

**MINDFULNESS CONCEPT AS SOLUTION TO DECREASE
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION'S OBSTACLES
(Case Study of Social Interaction among Indonesian
and Malaysian People)**

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a short overview of the main concepts and theories in intercultural communication, focuses in intercultural inhibitors like ethnocentrism, stereotype, prejudice, and mindfulness. This paper has a significant relevancy in Indonesian and Malaysian intercultural communication context, noted has many similarities. The intercultural misunderstanding could be decreased if we know at least some facts about others languages and behavior, know the intercultural communication principles, and apply it in communicating with other people as well. This paper is trying to explain both a mindfulness concept and mindlessness in communication context between Indonesian and Malaysian people. It uses a cultural psychology instrumental concept, in order to decrease possible conflicts in intercultural communication interaction. The finding fact from some Indonesian informant students who study in Malaysia, almost all of them said that they have quite big obstacles, mainly in language use. They had no idea about how Malaysian language and Indonesian are very similar, both in writing and pronunciation, yet have pretty different meaning. They known that they (Indonesian student) first adapted with the Malaysian language and tried to mindfull so as could be avoided from the conflict, and could interact without obstacle. Because they visitors they ought to adjusted. Thus, it's provides a brief introduction into the field of empirical research into culture-based value and variations, and also a short outline of the major works in this area.

Keywords: *intercultural inhibitors, ethnocentrism, stereotype, prejudice, mindfulness.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of problem

The high frequency tension between Indonesia and Malaysia indicated that there is still a high tendency of mindless and prejudice state of mind in communicating among people in these two countries. Each country has a reactive attitude in interpreting behavior, especially communication behavior that has its own perspective.

Indonesia and Malaysia are two allied countries which have lots of cultural similarities that could be looked from the likewise language, art, religion, etc. Cross-cultural communication activities have a great tendency to cause a different interpretation among two different perspectives, or usually called misunderstanding. At a glance, Indonesian and Malaysian are almost have a same structure. Indeed, they have many significant differences that probably create misunderstanding among communication act between the people of those countries. Because its characteristics, cross-cultural communication could happen in any communication context, either interpersonal, business, mass media or international communication.

As being known by us, there are many Indonesian citizens who settled in Malaysia, both in a short time like tourists, and in quite long duration of time, as the student, manpower, or the diplomat does. We also can find Malaysian citizen who settled in Indonesia. While doing some communication interaction, these two different cultures must often meet some kind of obstacles; which called as intercultural obstacles.

Stereotype, ethnocentrism, prejudice, or any other obstacles could cause cross-ineffectiveness of cultural communication. If we can't handle these obstacles, we could come to a situation which known as lack of empathy. Which is has a big possibility to create a conflict.

This paper will not discuss about political problems among two countries. This study intends to explore about how the obstacles in intercultural communication often exist among Indonesian and Malaysian people. If the people keep defend the mindless state of mind, it can creates a serious conflict. The example case that usually happened is when Indonesian society felt offended with the word "Indon", Malaysian term to call Indonesian people who live in Malaysia.

In addition, it also happened when I myself came to Malaysia several times ago, I often said "butuh" that usually used in Indonesia -or "need"

in English- when we need something, but the negative reaction from Malaysian people surprised me. As I knew the meaning of “butuh” in Malaysia, I have an understanding that makes me know about the matter. Things like that could be avoided if each country apply mindfulness concept in doing intercultural communication.

This paper also had the important relevance in the context of intercultural communication between Indonesian and Malaysian that had many similarities. Intercultural inhibitors could be reduced when we, at least, eager to learn the language and the behavior of one’s culture and know the principles of cross-cultural communication and practice it in communicating with others.

1.2. Problem Statements

According to the explanation above and intercultural obstacles phenomena between daily interaction of Indonesian and Malaysian, I, particularly want to figure out how mindfulness state of mind could be a solution in decreasing intercultural obstacles between Indonesia and Malaysia?

1.3. Objectives of Study

This paper is trying to explain both a mindfulness and mindlessness concept in communication context between Indonesian and Malaysian people. It uses a cultural psychology instrumental concept, in order to decrease possible conflicts in intercultural communication interaction. Besides, I also elaborate the assessment related to those concepts and a proper time to become a mindful or mindless.

2.0 THE CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGE: CONCEPTS OF INTERCULTURAL OBSTACLES

Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from different cultures. According to Samovar and Porter (1991 p.10) intercultural communication occurs whenever a message is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture, a message must be understood. Because of cultural differences in these kinds of contacts, the potential for misunderstanding and disagreement is great. To reduce this risk, it is important to study intercultural communication.

The relationship between culture and language has been studied for many decades, but scholars from different disciplines still have not

reached consensus on the degree to which culture and language are related to each other. The first argument is that language determines our culture. This approach comes from the “Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis” which claims that language not only transmits but also shapes our thinking, beliefs, and attitudes. In other words, language is a guide to culture. Other scholars argue that language merely reflects, rather than shapes, our thinking, beliefs, and attitudes. Despite these differences in approaches, all scholars still agree that a close relationship exists between language and culture.

In order to live and function in this multicultural environment as effectively and meaningfully as possible, people must be competent in intercultural communication, why? Because if we know about it, slowly but sure we can omit its obstacles, here are some kind of it.

2.1. Ethnocentrism

When we communicate with people from other culture, we often are confronted with languages, rules, and norms different from our own. One of the major factors influencing our effectiveness in communicating with people from other cultures is our ability to understand their cultures. It is impossible to understand the communication of people from other culture if we are highly ethnocentric (Gudykunts, 1997 p.5).

Sumner (1940) characterizes ethnocentrism as the view of things in which one’s group is the center of everything, and all other are scale and rated with reference to it (Gudykunts, 1997 p.5). Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities and looks with contempt on outsiders. Ethnocentrism is the predisposition to view the world mainly from the perspective of one’s own culture. It often involves the belief that one’s own ethnic group or race is the most vital and that several or all features of its culture are superior to those of other groups. Each person will judge the other races in relation to their own particular ethnic group or culture especially with regards to behavior, language, custom, norms and religion. Ethnocentrism can be defined as: making false assumptions about others’ ways based on our own limited experience (Ken Barger, 2004). The other definition is: Ethnocentrism is negative appraisal toward other cultural aspect according to the culture’s standardization. Person will get ethnocentric when he absolutely certain about the superiority of the culture (Fred E. Jandt. 2007 p.74).

Furthermore, Jandt noted that the other term of ethnocentric is an antipolis concept of culture’s relativism. It means that nothing is

the same with others. This concept qualifies us to try to understand people's behavior in cultural aspect before we make any judgement. Also, it means that we recognize the arbitrary of cultural behavior and have willingness to reinvestigate it through learning the other cultures (Jandt, 2007 p. 75).

An extreme form could be named as cultural nearsightedness (*budaya mata ayam*), just giving priority his own culture and underestimate others culture. For instance, US citizen uses term Americans to refer the US Citizen, though it should be used to name all people in America, either in north or south ones. That term is one of ethnocentrism form.

Moreover, it can cause some misunderstanding in communicating especially in intercultural communication. For example, as an Indonesian people, we will get offended and considers someone as an unpolite one when he gives something with left hand. In the same time, it considered as a common act in America. That misunderstanding could be decreased if we don't have ethnocentric state of mind, understand the language and other people's behavior, know the principles and applications of intercultural communication. Samovar (2001 p. 276) also noted that ethnocentrism is a negative condition and could make a destructive behavior.

Ethnocentrism leads to misunderstanding in communication especially intercultural communication. For example, Indonesian people feel impolite and will offended if there is a person who gives something with left hand, meanwhile for American people that was usual things to do and not something that inappropriate. We can reduce the misunderstanding if we stop being ethnocentrism, we should learn other culture and language, we also need to know the principal for cross-culture communication and adapted in daily life when we communicate with other people (Samovar, 2001 p. 276).

2.2. Stereotype

Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people whereby we attribute a defined set of characteristics to this group. These classifications can be positive or negative, such as when various nationalities are stereotyped as friendly or unfriendly.

Stereotypes inhibit effective intergroup communication because they distort perceptions and lead to pre-selected interpretations. They short-circuit the reciprocal process of understanding the person and the message.

Stereotypes are stumbling blocks for communicators because they interfere with objective viewing of stimuli and the sensitive search for cues toward the other person's reality (Samovar & Porter, 1988 p. 327).

It is unlikely that stereotypes will lead to a radical breakdown in communication. Instead, they lead to gradual downward spiral of miscommunication. Theorists emphasize that communication breakdown is a process, not "a sudden event frozen in time" (Hewstone & Giles, 1986 p. 21) and that stereotypes contribute to this process. The authors also see a paradoxical difficulty in that:

Out group stereotypes are likely to be used in attribution and functionally to explain away communicative difficulties thereby confirming suspicions regarding out group competence and integrity (ibid,p. 25).

Stereotypes are very resilient theories and hard to falsify. Pettigrew (1979) describes how people do not re-evaluate their stereotypes when they encounter an out group member that lacks a stereotypical characteristic, instead they label that person as "an exception" and "not like the others".

Mulyana stated, stereotype is categorization of a group recklessly, and disregard the individual's difference (Deddy Mulyana, 2000 p. 218).

How does the stereotype comes up? Based on Baron dan Paulus notions, which is explained furtherly by Mulyana (2000 p. 220), there are two factors of stereotype emergence. First, as a human we tend to divide this world into two categories, that is we and they. We see people out of our group are look alike and different with people in our group. In the other words, because we have a lack of information about them, we tend to generalize them, and consider them as homogeneous. The second thing is, stereotype seems sourced from our tendency to have our cognitive aspect in thinking about other person. Porter and Samovar defined stereotype as:

"Stereotyping is a complex of categorization that mentally organizes your experiences and guides your behavior toward a particular group of people." (Samovar and Porter, 2000 p. 269).

Eventually, stereotype could emerge what we known as prejudice. It is a generalization about one group, which simplifies the excessive reality. This categorization and generalisation would bring us to prejudice state of mind. Generalisation will inhibit the accurate perception about

other person.

Stereotyping is a result of categorization. Social categorization refers to the way we order our social environment by grouping people into categories that make sense to us. The more familiar we are without groups, the greater our perceived differentiation of these groups; and with that the less is our tendency to treat all members in a similar negative fashion. Furthermore, when we categorize strangers we form expectations for strangers' behavior. Negative expectations lead to uncertainty and anxiety; while positive expectations help us manage uncertainty and anxiety. One cannot avoid social categorization; but with mindfulness and the proper attitude one can avoid stereotyping.

Prejudice comes from stereotyping and the attachment of value judgment to the stereotype. Prejudice can be positive or negative; but usually it refers to negative attitude.

2.3. Prejudice

We can mention prejudice is very close to stereotype state of mind. The definition of prejudice according to Samovar and Porter is:

“Prejudice amounts to a rigid and irrational generalization about a category of people. Prejudice is irrational to the extent that people hold inflexible attitudes supported by little or no direct evidence. Prejudice may target people of particular social class, sex, sexual orientation, age, political affiliation, race or ethnicity.”

On the other hand, according to Ruppert Brown (1995) prejudice is negative perspective which include race community, religion , or any other socialization that already been there.

There are different kind of prejudice, one of them is ethnic prejudice. It is an antipathy based on a wrong and awkward generalisation. It may be felt or stated. It may be directed to other whole group, or someone in that group. We do have prejudice if we make appraisal toward a group of people based on our previous stereotype without know the actual condition about them (Deddy Mulyana, 2000 p. 223).

In communication activity, prejudice is one of obstacles and barrier for a goal achievement. A message receiver who has early prejudice would feel suspicious and tend to against the source. It can also cause what is known as lack of empathy and finally lack of trust. If the negative

imaging toward a certain group then followed by negative prejudice, moreover without seeing the fact in contrast with it, it can decrease the empathy and finally the trust of a person toward another person or group.

Stereotype could raise, what is known as, Self Fulfilling Prophecy. We can say that our perception is so much influenced by our wishes. If we wish other people do something as we want, we can communicate our wishes to them with subtle ways. That is, it has a greater opportunity to change people action as we wished before.

Therefore, linked with this problem, the suspicion among Indonesia and Malaysia will change into a lack of trust between them and finally leave out an empathy state of mind. If there's nothing to do through this problem, a prolonged problem will come up, which surely doesn't expected by all of us.

2.4. Mindfulness

The intercultural obstacles as mentioned above like ethnocentric, stereotype and prejudice could trigger the misunderstanding in interaction and communication action with people from a different culture. To decrease or minimize a possible conflict, intercultural communication noted that there are two concepts to handle it, named mindfulness and mindlessness.

Mindfulness involves creating new categories, being open to new information, and recognizing strangers' perspectives. Mindful ways of learning about strangers revolves around certain psychological states. Other definition of mindfulness is a concept that makes a person give his or her appreciation and respect towards the difference of people. When we apply it in communication interaction, we will find that communication, especially with a mindful concept, will respect the cultural difference.

Langer 1989 isolates three characteristics of mindfulness:

1. Creating new categories
2. Being open to new information
3. Being aware of more than one perspective
(Gudykunts & Young Yun Kim, 1997 p.40).

In order to make mindful concept be in our mind, we have to remind ourself that we have a limitedness possibility to predict other people. Though a difference of group could influence our communication way. After recognizing this possibility, we would try to collect some

information that help us understand what is happening, and eventually could decrease our anxiety and uncertainty in having interaction with people from different culture. In addition, it also could reduce some conflicts caused by stereotype and prejudice.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

It is important to take in to consideration the methodology to be used in order to have an in depth understanding of the factor that will cause possible conflicts in intercultural communication interaction. This research is analyzing using case study method. Whereas case study method was make an effort to completely analyzing the possibility of data concerning the subject that was researched. The case study was an empirical research that investigated the phenomenon in the context of the real life, when limits between the phenomenon and the context did not appear clearly, and the proof of multi-source was made use of (Yin, 2003 p.18).

By utilizing a qualitative descriptive research, which means this research only explained or related the results of this research or gave the explanation clearly about social situations. In this case the interaction situation between Indonesians and Malaysians.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Effectiveness intercultural communication among Indonesian and Malaysian

As I mentioned above, this paper merely concentrates on how effective the application of mindfulness concept on intercultural communication, especially between Malaysia and Indonesia. Based on the finding fact from some Indonesian informant who I have interviewed; four university students who study in Malaysia, two in Melaka and other two students in Kuala Lumpur, almost all of them said that they have quite big obstacles, mainly in language use. They had no idea about how Melayu language and Indonesian are very similar, both in writing and pronunciation, yet have pretty different meaning.

This some words have same spell but different meaning from Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia.

WORD	MEANING (MALAYSIA)	MEANING (INDONESIA)
banci	The inhabitant's census	A man who act like a women
bisa	poison	Can
boleh	can	Approve, allow
bontot/buntut	back	Last child / tail
budak	child	Slave
butuh/butuh	The man's sex organ	Need
kereta	Car	Train
comel	cute	complained
pengajian	education	Study and reading Alquran
pusing	Circle, around	Headache
Tewas	Lose	Dead
percuma	free	useless
Wayang	Film	Traditional dance from Java

Source: from interview

At first, they felt upset when they tried to speak Malaysian to make friends, but their Malaysian friend mock them. "We often were being a person to be laugh at. Let's say, one of us been asked by a lecturer whether he could speak Malaysian, and then he answered, "ya.. saya bisa sedikit-sedikit". Before finishing his words, he found that his Malaysian friends were laughing, since they used to know bisa is poison in Malaysian. In contrast, this Indonesian student said *bisa* to express ability. There is another case when he heard Malaysian told the result of badminton competition. His Malaysian friend said; *Indonesia tewas dalam final bulutangkis semalam*. He got offended by those words. He considered *tewas* as a rude word, without knowing its real meaning in Malaysian. In Melayu language or Malaysian, *tewas* means *kalah*, or loose. Those are some examples of misused of language that happened to Malaysian and Indonesian.

I also meet that misused of language when I said *butuh* to express my

needs to a friend or seller. It is really common to say *butuh* in Indonesia, if we need some information, refusing seller's offering, ask someone's favor, people usually use that word. But after I know its meaning in Malaysian, which is something impolite, I never say that word anymore.

Those things not only happened in interpersonal communication but also in mass communication. It also caused by a strong ethnocentrism state of mind. So when Malaysian call Indonesian as *Indon*, they get offended because it has quite close meaning to a negative one and usually used to call Indonesian or woman labors in Malaysia. It could be considered as an insult, though Malaysian maybe doesn't mean it.

4.2. Solution to use mindfulness concept

Based on those ineffective Indonesian-Malaysian intercultural experiences, I try to analyze it with mindfulness concept. It is a concept as a solution to handle intercultural obstacles, especially in use of language.

Interaction among the people from these two countries is getting higher. We can see from the increasing numbers of Indonesian students, tourists, and workers who live in Malaysia or vice versa. All of them surely got involved in communication activities, since they are some similarities between those languages, we can categorize it as an intercultural communication. In order to become effective, I suggest some steps to make it better, they are:

- Omit or minimize the intercultural obstacles as mentioned above; ethnocentric, stereotype, and prejudice state of mind. Though those are not always negative, it has proven that when we have and do them excessively, we will arrive to a negative condition.
- Normally we are not mindful in interacting with others. This is both a skill to be learnt and an attitude to be adopted constantly in intercultural communication but to minimize intercultural inhibitors if it emerged in interaction, we must have the culture mindful that is understanding and caring that the people were present with their difference to one another was based on the background of his culture. Then received the difference the way it is by means of as follows; openness to novelty, alertness to distinctions, sensitivity to different contexts, implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives, and orientation in the present.

In brief, to do effective intercultural communication, there are several ways: developing healthy self-concepts including healthy self-identities and social identities, correcting ethnocentrism, dealing with stereotyping, increasing tolerance for ambiguity, increasing empathy, improving reactions to strangers by active listening and proper feedback, and developing mindfulness.

Based on the interview with the informants that is Indonesian student who was studying in Malaysia, known that they (Indonesian student) first adapted with the Malaysian language and tried to be mindful so as could be avoided from the conflict, and could interact without obstacle. Because they visitors they ought to be adjusted.

5.0 CONCLUSION

1. Intensive intercultural communication process that happens among Indonesian and Malaysian not only would build a perception and experience but also identify the differences among them.
2. Becoming an intercultural individual is very important so we can decrease the misunderstanding between people from different cultures.
3. By becoming an intercultural individual, we study to accept the existing differences.
4. To handle the main case which this paper focused to, we may use or apply mindfulness concept from Gudykunts.

Literature review

- The paper of Benjamin Dattner, *A Framework for Understanding Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings*. In this research he endeavors to create a systematic framework for understanding cross-cultural misunderstandings. He examines various kinds of communication and various contexts in order to address two major issues, one mainly logical and the other mainly empirical. The first issue is: what are the kinds of cross-cultural misunderstandings that can occur, how do they relate to one another, and can they be classified into larger categories of misunderstanding. The second issue is: what cultures are likely to have what kinds of general and specific misunderstandings when they interact.

- The Paper of Rudolf Sinkovics, Ethnocentrism – A Key Determinant in International Corporate Strategy Formulation. The paper try to identification of different area of corporate strategy formulation which are assumed to be influenced by varying levels of ethnocentrism.

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