

Article

Intercultural Interaction and Communication at the Chinatown Marketplace, Petak Sembilan, Indonesia

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Abstract: Petak Sembilan is a Chinatown area located in Jakarta, where many Chinese hereditary communities stay. There is a famous Petak Sembilan Market that becomes the meeting point of mostly Chinese hereditary merchants with their customers. The interaction that occurred for years has always been interesting to be studied for the dynamic of their communication. The aim of this study is to identify the intercultural communication and interaction patterns between customers and merchants who are culturally diverse. The verbal and nonverbal communication were addressed in their interactions. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques used were observation, interview, and documentation for literature review. The results of the study are presented in the form of descriptive writing. The findings show that intercultural communication that occurred between the merchants and customers is a linear two-way communication. Verbal and nonverbal cues were identified from the observation conducted. During the interaction, the merchant and customers tend to use the same language to avoid misunderstanding.

Keywords: intercultural communication, interaction, verbal, nonverbal, Chinatown

Introduction

During this time, the marketplace, or *pasar* in Bahasa Indonesia, has been an important part of people's lives in society. In simple terms, a market is a meeting between potential buyers and sellers offering products or services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). But in more advanced conditions, the market is defined as a meeting place for sellers and buyers to buy and sell certain goods or services. In short, the market is where trading activity occurs. Meanwhile, trading is defined as the process of exchanging both goods and services from one region to another that occurs due to differences in resources owned and differences in needs (Bambang, 2009). From this understanding, it can be formulated that interactions in trading activity can occur due to the diversity of needs, or interests of buyers for goods or services in a place.

The economic strength of Chinese hereditary ethnicity has always been derived from the trade sector. Jakarta is one of the cities whereby Chinese ethnic groups or Chinese descendants run businesses. One of the areas that usually become the place where the business takes place is Glodok, usually addressed as Jakarta Chinatown. Glodok has long been a trading area that has always existed and is continuously growing better and better until the present day (Jenny & Rianto, 2021). Physically, a thick Chinese-style nuance adorns the Glodok area. In this study, merchants and buyers who had different cultural backgrounds, namely ethnic Chinese, for both merchants and buyers of different ethnicities become the subjects of this study. In the context of ethnic differences, it is referred to other ethnic groups such as Javanese, Batakese, Sundanese, Madurese, and other ethnicities of Indonesian, who, in this context, become buyers at Glodok market area.

Chinese people and their Indonesian descendants have lived in the Indonesian archipelago since a long time ago. The differences in cultural backgrounds in trade interactions may indicate new and unique experiences that occur during the intertwined communication process. In this case, the interaction occurred in

the trading at Petak Sembilan Market. Ethnic Chinese traders, known as a group with a strong trading tradition, have to interact with a wide variety of customers who had different traits, behaviors, and cultures as their backgrounds. Meanwhile, the customers, who in this case, are specifically referred to as different ethnicity or non-Chinese societies, have unique characteristics and ways of perpetuating the process of interaction. This situation is assumed that the negotiations that occur between buyers and merchants are different as well.

The Chinese hereditary ethnic community is indeed renowned for its ability and experience in running businesses. It is proven that nowadays whereby there are many Chinese people who start business ventures with families in Indonesia. For example, the Jaya Surya building shop business which has four brothers who have opened businesses in the same city. Besides, the “Citra Agung” building shop business has also developed the business to its second generation. Both businesses have been running for 30 years (Shella and Sari, 2019).

Abelio and Junaidi (2021) studied the social interaction of Chinese ethnicity with Dayak ethnic in Pontianak, Indonesia. The study found that mutual respect between these ethnicities is the basic foundation of how they communicate. However, the challenges found in terms of language led to inter-ethnic prejudice among them. This condition may occur since individuals probably will keep their accent or use their vernacular language once in a while on daily basis.

Ridaryanthi (2019) could support the argument based on her study that vernacular language migrants used in their interaction with other immigrants during staying in the host country to keep being with their original culture. Besides, Ridaryanthi (2021) furthermore stated that stereotypes and even prejudice could be constructed through individuals’ interaction with different cultural backgrounds.

Hall, as cited in Liliweri (2013), stated that culture and communication are inseparable. It is due to culture does not just determine who talks to whom, regarding what topic, how to encode a message, the meaning contained in the message, and even the conditions it has for sending, paying attention to, and interpreting the message. Communication is a complex process, indeed.

Furthermore, communication and culture are like two sides of a coin, where culture is part of communication behavior and vice versa. Communication also determines, maintains, and develops culture (Liliweri, 2013). Additionally, according to Mulyana (2007), culture is an order of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, time, the role of spatial relations, the concept of the universe, material objects, and property that a group of great people acquires from generation to generation through individual and group efforts.

The issue regarding the above argument is the fact that communication between ethnic Chinese cultures and consumers in the selling-buying interactions at the Petak Sembilan marketplace. How ethnic Chinese merchants communicate with buyers who have different cultural backgrounds when convincing buyers to buy in their stores and vice versa. Additionally, the one who dominates the interaction is also the aspect highlighted in this study. Mulyana (2007) stated that this ability is what ethnic Chinese traders must have when conducting buying and selling transactions with buyers.

Maintaining a good relationship with buyers is an important thing that ethnic Chinese merchant should do to be able to determine the success of the selling-buying activity. In this case, the things that ethnic Chinese traders should understand the non-verbal messages in the form of gestures, postures, facial expressions, or paralinguistic cues in order to avoid uncertainty in communicating between cultures (Liliweri, 2013).

Based on the background stated, the research will focus on intercultural communication between ethnic Chinese traders and consumers in Glodok Chinatown, specifically at Petak Sembilan. The uniqueness of this study is that the market environment consists of traders and buyers with different cultural backgrounds which are dominated by the Chinese hereditary ethnicity. Therefore, this study was conducted based on the following research question: How does intercultural communication occur between the merchants and customers at Petak Sembilan marketplace?

Methodology

This study was conducted using the constructivist paradigm. Constructivist paradigm enables this study to understand the world in which subjects live and work for background recognition as shaping interpretation (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This study used a case study method and approached qualitatively by using a

purposive sampling technique in determining informants of this study. Purposive sampling is carried out by establishing appropriate criteria for the informant to be interviewed. The following table shows the characteristics of the informant of this study:

Tabel 1. Informants' Characteristics

Subject	Name	Ethnicity	Details	Language
Merchant	Jochen	Chinese	Starting the business since 2010	Indonesian
	Lim Jok Lan	Chinese	Starting the business since 1998	Indonesian
	Hendro	Chinese	Starting the business since 2019	Indonesian, Mandarin
	Lini	Non-Chinese	Serving as employee at one of the <i>kedai</i> since 2018	Indonesian
	No name	Chinese		Indonesia, Hokkien
Customer	Dien	Non-Chinese		Indonesian
	Koh Tian	Chinese		Indonesian, Mandarin
	Mardiah	Betawi		Indonesian

Data in this research were gathered through in-depth interviews and supported by observation to obtain comprehensive data. Data were organized and analysed based on the categorization made, and reduction was performed to ensure the data used in the analysis process are related to the objective of this study. Ultimately, data were displayed as presented in the next sub-section for results and discussion.

The Findings and Discussion

From the results of interviews with the informants; seller and buyer, with the theme of the questions as follows: informant's background, informant's trading experience as a seller, communication experience, barriers, and adaptation of intercultural communication. Thus, the picture of communication that has been presented in Table 2.

The problem that often arises based on previous studies is related to different views in looking at other groups or ethnicities, therefore, it has the tendency to cause difficulties communicating between cultures and can affect interactions between various ethnicities. To find out intercultural communication in buying and selling transactions between traders and buyers of ethnic Chinese and other ethnicities found in Petak Sembilan market at Glodok area. The author first conducts an interview with several questions that concern the background of the Informant.

According to Samovar and Porter (in Liliweri 2013) intercultural communication occurs when the message communicator is a member of one culture and the recipient of the message (communicant) is a member of another culture. In this case, the communication that occurs in the environment of the Petak Sembilan Market in Glodok area has qualified as an environmental sample that implements intercultural communication. After knowing that the background of each source matched the criteria, the author continued to identify by analyzing the communication experience between merchants and buyers.

Based on the author's findings in the field, traders and buyers in Petak Sembilan market in Glodok area use Indonesian language as the main language in their interactions. Although dominated by residents of Chinese ethnicity, most of them claim to be unable to use Mandarin/Hokkien. Merchants and buyers who can still speak Mandarin/Hokkien will use the language to communicate with their interlocutors who can both speak the language.

Based on an interview with Mr. Hendro, the fourth informant as a merchant, in daily communication, if there are buyers of fellow ethnicities who use Chinese, then Mr. Hendro also uses Chinese in serving his

customers. However, Mr. Hendro will continue to use Indonesian as the main language in the process of daily interactions both with his employees and with visitors to his food stalls.

These findings were reinforced by interviews with the first Informant as a buyer with a Chinese ethnic background. Informants claimed to often use Hokkien or mandarin when they encountered sellers of the same ethnicity as him. However, if he is served by employees or sellers who are of other ethnicities, then the informant uses Indonesian.

The results of these findings indicate that although indirectly there is more than one Language used in communicating during the trading at Petak Sembilan Market. However, no signs of interference were found that hindered communicants from receiving messages as well as the message sources.

Noise is said to exist in one communication system when the message conveyed is different from the message received. The distraction can stem from elements of communication, e.g., communicators, communicants, messages, and media/channels that reduce joint efforts to give the same meaning to the message. Communication disorders originating from communicators and communicants for example due to differences in social and cultural status (social stratification, type of work, age factors), educational background (higher education), and knowledge (accumulation of knowledge on the theme being talked about), skills (ability to manipulate messages) communication.

In offering their wares, the three informants the author met at Petak Sembilan market tended to just wait quietly for customers to come to their stalls. However, there is one Informant as a merchant who actively offers his merchandise by bringing a menu of food, he sells to customers who pass by in front of his stall.

When making observations, the author noticed the existence of a process of verbal and nonverbal interaction at once. In verbal form, visitors stop in front of the stall and look through the merchandise, if they do not want to buy the merchandise offered by the informant, the visitor will respond by saying "*No sir. Thank you.*" While waving goodbye as communication in a nonverbal form.

Communication in another nonverbal form was discovered by the author during an interview with Mrs. Lini, a merchant informant at Petak Sembilan market, who was not of ethnic Chinese background. When encountering a buyer who uses Chinese in bidding and questioning his merchandise, Mrs. Lini said nothing yet shakes her head as a sign that she cannot speak Mandarin.

These findings are in line with Hall (as cited in Mulyana, 2007) who named nonverbal language as "*silent language*" and the *hidden dimension* of culture. It is called silent and hidden due to nonverbal messages are embedded in the context of communication. In addition to situational and relational cues in communication transactions, nonverbal messages give us contextual cues. Together with verbal cues and contextual cues, nonverbal messages help us interpret the entire meaning of the communication experience.

Regarding how to transact between sellers and buyers, most informants say there is no bargaining process. This is in line with the findings of research conducted by Mussadiq and Anisah that the difficulty of bargaining with Chinese merchants is one reason for the emergence of stereotypes that Chinese merchants are stingy (Musaddiq & Anisah, 2019).

In intercultural communication, we are faced with problems that exist in a situation where a message is encoded in one culture and must also be coded back in another culture. Therefore, culture is responsible for the entire treasury of communication and meaning possessed by each individual. Consequently, the treasury owned by two people of different cultures will be different which can cause all kinds of difficulties in the continuity of communication.

However, the findings made by the authors show that there are no obstacles that occur in the process of interaction and communication between cultures that occur in the Petak Sembilan Market.

According to Chaney & Martin (Liliweri, 2013) Communication barriers or also known as communication *barriers* are everything that is a barrier to the occurrence of effective communication. As supporting evidence, the first informant as a trader, Mr. Jochen said, for almost 12 years of replacing his father to continue the family business by selling in Glodok, Mr. Jochen never found it difficult to interact with buyers.

However, from the results of the interview analysis, the authors did not find any of the obstacles mentioned above in the findings in the field. The informants the author met, on average, did not distinguish the ethnicity of fellow communicants, both buyers, and sellers who were in Petak Sembilan market.

As for the interview conducted with the last informant as a trader interviewed by the author, was Mrs. Lini who was also the only merchant informant who was not of Chinese ethnicity, Mrs. Lini admitted that she never felt that there was any difficulty interacting when communicating with buyers because when Mrs. Lini revealed that she did not speak Chinese, the buyer would use Indonesian language when doing the buying and selling process.

According to the author, although the experience articulated by Ibu Lini is one of the barriers to intercultural communication that is above "*the waterline*", it is a type of obstacle that occurs because each individual does not have the same life experience, therefore, an individual has different perceptions and concepts in seeing things. However, this can be resolved because the buyer ends up using Indonesian language to communicate when doing the buying and selling process.

There were no significant obstacles found when conducting this study due to the selection of proper informants for the research. One of the characteristics of the informants is the one who has been selling and shopping for at least two (2) years in the Glodok Chinatown area. According to the U-Curve model by Lysgaard (1955), an individual could adapt to the new cultures within two years. Therefore, the obstacles in communication are no longer found.

Naturally, the process of intercultural communication is rooted in intercultural social relations that require social interaction. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (Liliweri, 2013) emphasize that the content of the communication is not in an isolated space. Content and meaning are two inseparable things, two things that are essential in forming relationships. In other words, relationships between people are greatly influenced by how the content and meaning of a message are interpreted by each of individuals involved.

Based on the findings of this study through an interview process regarding the adaptation of intercultural communication, the average informant the author encountered adapted to buyers of different ethnicities by understanding and identifying the needs of the interlocutor, as well as approaching the adaptation of the interlocutor's way of communicating.

The interview results show that it was found how to adapt in maintaining harmony between ethnicities. Mr. Jochen adapted to buyers who came from other ethnicities by identifying the needs of buyers who approached his stall. In another argument, Mr. Hendro was able to adapt and communicate with buyers of different ethnicities by adhering to his beliefs, he stated that "we must be like water that can enter on all fronts". Meanwhile, Dien's mother accommodate communication with the merchants who were ethnically different from her by calling designations according to the origin of her interlocutor, such as using the nickname "Koh" or "Cik" for ethnic Chinese merchants. In order to interact with the merchants of Javanese ethnicity, Koh Tian sometimes uses the Javanese language when communicating; asking the price of the goods he will buy from ethnic Javanese sellers to adapt and build closeness with sellers.

The results of the interview proved that between sellers and buyers in the Petak Sembilan Market at Glodok area in the process of interacting with buyers adapting by understanding (accommodating) the needs of buyers, while from the buyer's side, the adaptation process uses a special call for sellers from ethnic Chinese. In the buying and selling process, this can be used as a strategy for communicating so that the bargaining process and meeting needs/sales can take place effectively.

From the above findings, the authors identified the use of accommodation theory by Howard Gilles in the adaptation of intercultural communication by informants. This theory describes how a person adjusts (overaccommodation) such as empathy and adaptation or adjustment of the way of communicating with other members within a heterogeneous group. The mutual respect between the ethnicities involved is seen as the foundation of their communication during the selling-buying process. This theory applies not only to self-adjustment in interpersonal communication, but also to groups that have differences such as ethnicity, employment status, gender, age, and so on (Dewi, 2018).

Based on the results of field observations done in this study, the overall communication applied to the Petak Sembilan Market is carried out through a communication process that supports smooth communication and transactions between sellers and buyers. All informants as traders and buyers that researchers meet will use Indonesian language as the main language in conducting buying and selling transactions. Although most of the informants with Chinese ethnic backgrounds claim to be unable to speak Chinese. However, there are still informants who are sellers and buyers who can speak Chinese and only use the language of the interlocutor

who also communicates in Chinese. This is not only done to facilitate communication but also to maintain the characteristics of the art of communication marketing in traditional businesses that are still running well.

The other communication concept that can be identified by the author based on the findings above is the communication employed is two-way communication or reciprocity (Two-way traffic communication), whereby the communicator and the communicant become interchangeable functions in carrying out their functions in communication. The communicator in the first stage becomes a communicant and in the next stage alternating functions with each other. But in the essence, the one who starts the conversation is the main communicator, the main communicator has a certain purpose through the communication process. The process is dialogical, as well as feedback occurs directly. Besides, linear communication did occur, which contains the meaning of traveling from one point to another in a straight way, which means the delivery of a message by the communicator to the communicant. Therefore, the process of communication usually occurs in a face-to-face mode of communication. This is reflected in how the communication between seller and buyers occurred in the traditional market within the context of Chinatown.

Table 2. Intercultural Communication Between Ethnic Chinese Traders and Buyers at Petak Sembilan Chinatown Marketplace

Ethnicity	Verbal and nonverbal communication		Accommodation
Chinese Merchant	The language used (V)	Indonesian Mandarin	Understanding the customers' needs.
	Gesture (NV)	Enthusiastic Firm	
	Expression (NV)	Focus Friendly	
Others Merchant	The Language used (V)	Indonesian	Using specific terms in addressing the Chinese buyer/customers
	Gesture (NV)	More relax Shaking head to say 'no'	
	Paralinguistic (NV)	Tone down voice	
Chinese Customer	Expression (NV)	Tend to talk around Less confidence	Using language selectively based on the one they communicate with
	The language used (V)	Indonesian Mandarin	
	Gesture (NV)	Enthusiastic	
Others Customer	Expression (NV)	Fokus	Using specific term to address the Chinese merchants
	The language used (V)	Indonesia	
	Gesture (NV)	Casual	
	Expression (NV)	Tend to be casual	

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that the intercultural communication that occurs between traders and buyers in Petak Sembilan Market at Glodok, Chinatown area takes place in two directions, 1) where each seller and buyer accommodate each other's communication process and 2) adapts to each other's culture. The mutual respect between the ethnicities involved is seen as the foundation of their communication during the selling-buying process with regard to the ethnic backgrounds of both communication participants. This communication pattern occurred due to the ethnic background of sellers and buyers being dominated by ethnic Chinese with the characteristics of informants who have been buying and selling for years or more in the Petak Sembilan Market area, in Glodok. In addition, verbal messages using Indonesian language as the main language and Mandarin/Hokkien for fellow communication actors who both have an ethnic Chinese background and can still use the language as well as nonverbal messages owned by informants who are of

Chinese ethnicity are characterized by swift and excited gestures and more firm and focused expressions when compared to informants from other ethnicities are supporting factors in the occurrence of intercultural communication that occurs between traders and buyers. Two-way communication occurred among the communicators; both merchants and buyers.

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