SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Intercultural Communication among the Local Elites in Indonesia (A Study in Banten Province)

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ABSTRACT

Research on intercultural communication with respect to cultural differences in an ethnic group has rarely been undertaken. Thus, this study is proposes a communication model among elites (namely ulamaks) in Menes district, Banten province, Indonesia using Goffman's (1974) dramaturgy theory. Data was obtained from 24 informants from the district of Menes-Banten based on interviews, observation and documents. Findings show that Goffman's *impression management* theory cannot be fully accepted, particularly ulama's impression management model.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, local elites, impression management, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Background

Intercultural communication includes interracial, interethnic, and international communication (Rich, 1974; Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981). Numerous studies have explored patterns of interracial, interethnic, and international communication (Lu & Hsu, 2008; Chitty, 2010; Sharifian, 2010; Panggabean, Murniatia & Tjitra, 2012). For instance, Lu and Hsu, (2008) studied interracial communication between Chinese and Americans in relation to their willingness to communicate. Sharifian (2010) studied interethnic communication between aboriginals and non-aboriginals in Australia ethnic groups while Panggabean, Murniatia and Tjitra (2012) examined interracial communication among Chinese, Indonesian, and Singaporeans in relation to work competencies. Chitty (2010) on the other hand, did the mapping of international communication in Asia.

However, very few studies focused on intercultural communication between different cultures within the same ethnic groups. Saied, Reza, Ameli, and Hamideh Molaei (2010) studied intra ethnic communication between Syiah and Sunnis in Iran. Ma (1999) examined intra-ethnic non-verbal communication and found that non-verbal communication plays an important role in intra-ethnic communication. This study was therefore, intended to examine intra-ethnic or intra-cultural communication among the Sundanese in South Banten, Indonesia with particular attention on verbal and non-verbal communication among *jawara* (powerful free men), *ulama* (Moslem clerics) and *umaro* (government officers). The study was based on impression management theory of Erving Goffman.

Jawara, ulama, and *umaro* in Banten (Indonesia) are local elites who have significant influence in the society. *Ulama* refers to an individual with adequate Islamic knowledge and is regarded as the primary source of society regarding various social problems. *Jawara* is acknowledged as having knowledge in community martial arts (*silat*). His role is to prevent chaos and disharmony among the Banten ethnic group while *Umaro* is a government officer whose major role is to oversee the community in the region of Banten. The *ulama, jawara* and *umaro* are mutually dependent on each other namely having a symbiotic relationship in the social construct and culture of Bantenese ethnic groups (Dewi, 2003: 243).

Although *ulama, jawara*, and *umaro* support each other, they often live in less harmonious situation mainly due to their different roles and interests. *Ulamas* are very strict in their religious tradition *Jawara* (who is not *jawara-ulama* type) has long been much influenced by a feudal system of indigenous leadership. This often leads to a serious conflict of interests among the *jawara* and *ulama*. On one hand, *jawara* is concerned with customs or feudal traditions which are influenced by Hindu culture. On the other hand, *ulama*, tries to erode the influence of Hindu teaching (Sunatra, 1997: 125). According to Nugraha (2006):

> In the next development, especially ulamas, they became separate groups, and as if it has different schools. As the time goes by further change the image of jawara who used called as patriot to be people who simply sell muscle. Crime and hugger even attached. Even at local politics as direct elections of regional heads are rampant, jawara are mobilized by certain candidate as pollsters.

The *Umaro* is often viewed by other elites, *ulama* and *jawara*, as a source of potential conflict in society as their mission or message are sometimes considered as not in line with the expectations of society.

Sunatra (1997: 124) states that *ulama, jawara*, and *umaro* in Menes-Banten have become an important feature of

complementary leadership, but, they also lead to potential conflicts. The conflict is also due to communication problem between them, such as perceptions, prejudices, and so forth. In addition, the differences in cultural backgrounds, values, norms, attitudes, and ways of life among them can lead to potential conflicts.

Menes was chosen as the study area of the current research because it is known for its Islamic education as well as being the home town for famous. Menes, since the turn of the 19th century, has become one of the centres of Islamic education and for protesting against colonialism.

Research Framework

The communication pattern or the impression management between ulama, jawara, and umaro in Menes, Banten, the focus of this study, was explored on the basis of Goffman's theory of Dramaturgis. The impression management, the process by which people control communications with others, plays an important role in interpersonal behaviour (Leary & Kowalski, 1990:34). Goffman (1974:32) believes that human social life can be divided into "front area" and the "back area". The front area refers to social events that allow individuals play a formal role as an actor, in front of an audience. The front area is described by Goffman as the following:

> *that part of individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe*

the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (Goffman, 1974: 32).

The back area refers to places and events that allow people to prepare for their role in the front area. This area is like a player behind the stage (back stage) or a dressing room where performers relax, prepare or practise to play a role in front of the stage (front stage) (Goffman, 1974: 114). The front stage is different from the back stage. Behind the stage is a place that contains discussion dealing with human behaviour in terms of whether to use harsh or vulgar words, sexual comments, sitting and standing recklessly, smoking and dressing casually, using regional dialect or language, ranting or screaming, acting aggressive and joking, humming, whistling, chewing gum, burping, etc. (Mulyana, 2001: 115). The front stage is an area where the actors manipulates or use masks in their appearance, while the back of the stage is where the actors behave like themselves without feeling the need to portray a front. Goffman says that the front stage must be set in the form of physical landscape such as chairs, decorations, and a variety of other backgrounds based on the interests of actors (Goffman, 1974:32). In relation to a setting, the front manifests in appearance and style (manner). Appearances include various types of good values that we introduce to the social status of actors (e.g., white robes for

doctors). The style on the other hand relates to what kind role the actors are expected to play in certain situations such as using physical force and having a certain attitude., Goffman explain:

> *Appearance may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses. These stimuli also tell us of the individual's temporary ritual state: that is, whether he is engaging in formal social activity, work, or informal recreation; whether or not he is celebrating a new phase in the season cycle or in his life-cycle. Manner may be taken to refer to those stimuli which functions at the time to warn us of the interactions role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation* (Goffman, 1974: 34-35).

Communication behaviour or impression management is coloured by perceptions and prejudices of local *ulama* elites, *jawara* and *umaro* based on Goffman's theory. The theory describes how they interact, view, manage prejudices and communicate with each other.

METHODS

Approaches and Methods

The research approach of the current study is interpretive, phenomenological and naturalistic. It focuses on the meaning, motives, background, rationality, and interrelationships(Creswell, 2002:136; 1997; 14) and its meaning is based on a social phenomenon (Verstehen).

Data Collection Procedures

The subjects were determined using purposive sampling. There were 24 informants, comprising three ethnic groups: *Ulama, Jawara*, and *Umaro*, each represented by 8 informants. Data was collected through interviews, observation and literature review related to the research problem. Triangulation technique was used to examine data based on the inter-subjective interpretation among *jawara*, *ulama*, and *umaro*.

Creswell's "a data collection circle" (Creswell, 1988:110) was adopted; the Creswell Model is outlined below:
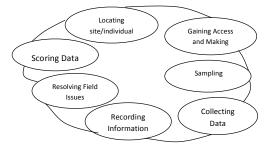

Figure 1. A data collection circle
Source. Creswell, 1988:110

The circle model of data collection as shown in Figure 1 indicates that the steps support each other. Creswell suggests determination of the place or the individual (*Locating site or an individual*) is the first step.

Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study are statements, symptoms and non-verbal actions. Data analysis is performed simultaneously, namely data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion or verification.

The researcher used a matrix of texts, graphs, and charts on the network side of the narrative text. Conclusions made in this study are verified during the research process. Verification in the form of a review or re-think of the field notes was done carefully and it took a long time to develop inter-subjective agreement. Validity test confirmed the reliability of data (Alwasilah, 2003:169).

To test the validity (credibility or validity of data), this research followed procedures as suggested by Alwasilah (2003:175-190)

To maintain reliability or trustworthiness, an audit trail was also done so the results of the study are valid.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section Impression Management among the elites, *ulama, jawara*, and *umaro* in Menes, is discussed.

Impression Management Model

The communication of *jawara* with their community members and outsiders as well as with other elites such as *ulama* and *umaro* can be viewed as two different communication events. The first is back stage, while the second is front stage. When *jawara* communicates both with *ulama* and *umaro* it is classified as the front stage because of what they display when communicating with others is different compared with members of their own which can be seen as back stage. Based on participants' observation and references to Gofman's theory, the communication management model of communication of *jawara* with *ulama* and *umaro* can be described as below:
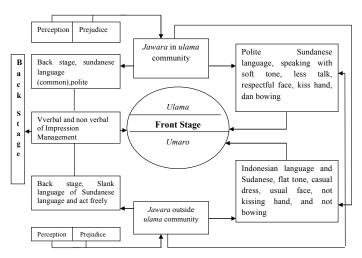

Figure 2. Impression Management Model of *Jawara*'s Communication with *Ulama* and *Umaro*

The model illustrates *jawara*'s communication with the *ulama* community, and outside both verbally and nonverbally. They speak the dialect of Sundanese Banten relatively "smooth with soft tones and a little talk with facial expression indicating respect (bending the face and body), and kiss the hands of ulama. However, they communicate with umaro in the Indonesian language, which is occasionally mixed with Sundanese language especially in official places such as village offices or district offices. They speak in a flat tone, and a facial expression indicating less respect. They neither kiss the hand nor bow. Interview with three *jawara* informants showed that the Jawara tended to speak more politely with ulama than they did with umaro. They regard the ulama as a role model in terms of attitude. This is an excerpt of their interview.

Jawara say to *ulama*: "Kumaha damang abah?"
Jawara say to *umaro*: "Apa kabar pak?"

The dialogue above indicates that the first greeting (in Sudanese) by *jawara* to *ulama* is more polite rather than second greeting (in Indonesian). (Interview 2015).

Impression management by *jawara* and *ulama* differ significantly from that initiated by *jawara* with a village head or a district head. This is due mainly to the *jawara*'s different perceptions and prejudice of the two groups of elites, *ulama* and *umaro*. *Ulama* were perceived by *jawara* as higher than both *jawara* and *umaro* as having higher social status, roles, and position in the

society.(Goffman, 1951: 294). The *jawara* regard *ulama* as a community builder and being a honourable person, while they perceive *umaro* as being venal. As a result, *jawara* generally speak politely using Sudanese language and sometimes switch to the Indonesian language with an ordinary tone of voice, not flat intonation, and speak slowly when they talk to the *ulama*. Unlike when speaking with *ulama, jawara* tended to speak with a patronizing tone, and with a lot of interruptions when talking with *umaro*, i.e., a village leader. However, they speak with more respect to *umaro*, particularly with those high ranking officers with a higher level of education such as when speaking with district heads compared with a village head. Fisher (1994: 57-60) suggests that experience, and socio-cultural factors, such as, educational level, occupation, social status and even psychological factors such as motivation, expectation, emotion affect social perceptions and behaviours are at play in this kind of situations. Even the nostalgia factor, a social emotion, has relevance to intergroup perception, in particular to prejudicial reactions (Cheung, Sedikides, Wildschut, 2017:96). This has coloured the communication behaviour of jawara both verbally and nonverbally. According to Moss and Tubb (2001: 56) and Rich (1974: 34), perception colours the behaviour of one's communication. Kartika (2016) explains that perception greatly influences personal or community behaviour in Indonesian society.

Communication events between *jawara* and the *ulama* and *umaro* indicate a different

ways communication between the different elite groups. They communicate using harsh language that is abusive (impolite Sudanese language), with a high intonation of voice or in a high pitch, interrupting each other, pointing their fists, hands on their hips, and sometimes even talking indecently. They also often a gossip about each other, irrespective of their social status or position in the society.

Although the *jawara* is perceived as not having good manners, the senior *jawara* is always respected by the junior. This is seen in the way they speak with each other. Juniors tend not to speak too roughly, loudly, or in a high pitch voice, and do not interject each other during a conversation. They avoid sitting before their senior *jawara*, particularly those with higher position in society, such as the head of the association of swordsman or another chairman of *Jawara*. They kiss the hand of the senior *jawara* as they do with the *ulama*. *Jawara* who are subordinates tend to perform Impression Management when communicating with their seniors.

Model of Impression Management in Communications of *Umaro* Against *Jawara* and *Ulama*

The communication between *umaro* and outsiders and communication with other elites, both *ulama* and *jawara*, has two different components, namely back stage and front stage.

When the *umaro* is communicating with *ulama* and *Jawara* it considered as the second stage, because of what is shown (the performance) them when communicating with other parties. This is in contrast with the *umaro* communicating among themselves, which in this study, is considered as back stage. Thus, the impression management model of communication of *umaro* vis a vis the *jawara* and *ulama* can be described below:
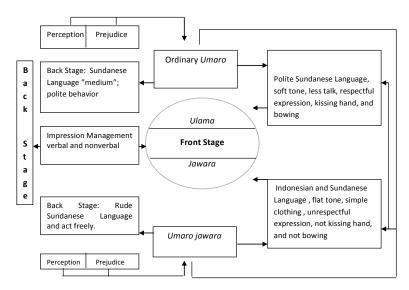

Figure 3. Impression Management Model of Communication of *Umaro* against *Jawara* and *Ulama*

Among the *ulama, umaro* as well as *jawara* - as depicted in the model, they speak politely in informal situations. In their homes, ulama, umaro and jawara generally use Sundanese Banten dialect and with respectful expression, bowed action, and kissing the hand of the *ulama*, especially a senior *ulama*. While in formal situations, such as meetings at the village or the district, the umaro generally speak in Indonesian, although sometimes he occasionally mixes it with Sundanese language. Like the *jawara*, the *umaro* speaks in Sundanese language instead of Indonesian when communicating with *ulama*. This is a reflection of their closeness and respect.

The reason for different communication style with regards to the *ulama* is that in the perception of *umaro*, they are more respectable than *jawara*. *Ulama*, especially senior or elderly *ulama*, must be respected. Their homage to *ulama* is coloured by their beliefs and worldview of *umaro*. The *Ulama* is considered as *Warosatul Anbiya* (heir to the prophet). This is the reason that is why they must be respected. When meeting with *ulama* such as, a in religious ceremony, *umaro* generally wearing black kopiah or a pilgrimage kopiah, in order to be presentable.

Umaro has different communication behaviour or impression management when they meet the *jawara* and *ulama*. They wear plain Indonesian clothes and speak in Sudanese in a monotone, and use expressions of disrespect, without kissing hand, and bowing when meeting with *jawara*. On the other, *umaro* do not use Indonesian but rather Sundanese as mother tongue. It is supported by data from interview with two informants (*umaro*). Using Sundanese as mother tongue to *ulama* is intended to be more polite and presentable (interview 2015). This points to the distinction of treatment between ulama and *jawara* by *umaro*, that is, the *jawara* is viewed by *umaro* as someone who is potentially violent and commits petty crimes.

Umaro do not appear to respect the *jawara* because of their "bad manners or behaviours "such as, sitting and standing carelessly, long-haired, ranting, joking, teasing each other with harsh and bad language, throwing food or cigarettes, and casually dressed. The *umaro* is regarded as having a better conduct and better ethics than the ordinary Indonesians. When the *umaro* talk to each other, especially with those whose position or social status is equal such as, communication between district heads or a village head with a village head, their communication seems to be on familiar terms, far from feeling shy or awkward, as opposed to talking with outsiders. They respect not only the *ulama*, but also people in *umaro* community who have higher positions or ranks. *Umaro* is expected to be more respectful and polite when communicating with their seniors or higher government officers as they are aware of their inferior position. Under certain circumstances, the *umaro* performs Impression Management vis a vis their superiors.

Impression Management Model in the Communication of *Ulama* With *Umaro* and *Jawara*

As with the other elites, the communication between *ulama* and their fellows, and communication with outsiders and other elites, both *umaro* and *jawara*, are considered different. Communication in the first event is classified as a back stage, while the second communication event is called front stage. When the *ulama* communicate with both *umaro* and *jawara*, it is considered as the second stage because of what is shown (the performance). When a *ulama* communicates with others, it is characterised by unobtrusive communication. The Impression Management model in the communication of *ulama* with *umaro* and jawara can be described as below:
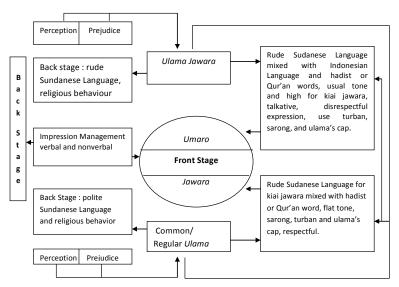

Figure 4. Impression Management Model of Communication of *Ulama* against *Jawara* and *Umaro*

With the *umaro*, as well as with other guests, generally in informal settings, such as at home, *ulama* tend to speak using the dialect of Sudanese Banten relatively "smooth", but *ulama jawara* still use Sudanese language which is regarded as being rude. In formal situations at work, such as in an official ceremony in village or in district or other events, such as religious holidays commemoration, take place formally where ulama generally communicate with *umaro* using Indonesian language, although sometimes remain intermingled with Sundanese language. When an ulama talk to *umaro*, he frequently cites or intersperses his speech with *Qoranic* verses or *Alhadist* for the purpose of preaching and advising umaro.

The *Ulama* when communicating with *umaro* and *jawara* tend to use same

management of communications. Based on the interview with three *ulama*, it was found they use Sundanese to both of two groups, *umaro* and *jawara*, in formal settings (Interview 2015). In certain circumstances, there is a different treatment of Impression Management between *umaro* and *jawara*. When an *ulama* meets either *umaro* or *jawara*, they are accustomed to wearing *koko* (moslem dress) or a long-sleeved shirt, with a kopiah (cap) or a pilgrim cap, and a turban. The turban is not viewed as the symbol of an *ulama* or a *Hajj*, rather, it is regarded as *Sunnah*. When the *ulama* communicate with both *umaro* and even *jawara*, they do not show respect to other groups of elites as they are used to doing that to the *ulama*. This indicates that men though regarded as equals, the treatment also varies based on their religious status .

Communication by *ulama* with other groups of elites as previously described is slightly different from that with others in their community. On the back of stage, *ulama* communicates differently with the *jawara* who has "bad" manners within their community. *Ulama* in their community appear to have better etiquette and conduct than the *jawara*. When *ulama* talk to each other, their communication is warm and pleasant and they often joke among themselves, with occasional arguments on matters related to religion. However, the jokes and debate are done respectfully, using "polite" language, This is different from the communication among the *jawara* characterised by harsh language. Under certain circumstances, on the back stage,

when students meet with their ulama, they use Impression Management such as, bowing and kissing their hand.

As discussed, the Impression Management of ulama vis a vis the *umaro* and *jawara* is similar. The difference is simply a matter of verbal Impression Management. The *Ulama* is often called *jawara baragajul*, that is, an individual with bad manners. They refer to the *umaro* as educated people. The nonverbal communication between *ulama* and *jawara* is characterised by the use of a personal space. For example, *ulama* is always seated in the front row along with *umaro* in every single social or religious event. This allows *ulama* to get closer to *umaro*. This form of familiarity suggests differences in Impression Management both verbally and nonverbally by *ulama* with regards to *umaro* and *jawara*. The differences are coloured by perceptions and prejudices of *ulama* against *umaro* and *jawara*. The *Ulama* generally has a more negative perception and prejudice against *jawara* in contrast with *umaro*. *Jawara*, in the eyes of *ulama*, is identical with those who commit violence and often breach religious rules or teachings.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown the impression management of *jawar*a vis a vis the *ulama* is more respectful than that of *jawara* towards *umaro*. The *Jawara* generally perceives *ulama* as an individual that needs to be totally respected, while *umaro* is often seen by *jawara* as a person who tends to abuse his position or power for a personal gain.

Similarly, impression management by umaro to *ulama* and *jawara* is different. On one hand, the *umaro* gives more respect to the *ulama* than to *jawara*. They perceive ulamas as leaders who are a role model for society and therefore, they need to be respected by the members of the ethnic group. On the other hand, *jawara* is often regarded as one who is willing to commit violence.

Impression management by *ulama* is not special in the sense that the *ulama* does not show respect to both elites of ethnic groups, *umaro* and *jawara*. In addition, quoting *Qur'an* verses and *Alhadist* is not intended to build an image that they need to be respected as *ulama*; rather, it is for the sake of missionary endeavour in order to seek blessings from God. This suggests that Goffman's theory cannot be accepted fully, as this study has proven communication is loaded with pragmatism and idealism.

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