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Intercultural Miscommunication With Local People: A Descriptive Study on Foreigners' Perception and Experiences

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Abstract— Initially, the complexity of communication is mainly considered on the transmission of the message from senders to recipients and this can be affected by a range of things. One of them is cultural situation particularly for people from different cultural backgrounds and social groups involved in intercultural communication. However, this aspect has made it difficult for people to understand one another while communicating. This communication problem leads to intercultural miscommunication. This study discussed this phenomenon and aims at identifying sources of miscommunication and how foreigners respond to them. The writer interviewed four respondents from different countries in gaining the data. The result of the study showed that foreigners experienced intercultural miscommunication resulting from verbal and non-verbal discursive symbols. In terms of verbal miscommunication, lexical choices, paralinguistic choices, formulaic expressions, accent, and pronunciation are the sources of problems. In non-verbal communication, serious facial expression, intrusion to personal space, and eye contact are the sources of miscommunication. Culturally-ambiguous words and phrases/expressions also lead to miscommunication.

Keywords—intercultural communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, miscommunication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication and culture have great influence on each other. The culture in which individuals are socialized creates the way they communicate, and, vice versa, the way individuals communicate can reconstruct the culture. According to Samovar, communication is a dynamic process which people attempt to share their internal states with other people through the use of symbols shared in certain group communities [1]. Indeed, the group members share speech codes, systems of symbols, signs, meanings and rules for use in specific situations and interactions. Several aspects, like the relationship, age, gender, social status and generation, affect communication. Thus, not all group members communicate in the same way in the speech community.

Communication and miscommunication between people from different cultures is not new. It has occurred for thousands of years when cultural groups waged wars, conducted commercial activities, and engaged in social changes. Furthermore, as Samovar has clearly stated, communication among people from different cultures, called intercultural communication, dated back to the dawn of civilization, when first people formed tribal groups and started to interact with others from within or from different ethnic groups [1]. There was a point in history where past experiences, perception, and cultural background greatly affecting the way people talk. The behaviors in interaction among people have not only become ordinary but also are necessary, creating a multiple but mutually inter-reliant global communities.

Nowadays, globalization and immigration have created multi-ethnic and multi-complex societies enabling people with different cultural backgrounds to be involved in face-to-face or mediated communication. In fact, intercultural communication has become unavoidable. But, differences in the cultural backgrounds, even when common languages are shared, have always hampered people to understand each other. These communication problems have led to the need for understanding the reasons behind miscommunication between people of different cultures and, in literature, this phenomenon has been framed as intercultural miscommunication.

Generally speaking, when individuals from different culture and language backgrounds engage in communication, it is very likely that one or more will have great potentials of communicating due to business or travel purposes. As Samovar has described, during interaction with someone speaking a different language, there is a very high potential for miscommunication, unless the person is fluent in the language and knowledgeable in the culture [1]. This type of communication is commonly found in global business communities. In Lombok, the hospitality and the openness of the local community open up an opportunity for interaction involving foreigner tourists and local hosts. Both foreigners and locals have great potentials for miscommunication and misinterpreting the messages resulting from the languages that they speak and from the way they see the world around them. However, this intercultural miscommunication can be reduced to achieve cross-cultural success by developing mutual cross-cultural understanding, deeper respects for differences, and better corporation and communication among them.

This study examines this phenomenon by investigating how foreigners and local people experience and resolve intercultural miscommunication. This study particularly observes categories of intercultural communication involving verbal (phrases or words) and non-verbal (gestures) communication that lead to miscommunication. Thus, the study will discuss the following questions: What intercultural miscommunication experiences do foreigners have when interacting with the local people? What verbal and non-

verbal symbols are produced leading to the miscommunication?

The present research aims to examine what are foreigners' intercultural miscommunication experiences occurs and types of words or verbal phrases also gestures can be conducted during interaction between foreigners toward local people which are viewed from foreigners' perception.

Effective intercultural communication in terms of studying miscommunication produces benefits such as:

a. Helps foreigners and tourists agents or local people from different ethnic background to communicate effectively with one another and reduce negative stereotype.

b. Enhance teamwork in an organization where colleagues respect another's cultural background and capabilities.

c. Guides the local business management to design policies to give well trained to the local people (employees) about the important of intercultural communicate on how to have better social interaction (meeting bargaining, negotiating, etc) with foreigners to prevent miscommunication.

A. Intercultural Communication

Communication is the process where individuals try to exchange ideas, feelings, symbols, and meanings using verbal and non-verbal cues. However, as Samovar described, there is close correlation and connection between cultures communication in intercultural communication [2]. Intercultural communication takes place when people of different cultures interact. In addition, intercultural communication involves people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event [2].

There are a number of areas in which global interconnectedness and the cultural dynamic of society will have a direct impact in our life. These areas include globalization, international conflict and security, world competition for natural resources, global environmental challenges, world health care issues and population shifts.

Thus, it can be obviously said that successful intercultural communication is a matter of highest importance if humankind and society. It means that it can produce benefits when people attempt to exchange information, ideas, or feelings with others who have different cultural backgrounds.

Successful intercultural communication requires that people recognize and understand culture's influence on both verbal and nonverbal interaction. This process includes the sending of verbal messages via words on the one hand and the sending of non-verbal messages such as pauses, attitude, volume and tone of voice, physical appearance or facial expression on the other hand.

According to Mehrabian, in intercultural communication as a type of communication, there are there are three essential elements involved: words, tone of voice, and non-verbal behavior [3]. These variables are identifiable as verbal and non-verbal communication.

1) Verbal communication

Verbal communication is the use is the use of auditory language to exchange information with other people. It includes sounds, words, or speaking. The tone, volume, and pitch of one's voice can all contribute to effective verbal communication.

Classifies of verbal communication in terms of systematic differences in contextualization cues in the form of verbal messages: lexical (word choices), phonological (dialects, accents, pronunciation), paralinguistic choices: use of formulaic expressions, code switching, and style switching [4].

2) Non-Verbal communication

On the other hand, non-verbal communication is communication between people through non-verbal or visual cues. This includes gestures, facial expressions, body movement, timing, touch, and anything else that communicates without speaking. Moreover, classifies non-verbal communication or messages into two comprehensive categories:

1. Those are primarily produced by body. In this case it involves appearance, movement, facial expressions, eye contact, and touch.

2. Those that the individual combines with the setting such as space, time, and silence [1].

In every communication process, understanding and interpreting is the barrier which cause miscommunication very easily for both verbal and non-verbal communication. This phenomenon can occur when most people have language differences to express themselves in two different linguistic systems. This situation presents an obvious challenge because they tend to force themselves to use a series of grunts, gestures, or words which may result in frustration and miscommunication.

B. Intercultural Miscommunication.

Intercultural miscommunication often occurs because of violations of normative expectations in a communication especially if a person comes from an individualistic-based culture and the other party comes from a collectivistic-based culture which often leads to misinterpretation. There are many examples of miscommunication. One of them is the treatments that are based on assumptions of how a patient regards such issues could potentially result in miscommunication. Research in nursing has also acknowledged the importance of culture in understanding a patient's attitudes toward birth, death, sex, relationships, and ritual [5].

Another example is variation in pronunciation. For example, an Indonesian which has hard time to distinguish several certain sounds. Indonesian language as mother tongue influences significantly to the way of Indonesian students in pronouncing English sounds. Compared to English, Indonesian language generally does not have differences between spelling the letter and pronouncing the sounds. For a wide variety of reasons, these circumstances can contribute to miscommunication both verbal and non-verbal communication.

II. METHOD

This session discusses the method of the research related to research design, correspondences of the study, data collection, instrument, and data analysis. In this study, the writer uses qualitative method with descriptive survey.

There were four foreigners (2 men and 2 women) correspond in voluntarily to take part in the study to share their own experiences with regards to miscommunication during their interaction toward local people. The female tourists were from Ukraine and England. The Ukrainian traveled to Indonesia and Lombok for the first time and stayed in Lombok for three days after visiting Java and other parts of Indonesia. The English also traveled to Lombok for the first time and had just arrived at the Kuta beach of Lombok. The male tourists were from Australia and Turkey. The Australian has travelled to Indonesia for several time and lived in Bali until early 2020. He has also visited Lombok several times. The Turkish has just visited Lombok although he has been twice to Indonesia.

The methods of data collection used in this field work were recordings and interviews. The recordings were made manually by note takings and instrumentally by means of recording equipment. The interview guide consisted of questions in mediated correspondences where intercultural miscommunication experiences were narrated. The data were transcribed, interpreted, and analysed using content analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural miscommunication occurs when there is a breakdown in communication between speakers two different cultures and languages. Furthermore, if both partner originate from the same culture area communication generally takes place without any difficulties, but if we assume that both dialogue partners have unequal cultural backgrounds and come from two different countries misunderstandings and misconstructions may occur [6]. Thus, cultural background differences are probably the most significant problems leading to miscommunication among foreigners and local people.

The study showed that all of the respondents were aware with the existence of the intercultural miscommunication. The following table portrays the respondents 'experiences and opinions in intercultural communication.

TABLE I.   RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

Foreigners' Intercultural Miscommunication	Types of Intercultural Miscommunication	
	Verbal Communication	*Non-Verbal Communication*
Australian-British	Lexical (word) choices and paralinguistic choices (formulaic expression)	Serious facial expression
Ukrainian	Pronounciation	-
British	Accent	Intrusion to personal space
Turkish	Lexical choice	Eye contact

Based on the table above, it can be observed that the first respondent's experience in this case dealing with verbal communication process such as wrong used of word and paralinguistic choices. The first respondent's experiences in miscommunication mostly occur when communicating with women or girls.

"........First thing I can think of comes with vocabulary... Specifically, the word fun. I know I live in Bali, and unfortunately there are many working girls. But a normal wisdom to all someone is Australia, at least, is... "Did you do anything fun last night or yesterday". Fun seems to mean sex to a lot of women here strangely where it should just mean the literal something enjoyable. It's a bit weird I know hahaha.

From the first respondent's experience, the word is seemly problem in here to create miscommunication is *fun*. For the respondent, it is very common word to be used in daily conversation to ask people about something enjoyable. Unfortunately, for local people particularly for girls it means indicating sexual activities

Another experience can be analyzed based on his following statement involving paralinguistic choices.

"I am the type of guy who I'd see someone who looks good, a stranger, I will say something...Like something small, and "hey cool shirt" or "wow looking good today. Apparently I'm weird in doing this but I think it's nice. If I meet a woman online or in personal, who finds me attractive, they will more likely take my compliments seriously. But come on.. It's just a compliment, just being nice.

The first respondent clearly describes the main problems which cause miscommunication in terms of paralinguistic choices. In this case, the terms of using some phrases such as *Hey cool shirt* or *Wow looking good today*. These phrases can produce miscommunication when the respondent has communication with girls or women who find the respondent is very attractive. However, the local girls/women seemly think these phrase as something that the respondent like them; in fact, the respondent just tried saying something nice to them for showing polite things. Moreover, the girls tend to take the compliments seriously by showing serious face expression as non-verbal miscommunication.

Furthermore, miscommunication which has been experienced by first correspondence also found in another paralinguistic aspect.

People tend to be less specific about things as they generally don't know if or when things can happen. And perhaps this has a follow on effect into other areas of dealing with things. Religiousness could also have something to do with it as well. "Insha Allah" for example.

In this case, the respondent observed that the formulaic expression such as *Insha Allah* can be classified leading to miscommunication for the respondent as foreigners. The respondent might think that local people tend to use this religious expression to show certain thing happen because this expression deals with religious term. However, the miscommunication often happen when local people actually

use this expression for showing about things as they generally do not know if or when things can happen.

In addition, the second respondent also experience verbal communication as it can be noticed in table above.

What I noticed is that locals know English, but somehow use what they think is the right way to pronounce the words based on Bahasa and alphabets. Then miscommunication happens.

.. The office guy said "There are two Persians who stayed in this hotel a day ago. Hahaha I thought he means truly Persians and guess what, he meant persons.

Verbal miscommunication is able to be noticed from the second respondent's experience is dealing with pronunciation. As a foreigner who has traveled to Java Island before visiting Lombok for some weeks, has realized that the way of Indonesians mostly pronounce the English words based on Bahasa which can produce miscommunication.

The word *Persons* /ˈpɜː.sᵊns/ is mispronounced with *Persians* /ˈpɜː.ʒəns/. Thus, it causes mispronunciation for the meaning.

Most of local people had great intention to be able to speak like native speakers who learn English as a foreign language. In fact, it is not easy to achieve this goal since one of Indonesian difficulties in communicating by using English is how to pronounce English sounds correctly. Pronunciation is one of the important elements to convey idea or information in terms of oral way. Pronunciation is the manner where someone utters a word. In Addition, Indonesian language as mother tongue influences significantly to the way of Indonesians especially for the learners in pronouncing English sounds.

There are some reasons why foreign learners often got difficulties in learning English such as depending on what they can hear the pronunciation features, what they can say which make them have problem in pronouncing the sounds using particular parts of mouth, uvula or nasal cavity, and related to intonation problem which occasionally find difficulties to hear tunes or to identify the different patterns of raising and falling tones [7]. Another factor is influenced about the pronunciation is because of the interference of dialect.

The next data was analysed is gained from the third respondent who is coming from England. The respondent obviously has native English accent can be the main problem for the local people in understanding the respondent' utterances.

.....Sometimes when I speak pretty fast, they ask me to repeat it, because they don't understand. ....Then he leans in toward me or just step closer to me.

In the same way with the second respondent's experience, the third respondent also perceived intercultural miscommunication in terms of phonological aspect particularly for the accent.

Based on the interview, the respondent was aware of local people's difficulty in comprehending a British's

accent. They would be asking the respondent to repeat the utterances especially when the respondent speak pretty fast

Lastly, the respondent also believes that the local person used body language which indicates him not understanding or having miscommunication to the respondent which involving intrusion to personal space.

The last respondent is from a Turkish who has been traveled to Indonesia twice. The data is gained showing that he had an intercultural miscommunication in terms of verbal and non-verbal ways toward local people.

Although the respondent is non-native English speaker, but there are some words and gesture clearly define as first miscommunication that the respondent has experienced. It happened when the respondent came to Lombok, Indonesia for the first time in 2017.

......I don't know why people here always call me as Boss or Brother. Every time they offer me something, then they end it up with Boss or Brother. Like... "This t-shirt is very cheap, come inside and buy it Boss" or like "Fast boat, cheap, Boss!

Another way people like called me with Brother. "Hey, Brother where are you going?"

In this case, the words like *Boss* and *Brother* are uttered by local people result miscommunication for the respondent because the respondent sees himself as an ordinary employee that travelling to other country. He needs hard works and savings lot. As a result, the respondent had an opinion that local people might always observe foreigners who travel have lot of money and this situation make them could be used for it. In other hand, the word *Brother* in the respondent's culture is usually used for sibling relationship in a family or is used when people have known each other for long time.

As we know that most local people used to call foreigners with *brother* to show their hospitality. However, this word leads to miscommunication for the respondent for the first time when he came to Lombok because of intercultural differences.

In addition, the respondent also experienced non-verbal miscommunication when the respondent met a local student in a beach who wanted to practice his English speaking.

.....At that time, he prevented to look at me or sometimes bow or nod his head when he was talking to me. Well, kind of annoying for me. When I asked him why he did that, he said he was bit nervous...

As it is observed above, the respondent experienced non-verbal miscommunication when the local's gesture showing to prevent eye contact or bow or nod at the time the local communicated to the respondent. This is seemly annoying to the respondent because it showed some disrespectful. The respondent mentioned that it is happening because of being nervous but the respondent said the student should keep an eye contact when talking to someone else.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study is revealed about the foreigners' intercultural miscommunication toward local people in Lombok. The result of this study showed that those three foreigners experienced intercultural miscommunication for both verbal and non-verbal communication. In terms of verbal miscommunication, there are some areas are involved such as lexical choices, paralinguistic choices (use of formulaic expression), and phonological areas both accent and pronunciation. Meanwhile, in non-verbal communication such as serious face expression, stepping closer to the respondent, and preventing eye contact.

There are some specific words or phrases/expressions are identified to produce miscommunication such as fun, *Did you do something fun last night or yesterday, Insha Allah, Wow, Good looking, Boss, and Brother*.

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