CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Imagine some excited travelers visiting a new place with expectation of making friends with its community and exploring the culture. Equipped with the latest dictionary and translator software of the local language, they are in a hope to easily fulfill their wish. However, having the instruments that enable them to define any words of the language does not guarantee a better understanding of the community's preferences, viewpoints, and ideas. The travelers might be confused because either the way the people use the language or the way people react towards the language is completely different from theirs.

This study focuses on the interconnection between language and cultural identities. I use the term cultural identities to refer to how a person's cultural background consciously or unconsciously affects his/her language use and outlook on life. I will explore the following aspects of culture: collectivism/individualism, reverence towards old age, high-context/ low-context communication, and monochromic/poiychromic time management

My research is inspired by a study in 1999 entitled "The Relationship Between Culture and Language" conducted by Wenying Jiang who compared the written expressive associations of two groups of participants, native Chinese speakers

(NCS), and native English speakers (NES). In Jiang's study, participants were asked to write the first six words that came to their minds when they saw the word "food" in a questionnaire. Afterward, Jiang concluded that the NCS and NES groups wrote different words to describe the word food based on their different culture. For instance, the NCS group used less adjectives to describe food. Jiang concluded that it might be due to the NCS group's lower economic positions; and that taste was more of a luxury during China's economic development period.

My motivation in this study is to expand upon Jiang's research first by comparing the written responses of twenty-eight Indonesian native Indonesian speakers (INIS), aged 18-25, studying at Soegijapranata Catholic University,Semarang, Indonesia, with twenty-eight American Native English Speakers (ANES), aged 18-25, studying at the University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, USA. The reason I chose these two groups is because I have attended Soegijapranata Catholic University Semarang during my college years for four years, and I spent two semesters at University of Southern Indiana, Evansville in 2010-2011. Therefore, it would be easier for me to collect the responses from both populations. In fact, these two areas are located in the opposite world sphere; Semarang, situated in Central Java, Indonesia, is a part of Southeast Asia commonly known for embodying the values of collectivism, high-context communication, reverence towards old age, and polychromic time management. Evansville, Indiana, however, is located in the American Midwest, thus it is associated with the American

values of individualism, irreverence towards old age, high-context communication, and monochromic time management.

However, unlike Jiang, I did not use the word, "food," but the words: society, old age, communication, and time. The word "society" represents collectivism/individualism. "Old age" represents reverence towards old age; "communication" represents high context/low context communication; and "time" represents monochromic/polychromic time management. Another difference from Jiang is that I used the term ANES instead of native English speakers (NES) and the term Indonesian native Indonesian speakers (INIS) to focus on American and Indonesian citizens.

After gathering the completed questionnaires from the participants, I will explore responses to see if the participants' perceived cultural identities are represented in their responses. My purpose is to better understand the differences and similarities in the responses of the ANES and INIS groups, and to see whether their expressions really represent their cultural identifies. There is a lot of information describing Indonesians as being collectivist, high-context, polychromic, and honorific towards the elderly; and Americans as being the opposite. I want to see if such cultural attributes are represented by the expressions of the two groups.

1.2. FIELD OF THE STUDY

The field of study is in Linguistics focusing on Sociolinguistics.

1.3.SCOPE OF THE STUDY

I conducted a research within the domain of Sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is a descriptive study that focuses on how the effects and aspects of a society including cultural identities, norms, expectations, and context impact the way language is used, and the effects of language use on culture. I would examine a phenomenon on how language and cultural identities are related among twenty-eight ANES in Evansville, USA and twenty-eight INIS in Semarang, Indonesia.

1.4.PROBLEM FORMULATION

I have attempted to address these following research questions:

1. How do the twenty-eight ANES use their language to express their cultural identities?

2. How do the twenty-eight INIS use their language to express their cultural identities?

3. What are differences and/or similarities between the expressions of the twenty-eight ANES, and the expressions of the twenty-eight INIS?

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

I have attempted to address these following objectives:

1. To identify how the twenty-eight ANES use their language to express their cultural identities.

2. To explore how the twenty-eight INIS their language to express their cultural identities.

3. To determine some differences and/or similarities between the expressions of the twenty- eight ANES, and the expressions of the twenty-eight INIS.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to strengthen my own knowledge of how language and cultural identities are related by comparing a sample population from Central Java, Indonesia, with a sample population from the Midwest, United States. Furthermore, by examining four distinct aspects of culture (collectivism/individualism, reverence towards old age, high context/low context communication, and monochromic/polychromic time management), I hope to be able to explore first hand whether such broad cultural attributes will be apparent in the written responses of two sample populations. In doing so, further research can be conducted on the subject.

1.7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Acculturation   :"A process that happens when a new culture comes into a society substantially resulting in some, not necessary all, cultural changes in the accepting society" (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p. 35)

ANES   : American Native English Speakers

Culture   :"The thoughts, behaviors, languages, customs, the things we

                   produce and the methods we use to produce them" (Jervis,

                   2006, p. 2).

Enculturation   :"A process where the culture that is currently

                   established teaches an individual the accepted norms and

                   values of the culture or society in which the individual

                   lives" (Kottak, 2010, p. 23).

INIS   : Indonesian Native Indonesian Speakers

Monochromic   : Refering to a culture that views time as linear and fixed

                   (Suntsova, 2009, p. 1).

Polychromic   : Refering to a culture that views time as flexible, cyclical, and

                   with no particular structure (Suntsova, 2009, para. 3).

Syncritisisim   : "A part of acculturation process in which two or more

                   original traditions, beliefs, viewpoints unite and create a

                   totally new culture" (Stewart & Ernst, 2003, p. 5).