

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS BETWEEN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The study concerns with the cross culture communication problems occurs in Indonesia and Malaysia. As people from different cultural groups gather together, cultural values sometimes cause misunderstandings. There are six fundamental patterns of cultural differences and these can all impact on our daily life such as different communication styles, different attitudes toward conflict, different decision-making styles, different approaches to completing tasks, different non-verbal communication styles and different attitudes toward disclosure. When we are learning a new language, we need to learn the language as well as have an awareness of the culture. It is important to learn new meanings and new ways of behaving. However, misunderstanding may happen and when it happens, it should be resolved by the two different societies which is in conflict so that they can achieve mutual understanding. Successful conflict resolution comprises some aspects: Sensitivity and self consciousness, and Desire and necessity for the conflict to be resolved. The objective of the study is to find out the cross culture communication problems occurs in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study was conducted by qualitative method.

Keyword : *cross culture, communication, cross culture communication problem*

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. But, simply put, “culture” refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender, race or national origin. It also includes groups we join or become part of. For example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly, we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.

Our histories are a critical piece of our cultures. Historical experiences – whether of five years ago or of ten generations back – shape who we are. Knowledge of our history can help us understand ourselves and one another better. Exploring the ways in which various groups within our society have related to each other is the key to open channels for cross-cultural communication. If difficulties or misunderstandings occur, we should consider the impact of cultural differences; make an effort to sensitively resolve differences, taking cultural considerations into account, address

any difficulties with appropriate people and seek assistance when required. Even when we are thoroughly aware of all the barriers to effective cross-cultural communication and make use of available aids and tools to assist us in communicating with people from cultural and linguistic backgrounds different to our own, misunderstandings will occur. Misunderstandings occur in all communication, even between people from the same cultural and linguistic background. We cannot expect to get it right all of the time. What is important is that we know how to respond when a misunderstanding occurs and that we learn from our mistakes.

In this paper, we will discuss about the cross-cultural communication problems between Indonesia and Malaysia both in verbal and non-verbal communication and how the communication gap should be resolved by the two societies so that their main intention to understand and be understood by the people with whom they socialize can be achieved.

II. Method

This study focuses on qualitative method. In this data were collected without any

treatment. Researcher used the qualitative method to explore the behavior, perspectives, experiences and feelings of people and emphasize the understanding of these elements:

1. Search the problems of cross cultural misunderstanding between Indonesia and Malaysia
2. Analyze the differences between both of Malaysia and Indonesia

III. DISCUSSION

Cross-cultural communication is a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural background communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures. Cross-cultural communication is the transfer of communication from one person with certain cultural to another person with different social background (Liliweri, 2002). Cross-cultural communication is communication among people with different cultures as international, inter-ethnic group and inter-social societies (Samavor and Porter, 1976). Further, cross-cultural communication is communication involving communication participants which represent individuals, interpersonal, intergroup, based on the differences of cultural background which influence the communication attitude of the participants (Dood, 1991).

There are some aspects of cross-cultural communication that may be perceived differently by people of different cultures:

1. High- and low-context cultures: context is the most important cultural dimension and also immensely difficult to define. The idea of context in culture was an idea put forth by an anthropologist by the name of Edward T. Hall. He breaks up culture into two main groups: High and Low context cultures. He refers to context as stimuli, environment or ambiance surrounding the environment. Depending on how culture relies on the three points to communicate their meaning, will place them in either high- or low-context cultures. For example, Hall goes on to explain that low-context cultures assume that the individuals know very little about what they are being told and therefore must be given a lot of background information. High-context cultures assume that the individuals is knowledgeable about the

subject and has to be given very little background information.

2. Non-verbal, oral and written: the main goal behind improving intercultural audiences is to pay special attention to specific areas of communication to enhance the effectiveness of the intercultural messages. The specific areas are broken down into three subcategories: non-verbal, oral and written messages.

All communication is cultural. It draws on ways we have learned to speak and give non-verbal messages. We do not always communicate the same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual, personality and mood interact with the variety of cultural influences we have internalized that influence our choices. The challenge is that even with all the good will in the world, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators.

1.1. Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding

A cultural misunderstanding occurs when something--a word, gesture, object, social context, almost anything you can think of--has different meanings in two cultures. Sometimes the misunderstandings get resolved, sometimes they lead nowhere, and sometimes they can escalate to anything from love to war.

Cross-cultural misunderstanding happens when people from different cultures communicate or interact with one another. People from one culture act according to their norms and values, but the other does not understand the message the way it was conveyed and might interpret differently due to the cultural differences. Cultural misunderstanding also occurs when a word, gestures or social context have different meanings in different cultures.

According to (DuPraw&Axner 1997), there are six fundamental patterns of cultural differences and these can all impact on our daily life which causes of cross-cultural communication difficulties:

1. Different communication styles
2. Different attitudes toward conflict
3. Different decision-making styles
4. Different approaches to completing tasks
5. Different non-verbal communication styles
6. Different attitudes toward disclosure

1.2. Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is the use of the sounds and words to express yourself, especially in contrast to using gestures or mannerisms (non-verbal communication). Verbal communication is defined as spoken communication, including the use of words and intonation to convey meaning. One example of verbal communication is conversation. In the global era, people from different countries may meet and be involved in conversation. Sometimes these different groups have their own language and cultural background. When they use international language like English, their main intention is to understand and be understood by the people with whom they converse.

The problem in conversation is complex. As people from different communities come together, they seek to co-ordinate their actions, and render meaningful interactions. The movement from unknown and unshared, to known and potentially shareable frames of reference, occurs what is called invisible misunderstandings (Carbaugh, 2005).

Speaking a different language is an obvious obstacle to intercultural communication, but a greater and more difficult hurdle is to “speak” a different culture (Novinger, 2001). As such, misunderstanding can take place in intercultural communication, when different culture groups interact (Buhriq and Thijs, 2006). Cultures are being understood as active in conversations, just as conversations are understood to active cultures (Carbaugh, 2005).

1.3. Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is “silent” communication, including the use of gestures, postures, position, eye contact, facial expressions, and conversational distance. Non-verbal communication includes not only facial expressions and gestures; it also involves seating arrangements, personal distance and sense of time. In addition, different norms regarding the appropriate degree of assertiveness in communicating can add to cultural misunderstandings. For instance, some White American typically consider raised voices to be a sign that a flight has begun, while some Black, Jewish and Italian American often feel that an increase in volume is a sign of an exciting conversation among friends. Thus,

some White Americans may react with greater alarm to a loud discussion than would members of some American ethnic or non-white racial groups.

The obvious way we communicate is by using words. However, as we have seen, we also use non-verbal communication: our tone of voice, body language, gestures, posture and facial expressions all impact on communication.

Often people think that the use of gestures and facial expressions will be sufficient to convey an accurate message, without regard for the different rules of non-verbal communication which may apply in the other person’s culture.

If we don’t understand the non-verbal communication from different culture, it is possible that we can make a mistake of reading the other person incorrectly. Some forms of non-verbal signals are the same and universal and they have the same meaning or interpretation. But, the other forms are different and have different meaning too, or no meaning in the other culture. Craig Storti in “Figuring Out” as quoted by Wienchecki (1999) mentions three main categories of non-verbal communication in the cross-cultural context. These are:

- a. Non-verbal behaviours which exist in your own culture and in the target culture which have the same meaning in both cultures.
- b. Non-verbal behaviours which exist in both cultures, but which are assigned different meanings in the two cultures.
- c. Non-verbal behaviours which have meaning in one culture but no meaning at all in the target language.

In addition, just as verbal language differs from culture to culture, the non-verbal language may also differ. One gesture may be common in a certain country and have a clear interpretation, it may be meaningless in another culture or even have an opposite meaning.

1.4. Indonesian vs Malaysian Culture: Differences and Similarities

Indonesia and Malaysia are similar in many ways, but in the same time, these countries have tremendous differences.

1. The Language

A long time ago Malay people inhabited Malaysian and Indonesian islands. That’s why Malaysian and Indonesian languages are so similar with about 80% of identical vocabulary.

However, Malaysian language uses more Arabic words, and Indonesian – more English and Dutch words because of the years of colonization.

2. Political System And Social Life

Development of both countries was dependent on colonizers. Malaysia was colonized by British and Indonesia by the Dutch. Therefore, Malaysia is a federation and constitutional Monarchy. Indonesia is a unitary presidential republic.

Indonesia has Ministry of religion with 5 official religions: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity (Protestants and Catholics), Hinduism and Confucianism. You have to put your religion in your ID card. And you cannot have a different religion or not have any religion at all.

Malaysia has a Ministry of Unity as well as Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development dealing with women empowerment and reaching gender equality.

3. Infrastructure And Development

This makes the biggest difference. Indonesia is a typical rural country. And many out of 17 thousand islands are still untouched by civilization. There is no metro in Indonesia, not many high buildings as well, due to constant seismic activity in the region. The most developed place in Indonesia is tourist paradise – Bali island as well as capital city Jakarta.

Malaysia has a well-developed infrastructure, better internet connection, air conditioners everywhere and water heaters in every hostel and house. You could rarely see wet markets in Malaysian cities as well. In Malaysia people are more obedient to rules and have more understanding of interdependent life in the diverse community, probably that's why usually you won't see people throwing trash from the car window, that is a usual picture in Indonesia.

4. Traffic

In Indonesia streets are narrow, cities are crowded and everybody use motorcycles so traffic you can easily spend few hours in traffic in the big city. If you don't know how to ride a motorbike, your life is going to be very limited in Indonesia.

Malaysia has a well-organized public transportation system, as well, as cars are the most popular private transport. So it's much easier to get around and that's the main reason

why usually Malaysians are much more punctual than people in Indonesia.

5. Food Is Important

From the first glance, food is something life goes around in both countries. People like to eat here and they like to talk about food a lot.

6. Multiculturalism: Local vs Global

There is around 360 ethnic groups, and around 700 different languages in Indonesia. But everybody can speak state language Bahasa Indonesia. Most of Indonesians (85%) are muslims. People from different ethnic groups have different traditions, customs, they look differently. Still this diversity could be called local as their cultures are relatively similar and usually representatives of this ethnic groups live on certain islands, not moving around much. So you won't spot so many very different people in one city like you will in Malaysia.

Malaysian society is dramatically diverse combining Chinese, Malays and Indians, Muslims, Christians and Hindus and many expats living together in one country. Although state language is Bahasa Malaysia, English, that is recognized as a business language, is used as everyday language by many.

7. Collectivistic Culture

Both Malaysian and Indonesian societies value obedience to the rules and respect to the older, understanding of the interdependence of each person in the community, representatives of both culture recognize the importance of material possessions and status symbols.

8. Attitude To Foreigners

Indonesia: Hello Mister, bisafoto-foto?! Bule (pointing at you)! Wow, you are a foreigner, I wanna be your friend, I wanna take a picture with you, oh, wait, selfie is even better! Post on FB, Line or Path and show to all of my friends that I a white guy is my friend. Oh, and if you are a foreigner, you are definitely rich tourist from Germany, France or Australia...

Malaysia: Orang putih? Oh, yea, another foreigner, nice to know you.

9. Happy People

Indonesian nation is one of the happiest on the Planet. People are smiling constantly. They are friendly and helpful. Generally people live simple life. They are satisfied with the things they have and don't want to work harder to get more.

Life in Malaysia is different. Because of the greater economical development people have to work harder to have a good life. That's why probably you won't see so many smiling people around.

1.5. Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding between Indonesia and Malaysia

Cross cultural misunderstanding between Indonesia and Malaysia can be both in verbal and non-verbal communication.

1. Misunderstanding in Verbal Communication

See the following conversation between Indonesian and Malaysian:

Malaysia : Awak punya *kereta* pribadi ?
Indonesia : Tidak, orang Indonesia tidak punya *kereta* pribadi, karena itu milik pemerintah.

Malaysia : Bagaimana mungkin? Itu *kereta* yang dikemudian adikmu, bukankah miliknya? (the word "*kereta*" in Malaysia means "*car*" while in Indonesia means "*train*")

Misunderstanding in verbal communication between Indonesian and Malaysian is much caused by the differences in language. Below are some words that may cause misunderstanding between Indonesian and Malaysian:

Word	Malay meaning	Indonesian meaning
akta (from Latino-Dutch <i>acta</i>)	act (= law)	act (= written legal document)
Awak	you (casual)	me / I (only used in some regions in Sumatra Island), crew (of transportation)
Baja	fertilizer	steel Malay: besiwaja
Banci	census (Indonesian: <i>sensus</i>)	effeminate, transvestite homosexual (negative connotation)
Bandar	city	port
Bangun	to develop	to build
Bapa	father (male parent)	specific to 'Father' (God) in religious context (Christianity) <i>our Father which art in Heaven</i> = Bapa kami yang di surga Father in Indonesian is <i>bapak</i> (with an additional 'k' letter)
Belanja	to treat, giving something for free	to shop (note: also carries this meaning in Malay, though in a context more akin to "spend".)
Berbagi	to give	to share (something)
Berbual	to chat	to tell a lie
Bercinta	in (the essence of) love	make love, have sexual intercourse
Beredar	From the root word "edar" which can mean; to oscillate (planets only), to leave, or to distribute	oscillate, distributed
Berlaku	happen, occur	apply
Biji	Seed	seed, testicles ("balls", offensive)
Bila	When	if, when (older version, almost obsolete)
Bina	to build	to develop
Bias	Venom	can/be able to (also understood but less

Word	Malay meaning	Indonesian meaning
bontot/buntut	Buttock	frequently used in Malay) (same as "boleh" in Malay), venom tail ('ekor' as commonly used in Malay, sometimes in Indonesia)
Budak	Kid	slave
butoh/butuh	male genitals, an offensive reference	need
cadangan	suggestion, opinion, proposal (example: peticadangan = suggestion box)	reserve, spare (example: ban cadangan = spare tire)
Comel	cute, pretty	(to call) someone who can not keep a secret (example: mulutnyacomel= her mouth can't keep a secret)
daripada	A preposition that carries 5 meanings; 1. from (to explain the origin of something) 2.than (to do comparison) 3.from (to protect from, to avoid from) 4. from (to state the sender of something) 5. from (to state the differences)	than (comparison)(example: Kamusinilebihbaikdaripada yang itu= This dictionary is better than that one)
Detik	Jiffy	second
Doctor	doctor (medical); doctorate (educational title)	doctorate (educational title) In Indonesian, the equivalent for medical doctor is <i>dokter</i>
Duduk	to sit, a place to live on (only used informally)	to sit
gampang	bastard from 'anakgampang' lit. easy child	easy (non-negative meaning)
Getah	rubber, plant sap	plant sap
Hemat	moral excellence	frugal, pennywise, save money or something e.g. electricity, gas or water usage
Jabatan	Department	position
Jawatan	Position	department
Jemput	invite, pick up	pick up
Jeruk	pickles/preserved fruits or vegetables	orange (fruit)
Jimat	frugal, pennywise, save money or something e.g. electricity	amulet (the Malay equivalent is azimat)
Kacak	Handsome	ber- <i>kacak</i> pinggang (stands with hands on your hips) The Malay equivalent is bercekak-pinggang, a phrase to mean that a person is being bossy
Kadar	Rate	content, level
Kakak	elder sister	elder sibling (either elder brother or sister)
kakitangan	Employee	subordinate (with negative meaning)

Word	Malay meaning	Indonesian meaning
Kapan	or kafan: Muslim burial shroud (kain kafan/kapan)	when (kapanmaupulang?= when do you want to go home?)
Karya	work of art (karyawan=artists)	work (karyawan= workers)
kerajaan	government (historical association, most Malay states were governed by monarchs, from Raja = King, now refers to any kind of government)	kingdom
keranjang	'bola keranjang' = basketball (no other use than for basketball)	basket
Kereta	Car	vehicle, carriage, cart (<i>keretaapi</i> = train, <i>keretakuda</i> = horse carriage/cart, <i>keretgantung</i> = cable car)

2. Misunderstanding in Non-Verbal Communication

Although Indonesia and Malaysia are neighboring country but there is also difference in our culture. In Malaysia, looking seriously at other people is a common thing. So, if you (Indonesian) go to a place or enter a new place and the people there look at you seriously, it does not mean that they dislike you or want to fight with you as Indonesian think. Don't worry, it is a common thing in Malaysia. While in Indonesia, seeing other people seriously may lead to a fighting or may means that we dislike the people.

1.6. Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding Resolution

The first step in developing skills to communicate with people from other cultures is to develop an appreciation of the rules of communication in our own culture. Similarly, an awareness of the most common barriers to effective cross-cultural communication is the first step to overcoming them. It also means that we will not be less likely to judge a person from another culture by our own cultural values.

When we are learning a new language, we need to learn the language as well as have an awareness of the culture. It is important to learn new meanings and new ways of behaving. However, misunderstanding may happen and when it happens, it should be resolved by the two different societies which is in conflict so that they can achieve mutual understanding. Successful cross-cultural misunderstanding resolution comprises some aspects:

1. Basic needs are sensitivity and self consciousness: the understanding of other behaviours and ways of thinking as well as the ability to express one's point of view in a transparent way with the aim to be understood and respected by staying flexible where this is possible and being clear where this is necessary.

It is a balance, situatively adapted, between three parts:

- knowledge (about other cultures, people, nations, behaviours)
- empathy (understanding feelings and needs of other people)
- self-confidence (knowing what I want, my strengths and weaknesses, emotional stability)

2. Desire and necessity for the misunderstanding to be resolved. To resolve cross-cultural misunderstandings, the two societies of different cultures need to be committed to resolving potential conflicts and take responsibility for bridging the cultural gaps. They must:

- have self-awareness of their own cultural practice, including prejudice, stereotyping and bias
- understand various cultural factors contributing to cultural differences
- be sensitive and appreciate a migrant's migration experience
- have a good knowledge of, and skills in, communication
- be able to work with interpreters
- be willing to accept and appreciate other cultures (modified from Lachowicz 1997)

1.7. Responding To Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding

- Step 1: Keep your cool—try not to respond emotionally
- Step 2: Tell the instigator promptly, clearly and calmly that you find their actions upsetting. The important thing to remember here is that the person understands you find their actions, not them offensive. A good response would be: ‘Please do not say that to me, I find it offensive and upsetting’. This response is clear, direct, and does not attack the person. It addresses the action. If your response is directed to the person, they are likely to get defensive, a situation not likely to work in your favour.
- Step 3: If the person apologises, accept their apology
- Step 4: If they don't apologise, let it go once
- Step 5: If the offensive behaviour happens again, action needs to be taken
- Step 6: The action taken will depend on the parties involved. Step 6 will change depending on who is involved in the conflict situation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Culture is a complex concept but, simply saying, “culture” refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. Exploring the ways in which various groups within our society have related to each other is the key to open channels for cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication is a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural background communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures.

As people from different cultural groups gather together, cultural values sometimes cause misunderstandings. There are six fundamental patterns of cultural differences and these can all impact on our daily life such as different communication styles, different attitudes toward conflict, different decision-making styles, different approaches to completing tasks, different non-verbal communication styles and different attitudes toward disclosure.

Cross-cultural communication includes verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is the use of the sounds and words to express yourself, especially in contrast to using gestures or mannerisms (non-verbal communication). Verbal communication is defined as spoken communication, including the use of words and intonation to convey meaning. Non-verbal communication is “silent” communication, including the use of gestures, postures, position, eye contact, facial expressions, and conversational distance. Non-verbal communication includes not only facial expressions and gestures; it also involves seating arrangements, personal distance and sense of time. The first step in developing skills to communicate with people from other cultures is to develop an appreciation of the rules of communication in our own culture. Similarly, an awareness of the most common barriers to effective cross-cultural communication is the first step to overcoming them. It also means that we will not be less likely to judge a person from another culture by our own cultural values.

When we are learning a new language, we need to learn the language as well as have an awareness of the culture. It is important to learn new meanings and new ways of behaving. However, misunderstanding may happen and when it happens, it should be resolved by the two different societies which is in conflict so that they can achieve mutual understanding. Successful conflict resolution comprises some aspects:

- Sensitivity and self consciousness
- Desire and necessity for the conflict to be resolved

There are six steps to respond to cross-cultural conflict:

- Step 1: Keep your cool—try not to respond emotionally
- Step 2: Tell the instigator promptly, clearly and calmly that you find their actions upsetting.
- Step 3: If the person apologises, accept their apology
- Step 4: If they don't apologise, let it go once
- Step 5: If the offensive behaviour happens again, action needs to be taken

- Step 6: The action taken will depend on the parties involved. Step 6 will change depending on who is involved in the conflict situation.

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