

Conference Paper

Qualitative Descriptive Study on Verbal Communication of Indonesian Women In 'Pengajian and Arisan' Community in Brisbane, Australia

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Abstract

Indonesian women living in Australia have a different way in using their verbal communication than the Australians. They also perform activities that consist of cultural traditions of Indonesia, such as *Pengajian* (Quran reciting) and *Arisan*, but the fact that they live in Australia not in Indonesia can create a new blend of two cultures. The relationship between culture and communication is a mutual one, both complete each other, neither can be separated because they both affect each other. What is communicated between them through symbolic interaction creates a culture, and the culture will influence back the way they communicate. This research problem focused on the following questions: How is the verbal communication process of Indonesian women in the *Pengajian* and *Arisan* Community in Brisbane, Australia? The research conducted a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The data collection techniques included interviews, observation and documentation study. The results from this study shows that when the Indonesian women gathered, they established a new pattern language/paralinguistic among the Indonesian women, while the topics that were usually discussed were problems concerning: (1) food and Indonesian cuisine, (2) the problems that exist in Indonesia and (3) gossiping about others.

Keywords: verbal communication, women Indonesia, Australia

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1. Introduction

Verbal communication is something that cannot be separated in the process of social interaction in daily life. This has the same meaning with the relationship of the way we communicate and the culture surrounding. Culture influence the way we communicate, and the way we communicate creates a culture, so both cannot be separated with each other.

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Symbols, language, or verbal messages are all kinds of symbols that use one or more words. Language can also be considered as a system of verbal codes ([3]: 69). Language can be defined as a set of symbols, with rules for combining these symbols, which are used and understood in a community.

Jalaluddin Rachmat (2009: 68), defines the functional and formal language. Functionally, the language is defined as a tool to express ideas shared. He emphasized shared, because language can be understood only if there is an agreement among the members of a social group.

Verbal language is the main way to express thoughts, feelings, and our intentions. Verbal language also uses words that represent the different aspects of our individual reality. And consequently, the words are abstractions of reality we are not able to cause a reaction that is the totality of objects or concepts represented by the words. ([3]: 75).

What we talk about, how we talk, what we see, what is not seen, what he think or not think are influenced by culture. Vice versa, all of which we consider, talk, think or indirectly in shaping a culture itself. Culture can begin from the smallest thing like the culture that exists within a family which in every family will have their own culture to one another.

Indonesian women that have life in Australia, married and have children tend to join communities that relates on their own identity, they want to feel accepted and safe, so they join Indonesian society in Australia. The society then are divided again into smaller groups, there will be 'pengajian' group, 'arisan group' or even a bigger group that builds an organization. The organization usually holds big Indonesian events, like the Independence day of Indonesia, or 'Lebaran day'. The 'pengajian' group is obviously a smaller group, it is a group which each members has a great willingness to improve their faith to Allah SWT, usually it only consisted of the women which do not work, because it is a routine schedules on weekdays.

Based on the aforementioned background, the researchers are interested to look more into the verbal communication of Indonesian women through 'pengajian' and 'Arisan'community in Australia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Verbal communication

Symbols or verbal messages are all kinds of symbols that use one or more words. Language can also be defined as a set of symbols, with rules for combining these symbols, which are used and understood a community.

Formally, the language is defined as all sentences unimaginable, which can be made according to the rules of grammar. Every language has rules of how words should be prepared and sequenced in order to give meaning. Grammar includes three elements: phonology, syntax and semantics. Phonological knowledge is about the sounds of the language. Syntactic knowledge is about how to sentence formation. Semantic knowledge is about the meaning of a word or combination of words. According to Larry L. Barker (in [3]: 81), the language has three functions: naming (naming or labeling), interaction, and information transmission. Labeling naming or referring to the effort to identify the object, action, or person by name so it can be referenced in communications. Interaction function emphasizes sharing ideas and emotions, which can invite sympathy and understanding or anger and confusion.

Through language, information can be passed on to others, this is called the transmission function of language.

Cansandra L. Book (1980), in *Human Communication: Principles, Contexts, and Skills*, said that the communication we succeed, at least the language must fulfill three functions, namely:

- Getting to know the world around us.
- Connecting with others.
- To create coherence in our lives.

Then there are language barrier that includes:

- The limited number of words available to represent an object
- Words are ambiguous and contextual
- Words contain cultural biases

2.2. Symbolic interaction theory

The essence of the symbolic interaction emphasis on an activity that is characteristic of the person, that the communication or exchange of symbols given meaning ([3]: 68). Many experts behind this perspective which says that individual as a human being is the most important thing. They say that the individual is an object that can be directly studied and analyzed through its interaction with other individuals. According to Ralph LaRossa and Donald C. Reitzes (1993) symbolic interaction essentially describes a frame of reference for understanding how humans, along with others, create a symbolic world and how the world shape human behavior. Symbolic interaction exists because the basic ideas in the form of meaning that comes from the human mind (Mind) about themselves (Self), and their relationship in the midst of social interaction,

and the ultimate goal to mediate and interpret meaning in society (Society) where the individual settled ([7]: 101).

Presentation on the background of great thoughts about the human influence the thinking of George Herbert Mead and the basic concept of symbolic interaction, it can be concluded that there are three themes concept of symbolic interaction, namely:

1. The importance of meaning for human behavior
2. The importance of the concept of self
3. The relationship between the individual and society.

The results of individual activities will affect the society in which individuals interact. The relationship between the community and the individuals who interact using the same symbols, they would interpret it according to their interaction. Interaction using the same symbol in a society can shape the social construction of reality for the individuals involved in it.

3. Research Methods

The research approach used in this study is a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. Descriptive method is a method in researching status group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a class of events in the present.

The purpose of this descriptive study is to create a description or a picture in a systematic, factual and accurate information on the facts, nature and the relationship between the phenomenon investigated.

The method used is a qualitative method. "Methodology is the process, principles and procedures that we use to approach the problem and looking for answers" (Mulyana, 2008: 145). According Sugiyono (2007: 1), the method of qualitative research is a study that is used to examine the natural objects where the researcher is a key instrument, data collection techniques are combined, data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results further emphasize the significance rather than a generalization. Qualitative research aims to maintain the shape and content of human behavior and analyze its qualities, instead of turning it into a quantitative entities (Mulyana, 2003: 150). The method used in this research is using descriptive research method with qualitative data analysis. Known as a descriptive method for this study, it does not use hypotheses and variables but only describe and analyze the events that there is no special treatment for the objects under study.

Observations that researchers do is research based on conditions in the field, researchers do not engage in such activities only observed symptoms on the field which is then analyzed to obtain the conclusions of research undertaken.

Data collection techniques are: observation, dept interview and documentation

1. **Observation**, the observation is conducted with a *nonparticipant observation*, toward the object research which the object under study is associated with verbal communication of Indonesian women in Pengajian and Arisan Community in Australia.
2. **Depth interview** that is conducted in this research is to acknowledge the point of view, opinions, and feelings from the subject matter expert. Creswell (1998:120) declared that this technique is very significant in a qualitative research to apprehend an accurate data.
3. **Documentation Study**, Burhan Bungin (2007:121) said that this method is used to search historical data. It is also to enrich theoretical backgrounds

In this study, researchers used a purposive sampling techniques, namely by taking informants in accordance with the needs of researchers. In this case, the researchers took a female informant Indonesian that are actively participating in 'Pengajian and Arisan Community' in Brisbane, Australia. Researchers took four informants:

1. Linda, from Jakarta, 30 years old
2. Puspa, from Sulawesi, 35 years old
3. Sri, from Jakarta, 52 years old
4. Endang, from Bogor, 57 years old
5. Sham, from Borneo, 45 years old

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, researchers focused on verbal communication Indonesian women when they gather. Conversations that are placed after and before the Al-Quran reciting become interesting because they tend to talk about everything.

The observation took place in two parts of Brisbane Australia. Both of them are different from one another. The first study group is in South Brisbane, where the Indonesian women who gather are those who live in that area, and the other part took place in North Brisbane. For them who live in that area. Observations were also took place in other group gathering centered on Caboolture and surrounding areas. The first

study group was held on Tuesdays, and the second on Fridays. The time starts from 10 am until lunch. This is due to fill their time waiting for their children who are at school, and husbands who work. While other gathering such as 'arisan' is usually held once a month on Sundays so that husbands and children can join.

Based on the observation, there were some points that could be categorized when they were having conversations:

1. The words are ambiguous and contextual

The words are ambiguous, because words represent the perceptions and interpretations of different people, who embrace the socio-cultural background differently.

2. The words contain cultural biases

Language bound cultural context. Therefore, in this world there are various groups of people with cultures and sub-cultures, it is not surprising if there are words that (coincidentally) the same or nearly the same, but interpreted differently, or words that are different but equally interpreted. Consequently, two people from different cultures may experience misunderstandings when they use the same words.

3. A blend of facts, interpretations, and assessments

In language we often get confuse of facts (description), interpretations (allegations), and assessments. This issue relates to the perception error. Examples can be seen in the process of the following verbal communication.

The process of verbal communication that occurs within a few topics of conversation:

1. A new establishment of paralinguistic/language pattern for Indonesian women.

Indonesian women who gathered in the study and gathering societies have unwittingly had a new language pattern formation, as agreed between the members of the Indonesian women.

This is reflected for instance in verbal communication choosing food and cooking. They have difficulty in finding the spices of Indonesian cuisine in Australia, although there are stores that provide it but the places are far away, making them experimenting in making a variety of Indonesian dishes with spices that are there. Sometimes they talk about the manufacturing process and how they get the seasoning. At one session recitals in south Brisbane, Linda talked about spinach leaves which she emphasized that the spinach in Indonesia and Australia have a different sense from each other. Puspa agreed on it, so that the dishes containing

spinach will certainly taste different when you cook in Indonesia comparing it when you cook in Australia. At other times, Endang and Sri discussed sago that was made by Sri, Endang praised how Sri could process the way Sri made the Sago.

Sometimes the dishes are taken as a potluck culture, however, there was once a woman named Syam that stopped to gather again with the other Indonesian women, since she had been talked about behind her back. The rumors were said that her dish was not that tasty.

'I no longer want to get together, because they said my dish wasn't that good, I felt hurt'.

2. Discussion about Indonesia

Frequently they talk about Indonesia, the country of their origin. Although they mostly talk about the negative things about Indonesia, they still recognize Indonesia with love and as their homeland. Their conversation about Indonesia relate on things that 'disturb' them, especially when one of the participants of the group had just returned from Indonesia. They will tell how chaos Indonesia is, such as the congestion, pollution, and other unhealthy food. Lia, one of the Indonesian women admit that upon his arrival in Indonesia, she felt that she became a different person, a person that always complained and she suffered higher emotions. So she couldn't wait to go back home to Australia.

Lia also shared about how people in Indonesia don not care about trash, to which it is still a lot of people are not responsible and they throw garbage anywhere they pleases *"Subhanalloh, I think, staying in Jakarta for a while was a big lesson for me, giving me so much stress, people there are so impatient, and very emotional,. it makes me become stress and emotional as well."*

3. Talking about other people 'Gossiping'.

At a social gathering session when women gathered, two Indonesian women were talking about Ms. Puspa, a person who had just got a divorced with her husband who was a citizen of Australia. They were saying that the divorce was not really necessary, as the husband seemed to had been a good one that was always caring and loving, they were saying that puspa divorced him because of religion, though they said that it didn't quite make sense as Puspa was not a religious person herself, she sometimes took off her veil occasionally and still went to night pubs and drank alcohol

On one occasion of observation, in an 'arisan' gathering which used the 'potluck' tradition (that is each member of the group should bring a dish of food to be

shared together in the dining table), one of the member of the group seemed to bring canned food (so it was not cooked by her, but it was bought in the supermarket), as a result, it became a talk about between the members. That she did was considered impolite and selfish, so she was mainly the topic of the rumors for weeks after the gathering between other members. Researchers also observed that the seniors (Indonesian women who had been members for a long time) when tasting a dish that was brought by one of the participants, will say 'ah bad' or 'bad'. If the dishes they tasted was bad, that too will be a matter to be dealt with by them for several weeks.

4.1. Analysis of symbolic interaction theory

Based on the exposure of the background of the great thought of the man who influenced the thinking of George Herbert Mead and the basic concept of symbolic interaction, it can be concluded that there are three themes concept of symbolic interaction, namely:

1. The importance of meaning for human behavior, it is relevant to the research conducted by researchers at the significance of the save zone for Indonesian women who join the association and gathering in Australia. The women who join those gathering will feel some sense of comfort and those places become their save zone.
2. The importance of the concept of self, it is relevant to this study that Indonesian women who gathered stated the importance of the concept about themselves. When they are assessing each other, they were commenting on each self. This occurs every time they gather.
3. The relationship between the individual and society, it is also relevant to this study. The society and the Indonesian women that live in Australia, even though they have a big difference in communicating, both influence one another in the way they think and the way they agreed on meanings of symbols. The individual activities that Indonesian women do use symbols or language through interaction with the community. The results of the activity of Indonesian women will affect a community in which individuals interact. The relationship between the community and the individuals who interact using the same symbols would interpret it according to their interaction. Interaction using the same symbol in a society can shape the social construction of reality for the individuals involved in it. This is reflected in verbal communication that occurs when the Indonesian women are in recitals association and gathering in Australia. The symbolism of

a meaning is not only about language, symbolism involves all aspects of human action. Symbolic Interaction enables people to understand the reality and interact with other human beings in a process of communication, in the sense that the message is understood and transformed on other parties may ultimately affect both parties in a process of reciprocal communication.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the aforementioned discussion, the researcher concludes as following:

1. Verbal communication that happens for Indonesian women in a gathering includes:
The establishment of a new pattern language/paralinguistic among Indonesian women, while the topic of the conversation relates on problems concerning.
 - a. food and cuisine of Indonesia,
 - b. the problems that exist in Indonesia and
 - c. gossiping about others.
2. Merging of the two cultures, between having 'potluck' and taking wrap food home, though the 'gotong royong' culture clearly still values in their lives, so they happen to do it every time they have a gathering.

6. Suggestion

Based on the research conducted, preferably Indonesian woman living in Australia should do programs/activities that build Indonesian nationalism which do not lead on negative conversation about Indonesia.

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