

From Stereotype to Cross Cultural Adaptation: Assimilation Manggarai Students in Malang

Frederik Masri Gasal¹, Radityo Widiatmojo², Asih Zunaidah¹ and Nisrin Husna³

¹Communication Science Program, Bina Nusantara Institute of Creative Technology Malang, Indonesia 65126

²Communication Science Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia 65126

³Public Relation Program, Bina Nusantara Institute of Creative Technology Malang, Indonesia 65126

Keywords: Cross-cultural Adaptation, Stereotypes, Community Culture

Abstract: Cross-cultural adaptation is a long process of adjustment to gain comfort when in a new and diverse environment. The students from Manggarai – Flores (Province of East Nusa Tenggara) residing in Malang have different identity characteristics, and this affects how they interact and adapt to local residents. Communication which is built between these students and the local residents can't be understood without learning the basic steps in cross-cultural adaptation process. This research uses qualitative research method with interpretive paradigm intended to gain deep understanding from Manggarai student's point of view in their adaptation with the local community in Malang. This research ultimately aims to contribute to the study of intercultural communication in Indonesia, especially to understand and deepen the communication between community cultures from outside the region and the local communities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Malang is well known as an education city in Indonesia. The growth of the number of students in Malang on average increases about 5-10 percent annually. The students come from various cities in Indonesia and this makes this city a 'meeting point' of many different cultures. Malang becomes an educational destination for the people of Indonesia, including the people of Manggarai, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara.

Cultural differences require Manggarai students to adapt to Javanese culture; the local culture of Malang people. The imperative to adapt to local culture encouraged Manggarai students to seek out strategies to be accepted and to blend in with the local communities. The process of adaptation faced obstacles when there was a conflict among fellow Manggarai students that led to the death of one of Manggarai students on November 14, 2015. This conflict triggered stereotyping by the local communities particularly to Manggarai students, and to East Indonesian students in general.

2 STEREOTYPES

Before entering the adaptation process, it is good to ask why people need to adapt in a new environment. The answer can be explained by looking deeply at the locals. In particular environment, individuals live and gather in generations. At the time, collectivism was strongly built and embedded with the local values. They made it, they used it, and they believed in their own system. When someone enters that system, he/she is carrying his/her own cultural identity and also his/her own system. To distinguish the new person in their environment, the locals use a label namely 'a stranger' for most of the time.

For instance, when an American comes to Tabanan Village at Bali, the locals immediately assume that the person is a stranger. The physical appearance and language are surely different because a human being was born with his/her own cultural identity. Moreover, humans tend to be different based on how they were raised in a particular environment. This fact generates familiarity and similarity in a specific cultural environment. Samovar, Porter and McDaniel explained when someone tackled with an absence of familiarity or similarity, they often resort to stereotypes. Because we meet so many strangers

and are often confronted with uncommon circumstances, stereotyping is a common happening. Thus, stereotyping can be a natural way of dealing with the unknown, but problems frequently arise from a failure to recognize negative stereotypes (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2013).

For example, the people of Surabaya (East Java) tend to talk loudly and use a lot of obscene words. When a Surabayan comes to Solo in Central Java, a problem will appear. Failure in recognizing the Surabayan culture made Solonese assume that Surabayan were so rude. In this example, the Solonese behave to *avowal*, which Littlejohn explains as a personal articulation of one's views about group identity. To achieve *avowal*, people need an action on it and it called stereotype (Littlejohn & Fross, 2009). However, Psychologists Abbate, Boca, and Bocchiaro (2004) offer a more formal definition about stereotype:

"A stereotype is a cognitive structure containing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human social groups." The reason for the pervasive nature of stereotypes is that human beings have a psychological need to categorize and classify. The world is too big, too complex, and too dynamic to comprehend in all its detail. Hence, you tend to classify and pigeonhole. The main problem is not in the pigeonholing or categorizing, but rather "the difficulty lies with the overgeneralization and the often negative evaluations (attitudes and prejudices) that are directed toward members of the categories."

This explanation fits with Indonesian condition. In a multicultural city like Malang, many people could be strangers if they move to other city. Once they enter a new environment, the action of stereotyping by the locals will occur. Indonesia is too big to become a single category of culture. In fact, overgeneralization often addresses specific ethnic group, such as Maduranese, Bugis, Sumatranese, Papuanese, Flores also Manggaraian, with a negative stereotype. To undo this stereotype, Martin and Nakayama (2010) argued that you have to be very vigilant and do something that is not "natural"—to be very conscious of how to see and categorize people. To do so, the locals and the stranger must be in one line of process, which is adaptation.

3 CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Among theoretical frameworks to answer adaptation process, Kim offers step-by-step adaptation on his

theory, The Cross-Cultural-Adaptation. Kim explained that the first period of adaptation is called Cultural Adaptation, where individuals struggle to adapt in their own ways, try to decode and encode every communication aspect surrounding the environment. This process is called enculturation. Kim (2005) believes that enculturation is the process of communication and interaction in cultural environment in continuous time to fit in with the locals who share a similar image of reality and self.

When individuals enter a new culture, they feel like a stranger in many ways. This shows the lack of familiarity and understanding about the locals. One way to decrease it is tempting enculturation. Through the time, the level of understanding will elaborate familiarity in the new culture. Not all of the local values are acceptable by strangers. Kim argued that this situation generates "crises" which various behavior and mentality are brought into awareness and turn into a question. Conflict will arise, and strangers start to learn the new cultural system. The process of learning new culture is the most important aspect in acculturation. Intentionally or accidentally, strangers need to obtain and to be influenced by new information as a self-image.

When a new lesson learned, strangers actually unlearned some of the old culture that they had acquired. This shifting of culture is the essence of deculturation. In order to become acceptable in the new culture means that strangers somehow must shift the old culture, and mix them with the new culture. Strangers do not have the capacity to make fundamental changes in the new environment. However, strangers have a hidden power to force some of the locals to adapt with them.

As the combination of acculturation and deculturation continues through good communication, strangers are profound to a new role. Strangers confirm the local values through their attitude and social behavior. The ultimate goal of this theoretical framework is toward assimilation. Kim argued that assimilation is "a state of maximum possible convergence of strangers' internal and external conditions to those of the natives" (Kim, 2005).

Research on intercultural believes that Cross-Cultural-Adaptation and Communication play important roles in lives. Schartner and Young (2013) find out the effect of Cross-Cultural-Adaptation on 680 post graduate student at Newcastle University UK in 2013. The finding provided a better result of adaptation and academic achievement on students studying Cross-Cultural-Communication (CCC) compared to the students that do not attend CCC

class. The relationship among key terms associated with Cross-Cultural-Adaptation is shown in Figure 1.

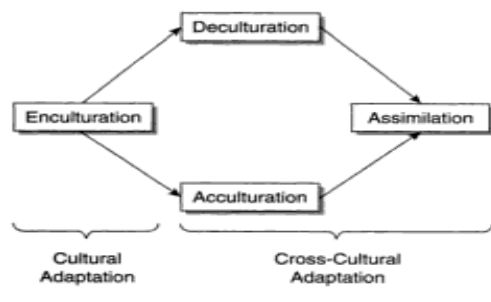


Figure 1: Relationship Among Key Terms Associated with Cross-Cultural-Adaptation (Kim, 2005)

4 METHODOLOGY

This research used the interpretive paradigm. For interpretive researchers, the goal of social research is to develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings (Neuman, 2014). The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

The approach used to build this research is a qualitative approach. This approach allows us to examine in detail, through the use of specific research methods (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Case study is used as a research strategy, where the things examined in the case study include individuals, actions and interactions, behavioral artifacts, setting and events or specific incidents (Punch, 1998). The case study design used in this study is single case study and single level analysis where the case taken is only one case, while the unit of analysis is the process of adaptation of Manggarai students with the community of Malang.

The sampling technique conducted in this research is purposive sampling, which means the researcher chooses the individual or location to be examined based on a specific purpose. The researcher chose 6 Manggarai students as the informants because they were able to represent Manggarai students in Malang and they were also active in some Manggarai communities in Malang. By in-depth interview, researchers interpret the data based on Kim's Theory framework.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On the enculturation process, there were similar patterns on each informant. They found a struggling condition when meeting the locals in the University or around the neighborhood. One of the informants, Anastasia, stated that she was being threatened as a stranger in her campus at the first time. "There were some unfriendly face when I introduced myself," said Anastasia. This situation at the moment led to the difficulties to adapt with the locals. Emiliana Wilminse just become silent. "The very first step of my new life in collage was struggling to adapt and blend in the new culture. I was at a cold condition, I became quite." Atanasius Cahyadi even took massive time to decode and encode the local culture. "It took me quite long time to freely communicate with the other students, especially the locals." To reduce the worrying of adaptation, they did the same pattern, which were looking for other Manggarai students and started to make friends with the locals. This step is crucial and becomes the gate for the next period.

On one hand, the informant did the acculturation process by learning the local culture, like Maria Melania did. "Over the time, I learn their culture and their characters in common senses." While Anastasia did very well effort by telling a great narration to the local. Anastasia said, "Just be active to change people's mind about NTT." Atanasius Cahyadi did a different way. "Non-formal occasion, such as Ngopi (having a cup of coffee with classmate) brings me a new perception, and I try not to differentiate my classmates from other students. Then I join Manggarai community in Malang. It is a semi-formal organization. It occasionally holds a situational program for us." The informants also tried to learn to control their voice volume and intonation so it will not disturb the neighbors. It gave a huge advantage to adapt with the locals in Malang.

The acculturation process faced such a big obstacle when the conflict among fellow Manggarai students occurred and led to the death of one of Manggarai students. A negative stereotype emerges against them. Atanasius states, "After that accident, one specific person show an unfriendly behavior to me." However, the negative stereotype is not a generalization of Manggaraian. Researchers found that the female informants were just fine after the conflict. Emiliana Wilminse argue, "My interaction with locals was just fine when that fight occurred."

After the conflict, each informant enters the shifting process. The negative stereotype about Manggarai students disappear smoothly. Atanasius confirm, "I felt that the environment here really

appreciates the plurality and I realize that by respecting the rules made by the owner of boarding house and local people, conflict will never occur." Emiliana did a self-reflection on deculturation process. Emiliana said, "I try to understand the character, I don't force people to make a friends with me. Rethink about what is right and reflect what is wrong." While Anastasia Patrin tried to get closer to the locals. "If the locals look unhappy with me, I just choose to be quite and make no comment. If a local tries to make a distance, then I come forward to say Hello," said Anastasius. From the time period of enculturation to deculturation, researchers found that those process need a long time. Based on in-depth interview with each informant, the adaptation needs one until two years.

The final stage is assimilation, which is the blending of Manggaraian with locals. Anastasia becomes a story teller in his community. "By asking and telling a story, I believe people will appreciate each other. That is the beauty of our diversity," argued Anastasia. Researchers profoundly find a great tool to accelerate an assimilation, which is language. Malang language is unique, because locals say words reversely (i.e. *Boso Walikan* – Reversed language). Atanasius learned the diverse culture through language. "The local custom and interaction were easy when I learn the local language," said Atanasius. Emiliana does the same pattern by learning the local language to blend with the locals.

The acculturation process experienced by the six informants is a long process. The environment of residence and campus became one of the important factors in the process. The informants are in an environment and a campus which tend to be heterogeneous or plural. It helps them to learn to adapt to the local culture, from the language to the local customs.

In addition to residential and campus environments, communities or organizations are also another important factor during the acculturation process. Communities or organizations, both in local area and in campus, help informants to develop insights and perspectives on things including how to appreciate differences. Differences of opinion and ethnic backgrounds they encountered in communities or organizations did not make them introverted. But with differences, they were increasingly helped to adapt and appreciate different cultures.

6 CONCLUSION

The adaptation conducted by Manggarai students in Malang aims at being accepted by the environment and the local community. The different cultures between Manggarai and Javanese culture requires these students to learn how to adapt; what strategies and steps they should take.

The concept of Cross-Cultural-Adaptation developed by Kim helps us to experience how communication processes are built between two or more parties of different cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural adaptation process passes through four important stages where each stage can take a long time and even when a conflict occurs, the adaptation process will not work properly and acculturation will take a very long time

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Researchers realized that the completion of this research certainly cannot be separated from the involvement and support of many parties. We respect and thanks to informants and their community for giving us more space to join and take part in many discussions. It is such an honor to share experiences to improve the image of Manggarai people in Malang, as well as in other areas of Java.

REFERENCES

- Abbate, S. C., Boca, S., & Bocchiaro, P. (2004). Stereotype in Persuasive Communication: Influence Exerted by Disapproved Source. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 34*(6), 1191-1207
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Kaplan, B., & Maxwell, J. A. (1994). Qualitative Research Methods for Evaluating Computer Information Systems. In J. G. Anderson, C. E. Aydin, & S. J. Jay (Eds.). *Evaluating Health Care Information Systems: Methods and Applications* (pp. 45-68). New York: Springer
- Kim, Y. Y. (2005). *Theorizing About Intercultural Communication*. California: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Littlejohn, S., & Fross, K. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. California: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Martin, N. J., & Nakayama, T. K. (2010). *Intercultural Communication in Context*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London: Pearson Education, Ltd.

- Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (1st ed.). London, Thousand Oaks California, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, E. R., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2013). *Communication between Cultures-Cengage Learning*. Boston: Wadsworth
- Young, T. J., & Scharter, A. (2013). The Effect of Cross-Cultural Communication Education on International Students Adjustment and Adaptation state. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(6), 547-562

