

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION OF MALAYSIA STUDENTS AT SUNAN AMPEL STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY SURABAYA

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## Abstract

The background of this research aims to find out how intercultural communication accommodation of Malaysian student at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, so that there is harmonious relationship with the people around them especially in lecture activities. The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe intercultural communication accommodation of Malaysian students at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, especially in convergence and divergence. The research method uses qualitative methods with a case study approach. The results showed that students from Malaysia at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya carried out intercultural communication accommodation due to their self-awareness of cultural differences, openness in interaction and a high willingness to learn new cultures and practice them in everyday life. Even so, not all forms of communication in the new culture were adapted in everyday life because they were considered not appropriate to the culture in their hometown in Malaysia. The convergence form of intercultural communication accommodation is by learning Indonesian and Javanese to the closest people, and practicing it by trying to use an accent in accordance with the people around them. The divergence form of intercultural communication accommodation is by maintaining communication distance between types or not being too close physically like students in general. In addition, female students still wear the clothes they usually wear in their hometowns, namely 'Baju Kurung' combined with a wide veil. Meanwhile, students often wear Malaysian Malay clothing for religious activities.

*Keywords: Communication Accommodation, Intercultural Communication, Malaysian Student, Convergence, Divergence.*

## 1. Introduction

Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya is one of the state university in the city of Surabaya with students from various regions throughout Indonesia. Not only from within the country but students at the State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya also from various countries, one of which is from Malaysia. The existence of a very diverse student cannot be separated from the occurrence of intercultural communication. In intercultural communication, something unwanted sometimes happens because of differences in perceptions between communication participants in interpreting something. Fellow students from Indonesia often do something unwanted because of differences in cultural backgrounds, especially with different countries such as Malaysia, where the differences are of course greater.

Indeed, linguistically and culturally there are many similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia so that these two countries are called allied countries. However, there are also many differences between the two in many ways. So it is not surprising if students from Malaysia who study in Indonesia or vice versa need to adapt to a new environment. Moreover, the two countries have been involved in unharmonious relations several times, such as problems with national borders, culture and others, although they were finally resolved peacefully. However, even though there were several times when the relationship was less harmonious between the two countries and the existence of several cultural differences, it did not affect the harmony of intercultural communication between Malaysian students and other students. In fact, students from Malaysia are very comfortable in Surabaya as in their own village.

Students from Malaysia really enjoy studying at the Sunan Ampel State Islamic University in Surabaya. It doesn't just happen, but through several processes. The first time they lived in Surabaya there was a feeling of fear. Some even felt threatened if they saw people they didn't know. The feeling of being alienated in a foreign country due to many cultural differences makes it uncomfortable in everyday life. Moreover, not many people know the people around them. So that it caused them to be closed for a while, some even didn't talk to anyone for one week except with the lecturer for fear of making communication mistakes. However, gradually feelings of discomfort and even fear turn into something pleasant. Feeling amazed that something that was not in accordance with the customs in their hometown was considered normal even though they themselves did not do it.

From feeling uncomfortable to even being afraid of being something fun, even like being at home, it takes a lot of processes that the student from Malaysia must go through. One of them is by approaching the people around them. To approach new people, there is an intercultural communication accommodation process that runs smoothly by Malaysian students as new people. Intercultural communication accommodation carried out by students from Malaysia at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya is important to research because it reflects how to communicate with people from different cultures, especially for people living in different countries. The results of the research are important to analyze and describe what the process of intercultural communication accommodation is so that it is easily understood in detail and clearly by the wider community. Therefore, a research was made with the title "Intercultural Communication Accommodation of Malaysia Student at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya"

## **2. Literature Review**

Intercultural communication is a combination of two terms, namely communication and culture with their respective meanings, but the two terms have a very close relationship. Because there is no culture if there is no communication and communication it's self is a cultural product. The combination of the two related terms gives a different meaning with the two origins of the word or a new meaning. Before discussing further about intercultural communication, it would be better to touch a little on what is communication and what is culture, so there is a common perception.

In simple terms, communication can be defined as the process of delivering messages. The definition of communication according to Onong Uchyana Effendy is the process of conveying thoughts or feelings by someone (communicator) to others (communicant). Thoughts can be ideas, information, opinions, etc. that arise from his mind. Feelings can be in the form of belief, certainty, doubt, worry, anger, courage, excitement, and so on that arise from the bottom of the heart (Bungin, 2011: 31). Meanwhile, culture of meaning is simply the result of human creation. As for the definition of culture according to Soekanto (2009) culture is a complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and habits carried out by a group of community members.

## **2.1. Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural communication can simply be defined as the process of communication that occurs between people of different cultural backgrounds. The definition of intercultural communication according to Charley H. Dood in Liliweri (2009) is communication that involves communication participants who represent individuals, individuals or groups with an emphasis on differences in cultural backgrounds that affect the communication behavior of the participants. Meanwhile, Porter & Samovar in Mulyana & Rakhmat (2010) argue that intercultural communication occurs when the message producer is a member of a culture and the recipient of the message is a member of another culture. In such a problem, a person is immediately confronted with the problems that exist in a situation where a message is encoded in one culture and must be encoded in another culture.

People involved in intercultural communication expect effective communication in the midst of differences. According to Schramm in Liliweri (2001) there are four conditions for effective intercultural communication. First, respect members of other cultures as human beings. Second, respect other cultures as they are and not as desired. Third, respect the rights of other members of the culture to act differently from how to act. Fourth, competent cross-cultural communicators must learn to enjoy living with people from other cultures.

## **2.2. Communication Accommodation Theory**

Before discussing communication accommodation theory, it would be nice to mention accommodation first. According to Bungin (2011), accommodation is a social process. According to Suranto Aw (2010), the communication process involving people from different socio-cultural backgrounds will be more effective if the social accommodation process runs smoothly. Social accommodation is a process of recognizing differences, but there is a willingness to reduce those differences. With reduced differences, there will also be less possibility of distortion of message interpretation in communication.

Communication accommodation theory is one of the most influential in communication science developed by Howard Giles. This theory explains how and why a person regulates communication habits according to the communication of the interlocutor. Furthermore, Giles explained that usually communication actors often pay attention to expressions, or other habits. This is called convergence or being together. The opposite is a divergence or present

one by one or in part. Divergence occurs when a speaker exaggerates their differences (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011: 183).

Griffin (2009) explains that communication accommodation theory concerns intercultural meetings when communication participants think about one of their personal identities or social identities. Giles stated that people who see himself as a unique individual will adjust the style and context of the conversation to connect with others in order to reach agreement. Conversely, when people have a strong group identity in interacting with others outside their group, this theory predicts these people will emphasize their differences in speaking styles.

West & Turner (2008) states that communication accommodation theory has four basic assumptions in which accommodation is influenced by several personal, situational and cultural circumstances, finally identified with several assumptions, including similarities and differences in speech and behavior are found in every conversation; how to perceive other people's speech and behavior will determine how to evaluate a conversation; Language and behavior provide information about social status and group membership; Accommodations vary in terms of suitability, and norms guide the accommodation process.

### **3. Research Methods**

In accordance with the formulation of the problem in this study, the researcher used qualitative research with a case study approach. Qualitative research in this study describes in detail and in depth intercultural communication of Malaysian students at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. In this study, researchers focused on intercultural communication accommodation of Malaysian students.

#### **3.1. Qualitative Research**

According to Miles and Huberman (1992) qualitative data is very interesting. Qualitative data are the source of a broad and well-founded description and contain descriptions of processes occurring at a local level. With qualitative data one can follow and understand the flow of events chronologically, assess cause and effect within the realm of local people's minds, and obtain many useful explanations. In addition, qualitative data is more likely to guide researchers to make unexpected discoveries and to form new theoretical frameworks, such data helps researchers to go beyond preconceived notions and frameworks.

#### **3.2. Case Study Approach**

The strategy in this research uses case studies. Researchers chose the case study method because the problem under study is a real phenomenon at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. The problem studied focuses on intercultural communication accommodation of Malaysian students at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. This study is not intended to obtain generalized results.

According to Mulyana (2003) a case study is a comprehensive description and explanation of various aspects of an individual, a group, an

organization (community), a program, or a social situation. Case study research aims to examine as much data as possible on the subject under study. Case studies are often used in research methods, interviews, observations, document review, survey results, and data that describe a case in detail.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Students from Malaysia at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya have managed to accommodate communication by adapting intercultural communication, so that there are no significant problems while taking lectures. The effectiveness of this intercultural communication is because it goes through a good process, with an approach such as not being picky friends, learning a lot and asking about cultures there. Even though at the beginning of living in Surabaya, there was a feeling of fear, discomfort and alienated, so they needed adjustment in a new environment. The success of intercultural communication accommodation of students from Malaysia is in accordance with what Suranto Aw (2010) stated that the communication process involving people of different socio-cultural backgrounds will be more effective if the social accommodation process runs smoothly.

Furthermore, Suranto Aw explained that social accommodation is a process that realizes differences, but there is a willingness to reduce those differences. By reducing the difference, there will be a reduction in the possibility of distortion of message interpretation in communication (2010: 80). Students from Malaysia managed to overcome these fears and discomforts because of their self-awareness of differentiating cultures, openness in knowledge and a high willingness to learn new cultures and practice them in their daily lives. So that communication distortion is reduced due to increased understanding of the language between Indonesia and Malay, even though they are still one family. Such as the use of the word '*kakak*' in Malaysia which is used to refer to an older sister, while in Surabaya it is more common for an older brother.

In addition, the success of intercultural communication accommodation lies in the reduction of different perspectives in seeing cultural differences, such as seeing the way young people interact in Surabaya in a positive side so that there is no awkwardness in interacting with the opposite sex. Although according to Malaysian students in Surabaya, the relationship between men and women is very loose than in their hometowns. However, the students from Malaysia continue to socialize like in their hometown. From the success of reducing the differences, students from Malaysia have many friends from various regions in Indonesia. In fact, it's like living in his hometown.

Even so, not all forms of communication in the new culture were adapted in everyday life because they were considered incompatible with life in their hometown in Malaysia. However, it still does not reduce the effectiveness of intercultural communication, even the form of communication that is not accommodated has become the identity of intercultural communication between Malaysian students at the State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya. This accommodation process is in accordance with the assumptions of communication accommodation theory according to West & Turner (2008), which includes language and behavior providing information about social status and group membership. Accommodation varies in terms of conformity, and norms guide the accommodation process.

#### **4.1. Communication Convergence in Malaysian Students**

In communication accommodation theory, convergence is explained how and why someone regulates communication habits referring to the communication of the interlocutor. Usually communicators often pay attention to expressions, or other habits. This is called convergence or moving toward union or uniformity (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011: 183). The form of communication convergence of Malaysian students here is by studying Indonesian. Although Malay and Indonesian have many similarities, there are many differences, so it is necessary to ask a lot of questions to anyone. Not only Indonesian, they also learn Javanese, some have even made a Malay-Javanese dictionary that is used personally to make it easier to communicate with people around who speak Javanese.

The awareness to learn Indonesian and Javanese is one way to regulate communication habits that refer to the interlocutor. Moreover, in using Indonesian, the student from Malaysia tried to use an accent according to the interlocutor, although sometimes they were laughed at, especially if they used Javanese because they were considered strange by the people around them. Although sometimes laughed at, they still try to communicate in accordance with the accent of the other person because they are laughed at just because they sound funny. Attempts to use an accent to suit the other person are the result of paying attention to the facial expressions of the other person and other habits. The attempt to imitate the accent or speaking style of the interlocutor is due to self-awareness of the difference between themselves as a Malaysian Malay who lives among Indonesians who are dominated by Javanese.

The form of convergence of Malaysian students is in accordance with what Giles stated in Griffin (2009) that people who see themselves as unique individuals will adjust the style and context of conversation to connect with others in order to reach agreement.

#### **4.2. Communication Divergence in Malaysian Students**

Divergence occurs when a speaker exaggerates the differences between communication participants (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011: 183). The communication divergence of Malaysian students at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya is to maintain a distance of communication between the opposite sexes or not physically close like students in general. Even Malaysian students rarely communicate between the opposite sexes unless there are important matters. Maintaining distance is a form of nonverbal communication that has its own message for communication participants. Keeping a distance here gives a message about the Malaysian Malay cultural identity adhered to by those who are so thick with Islamic teachings. This form of divergence is understood by people around them, so that there is no problem with the social distance between types practiced by Malaysian students. Moreover, there are also many non-Malaysian students who apply communication distance between types.

Another form of divergence from Malaysian students is that female students continue to wear the clothes they usually wear in their hometowns, namely the 'Baju Kurung' combined with a wide veil in their daily activities. They are not influenced by the Muslim fashion styles that are being loved by other

students. Meanwhile, male students often wear Malaysian Malay clothing for religious activities, even though Indonesians usually wear sarongs or everyday clothes which are considered polite. This form of divergence in the form of clothing is a matter of pride because it identifies as Malaysian Malays.

In addition, another form of divergence is not being ashamed of the Malay accent, which is difficult to get rid of even though you are speaking Indonesian or Javanese. This is in accordance with what is explained in Griffin (2009) that communication accommodation theory concerns intercultural meetings when communication participants think about one of their personal identities or social identities. When people have a strong group identity in interacting with other people outside their group, this theory predicts these people will emphasize their different speaking styles.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis and description in accordance with the research objectives, researcher made the conclusion that Malaysian students of Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya at the beginning of their stay in Surabaya were afraid and felt unfamiliar with their surroundings. However, all of this was resolved due to the smooth intercultural communication accommodation process, so that the student from Malaysia feels like in their own hometown. The intercultural communication accommodation process begins with self-awareness of cultural differences, openness in interaction and a high willingness to learn new cultures and practice them in everyday life. Even so, not all forms of communication in this new culture were adapted in everyday life because they were considered incompatible with life in their hometown in Malaysia.

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