language. With a pool of over 150 applicants, it was not difficult for ACIE to select the best 25 learners with the highest potential for success for CLS Malang. All instructors and peer tutors agreed that most, if not all, participants were hardworking, highly motivated learners who love Indonesia. Most other abroad programs do not have enough highly qualified applicants to select from.[3]

Second, the host institution was highly dedicated to making the program successful, by providing the best trained staff, instructors, peer tutors, leaders and host families to actively encourage the students' enthusiastic participation in the program. The staff, instructors, and peer tutors are employed full-time during the summer program with above-average salaries, so that they can focus their time and energy on facilitating the program activities and the students' success. The students who participated in CLS Malang all agreed that the staff, instructors, and peer tutors are highly dedicated, which in turn pushes the students to work hard.[4] Most of these well-paid staff members are part-time university instructors, who are available practically 24/7 to support the CLS learning activities. This situation is difficult to realize in other institutions that typically employ existing full-time staff who have many other responsibilities.

Third, all those involved were expected to expand and maximize learners' input and output activities, using CLT creatively and providing as much real-life communication as possible. For productive CLT to be successfully implemented in and outside of class, intensive training was conducted for the instructors and peer tutors throughout the year in order for them to cooperate with each other in the development of the curriculum, materials and syllabi for coherent goal-oriented activities. In addition, teacher-training activities also focus on training the instructors to monitor and evaluate each other's teaching performance and activities for continued improvement in order to enhance students' productive communicative activities during the program. The training also involves the host family members to gain their support in implementing the immersion program. To augment the students' real-life communicative activities, the CLT tasks are designed to boost language use in real-life activities outside of class, involving real people in real-life situations. Role-playing in class must, as much as possible, be followed by real-life communication outside of class or in the local communities. For example, instances of in-class role-playing are followed by real communicative activities, for example, in real traditional markets, in public transport, or, depending on the students' interests, in resolving garbage issues by working with the local communities, schools, and government offices. This is not unique to CLS Malang, but has been practiced in other summer programs as well. However, due to the availability of staff, the students of the 2010–2012 CLS Malang were constantly engaged in language and cultural learning activities during and after class hours, including time with host family members.

Fourth, CLS Malang is also committed to implementing an immersion program with a language pledge taken by students, as required by ACIE. Among a few agreements that the students must sign to be selected for this scholarship program is a signed language pledge that stipulates that students are required to use the target language throughout the duration of the program. Although some exceptions are permitted for elementary students during the first week, this pledge is seriously enforced and students who are caught speaking in English are given warnings and frequent warnings that may result in the students having to leave the program. In addition to the obligation to speak only in Indonesian, the students are warned not to spend time interacting with each other and are required to communicate with native speakers as much as possible. This is done not only to make sure that they speak Indonesian, but also to ensure that they learn more language and culture through active interaction with native speakers (Snow, 1990). Other institutions might also organize immersion programs, but based on my observations, CLS Malang is unique in that the program not only strictly enforces the use of only the target language by all involved, including host family members, but also that, outside of class, the learners are required to interact more with native speakers and less with other learners of Indonesian.

Finally, since the main goal of the program is to equip learners with skills that enable them to speak the way Indonesians do, the use of descriptive language is more important than the use of prescriptive language. Descriptive language does not mean informal language, because it refers to the real language used by native speakers that can be formal or informal, depending on the settings and communicative events. In addition, with descriptive language, the speakers can easily create connections and identify with native speakers. As discussed in the following section, teaching descriptive (as opposed to prescriptive) Indonesian is necessary not only for learners who are non-native speakers, but also for the successful implementation of CLT and for the high student achievement and their high scores in OPI tests. While many other programs claim to apply the principles of CLT, my observations show that some are still using class time for lectures on grammar and cultural notes, instead of teaching grammar by having students use it contextually, that is, in communicative activities. Not seeing any lectures on grammar or any separate grammar exercises, observers might have the impression that grammar is not taught in CLS Malang, but the grammar lessons are actually integrated in communicative learning activities. It should be acknowledged that other CLS programs and other in-country programs may have implemented the five principles or criteria discussed above, but perhaps the success of CLS Malang may be attributed to the seriousness and intensity with which it has implemented these principles. There may also be factors that are not discussed here, and there is no way of pin pointing the exact reasons for the better OPI test results achieved through CLS Malang. However, one of the features of

CLS Malang which, based on my observations, does not seem to be emphasized in other Indonesian in-country programs is the teaching of descriptive as opposed to prescriptive language.

3 Teaching descriptive Indonesian: Its significance for CLT and OPI tests

Teachers of Indonesian language classes in Indonesian schools emphasize the grammatical correctness of language use more than fluency, effectiveness, and the socio-cultural appropriateness of communication. This is fittingly so, because their students are native speakers, who already communicate daily in Indonesian in their communities. The majority of instructors believe that all they have to do is to make sure that the students abide by the rules prescribed by grammar books, the dictionary ("Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia") and grammar experts, especially those stipulated by the Center for Language Development (BPPB; Hasan, Dardjowidjojo, & Moeliono, 1993). CLT is not commonly practiced in these classes, since they are limited to teaching formal Indonesian, which draws examples from and is used in formal situations.

With regard to the teaching of Indonesian to non-native speakers, instructors in some institutions have actually focused on equipping students with communicative skills, for example, by teaching them to use the target language to accomplish different tasks. Unfortunately, many other instructors are still concerned about the grammaticality of the students' utterances, and neglect the importance of students' creativity in using real people's language contextually and meaningfully for fear being perceived as teaching colloquial language (Littlewood, 1981). CLT emphasizes learner-centered activities, where the students are required to creatively produce sentences in communicative contexts, which will enable them to communicate in the native communities (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). Thus, with the exception of college students taking Indonesian to fulfill their foreign language requirements, most foreigners learning Indonesian intend to come and visit Indonesia and to do research or conduct business activities. These students are more interested in real language being used in real-life situations rather than in grammatically correct but artificial language.[5] They are concerned about being able to communicate well following the socio-cultural norms, and are less interested in gaining linguistic knowledge of Indonesian. They need to practice interacting in real situations and to focus on their own interests rather than themes imposed on them.

CLT, which may be the best method for foreign language teaching, calls for more authentic materials and contextual communicative practices that demand more creativity from students as well as instructors (Hiep, 2007). This is the case, because CLT teaches the language of the people (descriptive language) and not the language of the grammarians or BPPB in the case of Indonesian. If we have to teach students the rules and grammar of the target language, it has to be not only done communicatively, but must also be focused on the grammar and rules that are based on real language commonly used by the majority of the native speakers and not based on what is suggested by government agencies.

Teaching descriptive Indonesian has helped students to learn to communicate naturally just like the majority of the Indonesian people do, such that they are perceived as socially and culturally acceptable speakers of Indonesian in various events and situations – formal, colloquial, or informal. This is important, because the students will be perceived and judged based on the native speakers' social attitude toward their speech, more than the correctness of their grammar. The learners usually receive compliments for being able to act and speak just like Indonesians more than being able to use the correct grammatical rules based on grammar books.

This is in line with Englebretson's (2010) research, which suggests that in everyday Indonesian interaction, it is not the use of the grammatical rules of language which is being judged by the Indonesian communities, but rather the use of pragmatically-loaded, attitudinal discourse particles. According to Englebretson (2010), Indonesian speakers tend to put more emphasis on socio-cultural attitudes of everyday speech and not the grammatical form, although Indonesian language education has been highly prescriptive and there is strong overt government pressure to define and regulate Indonesian grammar.

Indonesian-educated native speakers and those learning Indonesian in educational institutions are used to linguists and government agencies controlling Indonesian vocabulary and grammar. Interestingly, however, the Indonesian people in general, including high-ranking officials and the educated, do not follow all the formal rules and guidelines imposed on them, and many even continue to regularly come up with their own rules and speech styles. Table 3 shows some examples of words introduced by government agencies, that is, BPPB, and imposed on the people through the media, dictionary, grammar books, or school classes:[6]

Table 3. Examples of words introduced by government agencies and the equivalents used by Indonesians

	Words/constructions introduced by linguists and/or enforced by government agencies	**Words commonly used by majority of Indonesians**	**English translations**
1	*laman*	*website*	website
2	*unduh/unggah*	*download/upload*	download/upload
3	*kukuh*	*kokoh*	strong/sturdy
4	*khawatir*	*kuatir* or *kwatir*	to be worried/
5	*perdesaan*	*pedesaan*	village area
6	*memraktikkan*	*mempraktekkan*	to practice
7	*mengubah*	*merubah*	to change
8	*lever*	*liver*	liver
9	*rezeki*	*rejeki*	livelihood, fortune
10	*sangkil*	*efektif*	effective
11	*mangkus*	*efisien*	efficient
12	*pramusaji*	*pelayan*	waiter/waitress
13	*takhta*	*tahta*	throne
14	*diperbarui*	*di-update*	to be updated
15	*pembukaan perdana*	*grand opening*	grand opening
16	*undangan terbuka*	*open house*	open house
17	*menganalisis*	*menganalisa*	to analyze
18	*pergi-pulang*	*pulang-pergi*	round-trip
19	*mengawalkan*	*memulai*	to start
20	*memindahkan,mencontoh*	*mempaste, mengopy*	to copy paste
21	*petugas kebersihan*	*cleaning service*	cleaning service
22	*pelbagai*	*berbagai macam*	various kinds
23	*pialang*	*makelar*	the middle man
24	*teknik*	*tehnik*	technic/technical
25	*izin*	*tjin*	permit
26	*subjek/objek*	*subyek/obyek*	subject/object
27	*pakar*	*ahli*	expert
28	*Simpulan*	*kesimpulan*	conclusion
29	*pramuwisata*	*guide*	guide
30	*pramuwisma*	*pembantu*	house maid

There are other examples of discrepancies between what the BPPB want Indonesians to use[7] and what Indonesians actually use. In some cases, what the BPPB considers wrong is so widely used that what is prescribed by the BPPB may sound incorrect. For example, the word "kukuh" (sturdy, strong) suggested by the BPPB is rarely used and sounds incorrect, because in real communication people tend to use the word "kokoh."[8]

Due to the changing nature of the Indonesian language, many linguists concentrate their attention on finding, creating, criticizing, and modifying grammar rules. This supposedly improves the linguistic features and the use of the Indonesian language. Creating morphological rules intentionally prevents the language from being contaminated by foreign influences. These prescriptive linguists also tend to defy changes in language that have taken place naturally and conventionally throughout the history of any language.

To the descriptivists, "grammar" is mostly based on generative grammar where the hypothetical mechanism is embodied in the brain that produces sentences. Thus, descriptive grammarians emphasize the premise that language is an entity having its own rules of change and development based on its conventional use by its speakers, which in a way is following its own natural destiny. Descriptive grammar is not informal or colloquial grammar, but grammar based on conventional language use in both formal as well as informal settings. In contrast, to the prescriptivists, including grammarians and even many of the educated public, "grammar" is the mechanism embodied in books, linguistic experts, and teachers that decides the correctness and grammaticality of a language.

While the descriptivists view government-sponsored agencies which monitor and impose the use of correct grammar and vocabulary as an annihilation of the natural, conventional use of language, the prescriptivists view themselves as agents of Indonesian language maintenance, guarding the language from various ungrammatical local as well as foreign influences, standardizing grammar and vocabulary, and creating rules that maintain the sense of correctness and appropriateness, if not the purity of the language (Daoust, 1998). The dominance of government agencies that impose rules and grammar on the use of Indonesian has made Indonesian a highly planned language. However, despite heavy enforcement of the use of correct Indonesian, especially among the educated Indonesians, many Indonesian do not always conform to the rules and suggestions of the BPPB. This is true since many individual speakers do not manifest overt metalinguistic comments regarding grammar in their everyday interactional discourse. Rather, the forms that receive metalinguistic commentary are discourse particles and other expressions of social status and attitude (Englebretson, 2010).

Even the educated and high government officials do not always use correct and grammatical Indonesian, yet the Indonesian people do not view their speeches negatively or as being colloquial. See, for example, the following conversation between a journalist (J) and a minister (M) recorded from a TV interview:

J: Apa bapak betul-betul tidak tahu persoalannya sebelumnya?
(Don't you really know the problem earlier?)
M: Lah kalo nanyaknya kayak gitu, saya njawabnya harus gimana?
(If you put the question in that way, how am I supposed to answer it?)
J: Bapak kan sudah ketemu dia sebelumnya?
(Didn't you meet him beforehand?)
M: Nggak bener itu; itu cuma rumor.
(That is not true; that is only a rumor)
J: [Inaudible]
M: Masa saya harus tahu yang detail-detail gitu. Itu kan urusan mereka yang di lapangan.
(How come I have to know all the details? That is the responsibility of those on the field).

The minister did not always use formal and correct grammar and, thus, Indonesian grammarians may be quick to criticize his Indonesian. Yet, the majority of the Indonesian people perceive his speech and communication as a whole as socially acceptable.[9] See the following examples

from sentences that an instructor (I) and a textbook writer wanted the students to produce versus the commonly used utterances (C) even in formal situations:

I: Siapakah nama Ibu? (What is your name?)
C: Namanya siapa, Bu? Or Nama Ibu siapa?
I: Darimanakah anda berasal? (Where do you come from?)
C: Anda dari mana? Or Kamu dari mana (asalnya)?
I: Apakah bapak sudah makan? (Have you had lunch/dinner?)
C: Sudah makan, pak?

The supposed grammatical and standard forms (I) above are rarely, if ever, used in real-life communicative events. Thus, enforcing the use of utterances based on standard grammar – but uncommonly used language – defies the purpose of CLT and the goal of the program, which is to enable the learners to communicate using conventional descriptive grammar the way native speakers do. This goal is not an exaggeration, because, even when a foreign language instructor trains learners in pronunciation, grammar, and production of acceptable sentences, he or she is, to a degree, training the learners to be like native speakers of the target language. Obviously, CLT is not limited to training pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, but must include a wide range of communicative skills that involve cultural skills, including the understanding of the kind of language to use based on the contexts and norms, in addition to other factors that help produce a natural speech performance, such as the right paralinguistic features. All of these factors are important, if cultural competence is part of the communicative skills to be learned.

Emphasis on teaching descriptive language facilitates the achievement of communicative and cultural competence that leads to increasing native-like communicative skills, because descriptive language is based on actual language used in real contexts involving not only natural pronunciation and paralinguistic features, but also the local interactional norms. The more learners use descriptive language, the more they communicate the way native speakers of the target language do, and the more they are perceived as being competent communicatively and culturally. This is in line with the principles of CLT, as described by Brown (2007), who offered four interconnected characteristics as a definition of CLT: 1) "classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not linguistic competence;" 2) methods are "designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes;" 3) "fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use;" and 4) "students ultimately have to use the language communicatively in unrehearsed contexts." (p. 241)

The teaching of descriptive language also supports the students' achievement of high scores in OPI tests, partly due to the nature of the tests themselves. OPI relies on oral communicative competencies in real-life situations, where language use can be both formal and informal. As a matter of fact, based on my interviews and observations, it measures how proficient the students are in speaking like native speakers in different settings and situations.

My interviews with all the students taking the tests indicate that the better they described things, events, concepts, and experiences by focusing on fluency the way the native Indonesian speakers would, the higher they were rated. On the other hand, the more the students focused on the grammaticality of their responses, the less communicative and fluent they became and thus received lower scores. CLT, which focuses on communicative skills and descriptive language, had prepared the students for the OPI tests in that they focused on their communicative ability in conveying messages meaningfully. As a matter of fact, a few students who tended to be informal and relaxed during the OPI conversation were more capable of speaking more fluently and obtained higher test scores. Although this conclusion is based on interviews and observation only, the test scores indicate that the teaching of descriptive language is not only necessary for the successful implementation of CLT, but is also important for the achievement of communicative and cultural competence, which in turn is necessary for students to achieve higher scores in the OPI post-tests.

It should be noted here that this article only focuses on OPI tests that only tested oral skills of speaking and listening, because this is the test that is conducted for all languages under the CLS in-country programs, administered and rated by an independent testing institute. This by no means suggests that CLS Malang only teaches speaking and listening. As a matter of fact, as mentioned above, CLS Malang also teaches reading and writing (and thus, grammar is also taught contextually through reading and writing activities, and grammatical correction of students' work), and therefore conduct daily and weekly assessment of through written tests and assignments as well as a final paper project. CLS Malang itself also pre-tested and post-tested the students on the four skills, the results of which are similar to those of the OPI tests conducted by LTI, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. However, the locally designed and administered tests have not been tested for their validity and reliability and, thus, are not presented here. The similarity of the local written test results and that of the OPI tests may also suggest a connection between oral skills and reading/writing skills. As Geva (2006) points out, studies suggest that there is a relationship between second language oral proficiency and second language literacy.

4 Conclusion

This article discussed the CLS Malang Indonesian abroad program 2010–2012 and explained some of the important factors for it to be considered as one of the most successful abroad programs. These include the selection of the best students with the highest potential for success, the highly dedicated institutions including the well-trained staff, peer-tutors, instructors, and host families, the implementation of CLT that emphasizes real-life communicative skills, the immersion program with the language pledge, and the teaching of descriptive language. It has been acknowledged that other Indonesian abroad programs might have implemented similar principles, although, based on my observations, not to the same degree as CLS Malang has done. To better understand the reasons behind the success of CLS Malang as shown by ACIE, other factors need to be considered and extensive studies comparing in-country programs need to be conducted.

This paper focused on the implementation of CLT and how descriptive language use enhances the achievement not only of communicative but also of cultural competence. CLT emphasizes the creative use of language in meaningful contexts that require the use of descriptive language, that is, the language that native speakers actually use in real-life interactions as opposed to the language prescribed by textbooks or grammarians.

Teaching descriptive language is especially important for non-native speakers whose primary need is to communicate in Indonesian the way Indonesians do. This means they have to learn to creatively produce not only correct, but also – more importantly – contextually meaningfully sentences.

The teaching of descriptive language has also facilitated the achievement of higher scores in OPI tests, because OPI emphasizes oral proficiency based on communicative and cultural skills in real-life settings.

The teaching of descriptive language perhaps goes against the efforts of government agencies to create and enforce rules of grammars and vocabulary on Indonesians, albeit some of which the native speakers themselves fail to use. Therefore, if the goal of foreign language teaching is communicative and cultural competence, and if the measure of success is the OPI test, not only will CLT have to be implemented; for CLT to succeed, it should also focus on using descriptive language.

Notes

[1] For more information on LTI and its testing reliability and procedures, please see http://www.languagetesting.com/oral-proficiency-interview-opi.

[2] For more information on ACTFL guidelines, please see http://www.actfl.org/.

[3] For example, the other Indonesian summer abroad programs, including ACICIS (Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies), BIPAS Study Abroad in Bali, COTI – Consortium for the Teaching of

Indonesian, The Salatiga Program: PIBBI (Intensive Courses in Indonesian Language and Culture), USINDO (United States-Indonesia Society), usually accept all applicants and some even do not have enough students to fill the available slots.

[4] Positive comments of CLS students were cited in Davidson's (2012) presentation on CLS in-country programs.

[5] It should be noted that many CLS Malang students have to be prepared for CLT descriptive language, because many of them are used to learning grammar and formal languages such that learning the language commonly used in real life communication sounds informal to them and they want to be taught grammars.

[6] This list is not based on any formal study (none that I am aware of), but is based on notes from class instructors' corrections of the students' writings and oral performances, where the instructors allowed the students to use grammar and vocabulary commonly found in writings or real-life speeches that do not always conform to prescriptive grammar and vocabularies suggested by BPPB. Drawing from their notes during the summers of 2010–2012, the instructors came up with the list above that focuses only on what is expected in prescriptive grammar and vocabulary that are not followed in actual language use, written and spoken.

[7] See, for example, http://www.academia.edu/4098699/Kosakata_dan_Pedoman_EYD_Bahasa_Indonesia.

[8] This is by no means to argue that all grammar and vocabulary suggested by BPPB are not commonly used. However, some are rarely, if ever, used. For more examples, see: http://www.komunikasipraktis.com/daftar-kata-baku-tidak-baku-bahasa-indonesia/#.UyWmZPldXUU; and http://ardisetiawan1989.blogspot.com/2013/09/daftar-kata-baku-dan-tidak-baku.html.

[9] It is common knowledge in Indonesia that there tends to be a significant discrepancy between BBPP language rules and what is practiced by the majority of Indonesians, as shown, for example, in a discussion at http://ivanlanin.wordpress.com/2010/03/15/bahasa-indonesia-yang-baik-dan-benar/.

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