



Convergence Behavior in Intercultural Communication Among Vietnamese and Local Students at Tadulako University

Donal Adrian^{1*}, Retnadumillah Saliha², Chontina Siahaan³, Edwan⁴

^{1,4}Universitas Tadulako

²Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu

³Universitas Kristen Indonesia Jakarta

Corresponding Author: Donal Adrian donal.adrian2014@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Convergence, Vietnamese Students

Received: 18, February

Revised: 19, March

Accepted: 28, April

©2026 Adrian, Saliha, Siahaan, Edwan: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

There are inherent cultural distinctions between Vietnamese and local students at Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences. Vietnamese students need to move toward convergence or adaptation in order to avoid conflicts brought on by these cultural differences. This study aims to determine how Tadulako University's Vietnamese and local students are using intercultural communication to attain convergence and adjustment. Constructivism is the paradigm for the research. The study uses a case study technique and a qualitative methodology. According to the study's findings, Vietnamese students behave convergently toward local pupils, who are primarily members of Central Sulawesi's indigenous Kaili ethnic group. This convergent behavior is a type of adaptation, especially when it comes to Vietnamese students' usage of Indonesian to make sure they can communicate with local students and avoid misunderstandings. At Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), social interactions between Vietnamese and local students are developed through convergence or adaption in views and conduct.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation full of islands and many cultures. Based on the information that is currently accessible, Indonesia is an archipelago that extends from Aceh to Papua. The Republic of Indonesia is made up of 17,504 islands, 8,651 of which are named and 8,853 of which are unidentified (Situmorang, 2006). Indonesia is renowned for its cultural diversity in addition to its abundance of natural resources, such as its enormous biodiversity of plants and animals. Numerous ethnic groups, each with a unique culture, may be found in Indonesia. Aceh, Batak, Minang, Malay (Deli, Riau, Jambi, Palembang, Bengkulu, and others), and Lampung on the island of Sumatra; Sunda, Badui (a traditional community in Banten Province that isolates itself from the outside world), Javanese, and Madurese on Java; Dayak, Malay, Banjar, and others on Kalimantan; Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, Gorontalo, Minahasa, Manado, and others on Sulawesi; Maluku: Ambon, Ternate, etc.; Papua: Dani, Asmat, etc.) (Chontina, 2018:1.)

Every island has a unique culture, which is inevitably accompanied by unique communal traits, from everyday language to culinary and artistic conventions. The Kaili ethnic group, which is present in almost every district and city in Central Sulawesi Province, has a very fascinating culture to research. The culture of the Kaili ethnic group differs greatly from that of the Javanese people in Yogyakarta, according to evidence reported by Adrian (2006). When communicating, the inhabitants of Central Sulawesi always express their opinions in a loud, direct manner (if they like something, they say so; if they don't, they say no). The Javanese people, who communicate in a soft and pleasant tone of voice, behave significantly differently from this. The belief systems, values, and standards that have been acknowledged as expressions of the cultures themselves are reflected in the behavioral distinctions between these two civilizations.

Without a doubt, the Kaili ethnic group's cultural traits in Central Sulawesi are a unique attribute that helps them identify with other individuals or ethnic groups both domestically and internationally. Social interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds can undoubtedly be impacted by these cultural traits. According to Sya'roni (2008), social contacts do not always go well, especially when meeting with members of other ethnic groups. Communication is significantly influenced by cultural differences among ethnic groups (Xiaochi Zhang, 2010).

According to a study by Adrian (2016:1-2), disparities in perception, how verbal and nonverbal cues are used, and behavioral and attitude practices can all contribute to interethnic problems. For instance, when interacting socially on the Tadulako University campus, Kaili ethnic students will behave considerably differently from Vietnamese students. These distinctions, such as limited language skills, may make it more difficult for these pupils to communicate with one another.

The inability of Vietnamese and Kaili students at Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) to interact socially effectively is a phenomena. This is caused by low language proficiency; Vietnamese students,

for instance, frequently misunderstand local pupils because they are unable to utilize English and Indonesian successfully. Vietnamese students eventually withdraw or limit themselves in social situations as a result of these constraints. The barriers between Vietnamese and local students at Tadulako University can certainly lead to new problems, such as the emergence of inter-ethnic stereotypes (belittling other ethnic groups), resulting in offense and conflict among them. This phenomenon prompted the author to choose the title "Convergence Behavior in Cross-Cultural Communication Between Vietnamese and Local Students at Tadulako University."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-Cultural Communication

In an intercultural setting, communication is deemed successful if the communicator's objectives are satisfied and the techniques employed are suitable for the situation, according to Brian H. Spitzberg (quoted in Samovar & Porter, 2000: 375). Culture, connections, environment, and function are all part of the context in question. When analyzing and assessing behavior, culture plays a critical role. What is appropriate in a friendship or a professional connection depends on the nature of the interaction between the individuals involved.

All civilizations can use cultural patterns (beliefs, values, and norms) in communication. The motivations for applying cultural patterns are categorized by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (in Lustig & Koester, 2003: 91). First, people from various cultural backgrounds must discover solutions to issues that are generally similar. Second, there are very few ways to address cultural problems. Third, although people of a culture may choose alternative approaches, the available solutions to issues will be selected based on what is consistent with that culture. Fourth, the solutions selected will eventually influence cultural presumptions about norms, values, and beliefs.

Research by Turnomo Rahardjo (2005: 70) acknowledges the significance of one's cultural background in communication and identifies, among other things, the elements of intercultural communication that might lead to uncertainty and anxiety in cross-cultural interactions. These elements include expertise, knowledge, and motivation. These elements are referred to as cultural competency by Lustig and Koester (2003: 105). Knowledge, motivation, and behaviors that take place in a particular setting together with suitable and impactful messaging are all necessary for cultural competency.

It is inevitable for people to feel "culture shock" when they enter a new culture. When two people from different cultural backgrounds come together, culture shock usually happens. Physical symptoms of this "culture shock" phenomenon include lightheadedness, nausea, sleeplessness, extreme anxiety of dirty or unhealthy circumstances, helplessness and retreat, fear of being tricked, robbed, or hurt, loneliness, disorientation, and more (Dodd, 1982). Effective cross-cultural communication might be hampered by "culture shock" due to its intrinsically confusing nature. Several specialists have examined the

phases of "culture shock" that an individual experiences during this transition process (Dodd, 1982).

Message

A message is a component of communication; it has a tangible shape that the senses may see or take in. A message is the real physical product that the source encodes, according to Dominick (2002). the distinction between a message and encoding. A message is the outcome of the encoding process that may be viewed or received by the senses, whereas encoding is the process that takes place in the brain to create a message. The word "No" is an example of a basic message that can nonetheless have a significant impact. Messages can also be complicated and intricate. A message can be sent to a single person or millions of people; it can be created at significant expenditure (like a book) or delivered at little cost or for free (like spoken words).

A message is defined by Berger et al. (2014) in their book **The Handbook of Communication Science** as a collection of behavioral expressions, usually made up of mutually understood symbols, created in an attempt to communicate an inner state. Communication is nonetheless feasible despite the fluidity of the relationship between symbols and the things they represent, in part because most symbols employed by members of a society share a shared interpretation.

A message is fundamentally a speech act—the implementation of an action through vocal expressions and body language (gestures)—rather than just a collection of symbols that make up words and sentences. According to Searle (1969) (in Berger et al., 2014), when a source uses symbols to create a message, they are actually carrying out a full range of actions, including many propositional acts (like referring and grounding) and speech acts (like uttering words, sentences, and body language) in addition to one or more illocutionary acts (like declaring, stating, directing, expressing, or performing). Every action carried out by the source (the communicator) through the message must be interpreted by the recipient, and every action carries the risk of misunderstanding; the recipient may not comprehend what is said (misunderstanding the words or sentences), what is intended (misunderstanding the reference or prediction), what has been done (misunderstanding the illocutionary act), what the speaker aims to achieve (misunderstanding the desired outcome), or the speaker's underlying motivation for these interrelated acts.

The Accommodation Theory

Every action carried out by the source (the communicator) through the message must be interpreted by the recipient, and every action carries the risk of misunderstanding; the recipient may not comprehend what is said (misunderstanding the words or sentences), what is intended (misunderstanding the reference or prediction), what has been done (misunderstanding the illocutionary act), what the speaker aims to achieve (misunderstanding the desired outcome), or the speaker's underlying motivation for these interrelated acts.

All forms of communicative activity during a discussion, such as similarities or variations in voice intonation, pace, accent, volume, vocabulary,

grammar, body language, and so forth, can accommodate both convergence and divergence. Both divergence and convergence can be non-mutual, in which one speaker moves away from the other while the other moves toward them, or mutual, in which both speakers move toward or away from one another. Additionally, convergence can be "partial" or "complete." For instance, speaking as quickly as you can to match the other person's pace or a little faster to get closer to their pace.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

A paradigm, according to Mulyana (2003), is a framework for comprehending the complexity of the real world. In the socialization of their followers and practitioners, paradigms are firmly embedded. They are shown what is significant, legitimate, and reasonable by paradigms. Additionally, paradigms are normative, providing practitioners with guidance on what to do without requiring extensive existential or epistemological discussion.

The constructivist paradigm was employed in this investigation. The constructivist paradigm is practically the opposite of the perspective that centers the process of discovering truth or scientific knowledge around observation and objectivity. According to this paradigm, the social sciences are a methodical examination of socially significant conduct through close, in-depth observation of the social behavior involved in establishing, preserving, and controlling their social environment (Hidayat, 2003).

Types of Research and Research Approaches

A case study methodology is employed in the qualitative research design. Sugiyono (2013) defines qualitative research as an approach to studying objects in their natural state (as opposed to experiments), where the researcher is the primary instrument, data collection methods are triangulated (combined), data analysis is inductive, and the findings prioritize meaning over generalization.

Techniques for Selecting Informants

According to Bogdan and Taylor (Ilyas, 2017), who claim that informants were chosen purposively, the researcher's choice of informants was based on the following:

- a. Research subjects who are more open to the researcher's presence should be taken into consideration.
- b. Their capacity and readiness to discuss experiences from the past and present.
- c. Anyone deemed intriguing, including people with unusual experiences.
- d. Because they may have preconceived notions or biases that could affect how they understand the information, it is best to avoid choosing subjects with particular or professional ties.

Data Analysis

According to Sulaiman Mamar (2018), processing and analyzing qualitative data involves four steps, which are as follows:

a. Data Editing or Display

In order to avoid forgetting the meanings of acronyms and details that are still fresh in the researcher's consciousness, data and information gathered from informants on a daily basis must be edited as soon as they come home. The researcher should not go to bed before doing this. The following is the process for modifying interview results: (1) Any information that is still retained in the researcher's mind must be transcribed into written form with systematic sentence structure; (2) interview recordings made with a tape recorder or smartphone must be transcribed into written form with systematic sentence structure; and (3) interview notes, especially those that contain abbreviations, are corrected and supplemented. Because it takes a lot of time and care to transcribe interview recordings into writing, researchers usually give this duty to a student or another person in exchange for payment. Since the notes from the interview recordings made by that individual are still in their unprocessed state, the researcher must continue to edit them by selecting the essential facts and data pertinent to the study question and eliminating any unnecessary details.

b. Data Categorization or Grouping

The categorization or grouping of data from observations and interviews follows the completion of data editing or display. This is done as follows: (1) all observation results and responses related to the first research question are separated and grouped into a single category, namely Group 1; (2) the results of observations and informant responses related to the second research question are separated and grouped into Group 2, and so on if there are more than two research questions.

To conduct future qualitative data analysis and write the final research report, the results of this categorization or grouping of data from observations and informant interviews are essential.

c. Interpreting the Meaning of Data

As is generally known, data interpretation was done from an emic perspective—that is, according to the informants' own opinions—during informant interviews. As a result, the informant, rather than the researcher, deciphered the meaning of the data throughout the interview process; if an informant gave a succinct or shallow response, the researcher prompted the informant to elaborate on the purpose or significance of their response.

This interpretation of the significance of the data is what I call the "essence" of qualitative research. Because of this, results from qualitative research are more thorough and detailed than those from quantitative research, which is based on statistics and numbers.

The researcher once more interprets the meaning of the data "ethically" in the third step of qualitative data processing and analysis. This involves formulating propositions, identifying key concepts or novel concepts from the field data, and even developing a grounded "small theory." Developing conclusions and suggestions for the research is tremendously aided by interpreting the significance of the data.

d. Drawing Conclusions and Making Recommendations

Developing the research conclusions as responses to the study's research questions is the last phase of processing and analyzing qualitative data. A "small theory" is a research conclusion. The study findings will include two or more conclusions if the proposal addresses two or more research questions.

Following the formulation of the research conclusions, the researcher also develops recommendations or ideas to be taken into account by other researchers or decision-makers in order to address the issues faced by the study's target group. The practical or applied advantages of the research are represented by these recommendations or suggestions. The process and phases of qualitative research, as described above, can be better understood by looking at the diagram below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vietnamese students who are pursuing a bachelor's degree at Tadulako University are brought from their native country. These students are dispersed throughout almost every faculty of Tadulako University, including the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences' Communication Studies department. Vietnamese students will engage with several other students during their stay, most of whom are locals from Central Sulawesi Province. Local students are by definition a community whose traditions are a reflection of the culture of Central Sulawesi's indigenous Kaili ethnic group.

Students' interactions with one another form a communication-based cross-cultural social exchange. Even after meeting in class, they are reluctant to socialize socially since miscommunication often results from linguistic hurdles. Additionally, Vietnamese students at Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences seldom connect with local students on campus; instead, they prefer to mingle with their classmates.

The behavior of Vietnamese students who prefer to socialize with their peers can essentially lead to negative stereotypes of local students. This is demonstrated in research by Andriana Noro Iswari and Prof. Pawito, Ph.D (Adrian, 2006) with the article title Intercultural Communication among Students (Study on Intercultural Communication among Batak Ethnic Students with Javanese Ethnic Students at Sebelas Maret University Surakarta (explains that whether acknowledged or not, differences in cultural backgrounds can make us very stiff in the process of interacting and communicating. To realize good or effective communication with different cultural backgrounds, it is not as difficult as we imagine and not as easy as many people think. In communicating and interacting with different cultures, many things must be considered and there are also many possibilities for misunderstandings in it. These differences give rise to attitudes of social prejudice, economic prejudice, political prejudice between ethnic groups. These attitudes manifest as discriminatory attitudes (excluding other ethnic groups), interethnic stereotypes (demeaning other ethnic groups), and social distance (choosing to interact with other ethnic groups). If these attitudes are not addressed appropriately, they will cause social breakdown between ethnic groups. In other words, the

prevalence of cultural differences will lead to stereotypes of each ethnic group in encounters, which would undoubtedly impede successful intercultural communication.

At Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Vietnamese students who keep social distance from local students—for example, by choosing their companions carefully—basically display culture shock. At the very least, people who are immersed in a new culture will encounter culture shock. When two people from different cultures get together, culture shock usually happens. Physical symptoms of culture shock include lightheadedness, nausea, sleeplessness, extreme fear of filthy and unhealthy objects, helplessness and retreat, fear of being deceived, robbed, hurt, loneliness, confusion, and more (Dodd, 1982). Because of its tendency to be disoriented, culture shock can hinder effective interethnic communication. The stages of culture shock that a person goes through in experiencing this transition process have been studied by several experts (Dodd, 1982).

According to additional research findings, Vietnamese and local students at Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences are making adjustment attempts. They carry out this adjustment pattern in a number of ways, such as working together to finish group projects assigned by instructors. Vietnamese students learn from local students through these activities to improve their English and Indonesian communication skills. In order to facilitate effective communication, particularly in the use of language and nonverbal cues, local students also make adjustments by inviting Vietnamese students to sit together during free time, joke around, and, of course, learn each other's personalities.

According to Berger et al. (2014: 214) in their book *The Handbook of Communication Science*, a message is a set of behavioral expressions created in an effort to communicate an inner state. These expressions often consist of mutually understood symbols. Because most of the symbols used by interactants within a community are conventional, communication is still possible even when the relationship between symbols and what they represent may vary. A message is fundamentally a speech act—the enactment of an action through verbal expressions and gestures—rather than just a collection of symbols that make up words and sentences.

According to the Accommodation theory, Vietnamese students' adaptations to local students at Tadulako University are said to represent a type of convergence. The act of changing one's communication style to more closely resemble that of another individual or group is known as convergence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of the study on intercultural social interactions, Vietnamese students exhibited convergence behavior toward local pupils, who were primarily members of the Kaili ethnic group, an indigenous tribe in Central Sulawesi. This convergence behavior is a type of adjustment, particularly when it comes to Vietnamese students using Indonesian to effectively communicate with local students and avoid misunderstandings that

could result in unfavorable stereotypes. In order for social interactions between Vietnamese and local students at Tadulako University's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences to be well-established in both interpersonal and group relationships, convergence is also related to attitude and behavior.

REFERENCES

- Adrian, Donal. 2016. Relationship dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya Etnik (Studi Kasus: Pembentukan, Pemeliharaan dan Dinamika Relationship dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Sulawesi Tengah dan Mahasiswa Jawa di Yogyakarta). Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta.
- Berger, C. R., et al. 2011. The Handbook of Communication Science. USA: Wadsworth
- Dodd, Carley H. Dynamics of Intercultural Communication (Fifth Edition). USA: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, 1998
- Hidayat, Dedy N. 2003. Paradigma dan Metodologi Penelitian Sosial Empirik Klasik, (Jakarta: Departemen Ilmu Komunikasi FISIP Universitas Indonesia)
- Ilyas, 2017. Konstruksi Identitas Etnik Untuk Memperoleh Akses Ekonomi dan Tuntutan Corporate Social Responsibility (Studi Kasus pada Komunitas Etnik Lokal di Sekitar Tambang Migas Tiaka, Kabupaten Morowali Utara, Sulawesi Tengah). Universitas Padjadjaran.
- Littlejohn, Stephen W., and Karen A. Foss. Theories Of Human Communication, Tenth Edition. USA: Waveland Press, Inc, 2011
- Mamar, Sulaiman. 2018. Filsafat Dan Metode Penelitian Sosial. Palu: LPP-MITRA Edukasi.
- Mulyana, Deddy. 2003. Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif, (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya)
- Nasution, S. 1992. Metode Penelitian Naturalistik Kualitatif. Bandung, Tarsito,
- Siahaan, Chontina & Donal Adrian. 2018. Strategi Mengurangi Ketidakpastian Informasi dalam Komunikasi Antarbudaya Mahasiswa Etnik Papua dan Mahasiswa Etnik Jawa di Universitas Kristen Indonesia Jakarta. Proceeding ISKI, Jakarta
- Sya'roni. 2008. Interaksi Sosial Antarkelompok Etnik di Kelurahan Tambak Sari, Kecamatan Jambi Selatan, Kota Jambi. Kontekstualita. 23(1):15-25

Sugiyono. 2013. *Memahami Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif*, cet. 8. Alfabeta: Bandung.

Zhang, Xiaochi. 2010. *Developing Students' Intercultural Communication Competences in Western Etiquette Teaching*. China West Normal University. Vol. 3, No. 4. p. 224-227