

Intercultural Communication Between Japanese Expatriate and Indonesian Local Workers

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Abstract

Job opportunities in Japanese companies in Indonesia and also job opportunities in Japan are increasing every year. However, friction due to cultural differences is something that sometimes unavoidable in communication. This has been directly experienced by the author who has worked as an interpreter in a Japanese company in Cikarang, West Java, this is the basis of this research. The aim of this study are 1) to describe the problems experienced by Japanese expatriate workers and Indonesian local workers, 2) to describe the communication strategies used by Japanese expatriate workers and Indonesian local workers when facing problems they have experienced. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis method with a combined approach. The data in this study were collected quantitatively through questionnaires but the discussion was carried out qualitatively. Respondents involved in this study are 41 people, 26 Indonesians and 15 Japanese. The collected data will be analyzed by content analysis method. The results of the study show that 80% of Japanese people admit that it is difficult to work with Indonesians, and only 23% of Indonesian respondents who firmly say that it is not difficult to work with Japanese people. The difficulties experienced by Japanese respondents are in 5 categories, language behavior problems, differences in work culture, cultural differences (manners), foreign languages, and individuals. While the difficulties of the Indonesian respondents were in 2 categories, language behavior problems and foreign languages. In general, the strategy used by Indonesian and Japanese respondents in dealing with problems is a convergence strategy.

Keywords: Japanese expatriate workers (PEJ), Indonesian local workers (PLI), intercultural communication, cultural intelligence, strategy

INTRODUCTION

Friction in the work environment sometimes occurs due to cultural and character differences that greatly affect the way they communicate. The author once taught Indonesian language to a director of a Japanese company, in the beginning he complained a lot about the his local staffs, but after the author explained basic things about the character of Indonesian people his complaints decreased. The author was also working as in interpreter in Japanese company, the author heard the harsh Japanese language used by the director when he got angry. From that experiences the author feels that it is very important to have cultural intelligence for anyone who is working abroad. To build a good communication between IW and JEW they need cultural intelligence. Currently there are 1489 Japanese companies in Indonesia. This means there are many opportunities for Indonesians who understand Japanese to work for Japanese companies. Mizutani and Nobuku (1987) in Wahyuning Dyah, I Nengah Sudipa dan I Nyoman Suparwa (2018) stated that in Japanese society, a speaker has spoken politely or not can be seen from the variety of Japanese used and

other accompanying elements. Rigidity in communication creates distance between personalities, small talks between work is also important in communication to create a good working relationship and atmosphere.

JETRO noted that Japanese investment in Indonesia reached 4.3 USD per year. This value places Japan as the third largest investor in Indonesia. Because of the large number of job opportunities for Indonesians and Japanese to work in Japanese companies in Indonesia, it is very important for people from Indonesia and also Japan to master their cultural intelligence. It is important to have an understanding of communication between people involved in Japanese companies in Indonesia.

Indonesians tend to avoid formality and rigidity in a friendly relationship, while Japanese people tend to distance themselves especially in workplaces that demand professionalism. Rigidity in communication creates distance between individuals, light communication between work is also important in communication to create relationships and a good work atmosphere. In Shimoda (2013), Coupland (2003) states small talk enforces social cohesiveness, reduces threat values attached to social contact, and helps to structure social interactions. Malinowski (1923) in Shimoda (2013) argues that in social relations, small talk is the first action to build a relationship of fellowship and the creation of unity between people by breaking the silence and just exchanging words.

Seeing the importance of creating good communication and relationships in the work environment, in addition to understanding each other's language, it is very important for local Indonesian workers to understand Japanese culture and it is also important for Japanese expatriates to understand Indonesian culture so that they can help create a good work environment in the company. People who work in companies with different cultural backgrounds have certainly faced problems caused by misunderstandings in how to communicate. To communicate with people who come from different cultures, language skills are not enough, cultural intelligence is also needed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ino and Someya (2005) used the notion of communication in the 2003 encyclopedia dictionary, communication means that speakers use language and not language as a tool in the process of communicating messages to listeners. Intercultural communication happens when people from different languages and cultures have to be able to come into contact: they need to come physically face to face, or be culturally in contact through their writing or cultural product. Recently they have been digitally in communication with contact facilitated by technology especially the internet, Curtis and Sussex (2018) Not really different with intercultural, cross cultural is a communication activity between people with different backgrounds. In cross-cultural or intercultural communication activities, a speaker is not enough to master a foreign language but needs to have other competencies. Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) in Ino and Someya (2005) developed the concept of communication competence and classified it into 4 sub-competencies as follows:

- 1) Grammatical Competence: Knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, word formation, and phonology required for proper use of language.
- 2) Sociolinguistic Competence: Able to use language well in certain social cultures. This ability is also known as Pragmatic Competence.
- 3) Discourse Competence: Ability to understand and produce a series of sentences and utterances that are consistent and cohesive.
- 4) Strategic Competence: Ability to improve communication effectiveness and to supplement inadequate linguistic knowledge in some ways to communicate

Interculture communication and cross-cultural communication are multifaceted subject that has elements from several disciplines such as: anthropology, linguistics, philosophy and psychology. Cross-cultural communication or incultural communication is the way people from different cultures communicate when they face each other either at a distance or face-to-face. Communication can involve spoken and written language, body language and language of etiquette and protocol (Hurn & Tomalin, 2013:2). To create a good communication between people from different cultures cultural intelligence is needed. Peterson (2004:89) “*cultural intelligence is the ability to engage in a set of behaviors that uses skills (i.e., language or interpersonal skills) and qualities (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility) that are tuned appropriately to the culture-based values and attitudes of the people with whom one interacts*”. People mostly think that culture intelligence is a soft skill, according to Peterson it’s a serious mistake with a negative impact on the business in bottom line. Cultural intelligence is not soft skill that can simply be improvised on the spot. Knowledge about Cultures (facts and cultural traits) + Awareness (of yourself and others) + Specific Skills (behaviors) = Cultural Intelligence.

Kim (2001) stated that the key to the adaptation process is the ability to communicate in the new culture, the ability to communicate with local values and actively follow the communication process in the local community. This means that in order to adapt successfully, one must be able to capture the essence of the new culture through practical communication, and juxtapose it with the old culture (our cultural background). To be competent in the new cultural communication system, one must be able to become an active participant in communication between individuals and in the communication process between people in the local community. Like someone who learns to swim, it is impossible to become competent in communication without being directly involved in society.

In order for a person to easily adapt to the local culture, Kim (2001) states that one must have local communication competence. The competencies are

1. Cognitive competence

Cognitive competence consists of knowledge of local communication systems, cultural understanding, and cognitive complexity.

2. Affective competence

Cognitive competence consists of adaptation motivation, identity flexibility and aesthetic co-orientation.

3. Operational competence

Operational competence consists of technical skills, synchronization and intelligence/creativity to reconcile cultural differences and produce creative actions and plans in carrying out daily activities.

From the problems and conditions described above, the authors formulate the problems to be discussed in this study as follows:

1. What problems do Japanese expatriate workers (PEJ) and Indonesian local workers (PLI) encounter in communicating at work?
2. What communication strategies do Japanese expatriate workers (PEJ) and Indonesian local workers (PLI) use when responding to problems they have experienced.

METHODS

The data in this study were collected through a questionnaire compiled in the form of a google form, it was easier to get respondents during this pandemic. This is an open questionnaire, respondents are allowed to write their opinion freely. The respondents in this research are 26 persons Indonesian local workers who currently work or have worked in Japanese companies and 16 persons Japanese expatriate workers who currently work or have worked in Indonesia.

The respondents who answered the questionnaire were in the age range of the youngest 23 years old and the oldest 62 years old. Length of work is in the range of 3 months to 42 years. The company fields of the most respondents are education and culture, then industry and manufacturing. To get balanced information the author will ask the same question to Japanese expatriates and Indonesian local workers. The questionnaire written in both Japanese language for PEJ and in Indonesian for PLI. This study is a qualitative research, the data collected will be explained by descriptive method. Japanese and Indonesian language ability both PLI and PEJ will be divided to 3 level: 1) Advanced (able to converse in Japanese in all contexts, including business and daily life, with little or no difficulty); 2) Conversation (able to conduct basic daily conversation, but not in a business context, and having a lot of difficulties understanding the language if it is not simple); or 3) Only greetings or not at all, (O'Connel: 2006). Communication problems experienced by PLI and PEJ will be categorized into findings from Ushiro's research (2014), namely, language behavior, cultural differences and cultural differences (manners) and Yamauchi and Orr (2008) namely foreign language problems, native speakers' language, company structure and technology, individual and social abilities, while PLI and PEJ communication strategies are categorized into convergence accommodation

theory (*wa, ma, tatemaie and honne, kyouchousei, enryou-sasshi, nemawashi shinrai-kankei* indirect communication, high and low level conflict communication etc.) and divergence, and also its relation to theories of communication strategy and its relation to the criteria that have been mentioned by Peterson (2014)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

80% of PEJs who responded to this survey found it difficult to use PLI. On the other hand, only 23% of PLI respondents who responded to this survey stated that their company had no problem working with PEJ. Kim (2001) stated that the key to the adaptation process is the ability to adapt to new cultures and communicate with local values, but in the light of PEJ's response, which is devoted to the way it works, PEJ It turns out to be difficult to adapt to PLI's work culture. However, since the company where PEJ and PLI work is a Japanese company, the Japanese labor culture is of course brought to Indonesia. This is because everyone brings their own culture, social culture, psychological culture, Gudykuns and Kim Kartika (2013).

The number of difficulties PEJ experiences due to differences in work culture with PLI is a problem that PLI needs to be aware of. From the above, it is very important for Japanese speakers to understand the workplace culture of Japanese companies. The same is true from his research, which states that communication problems due to the influence of foreign languages are not necessarily caused by differences in grammar and vocabulary, but by underlying cultural values, Yamauchi and Orr (2008). Customs also contribute to communication disruptions. The same was reported by Peterson (2004). When working with clients and colleagues from different cultures, you need to be able to modify your behavior in the right way. It is part of interpersonal intelligence, which is an important element of cultural intelligence.

In addition, the difficulty of PLI in the PEJ's category of verbal behavior needs to be a concern for PEJ. Generally, the Japanese language in Japan is the same and understood by the Japanese, but the Japanese language learned by foreigners is standard Japanese. Therefore, PEJ needs to pay attention to dialect use and speech speed, and PEJ needs to adapt Japanese to PLI Japanese (Ushiro: 2014). It can be concluded that the difficulties PEJ experiences into five categories: language behavior problems, labor culture differences, cultural differences (manners), foreign languages, and individuals. The difficulty of PLI lies in two categories: language behavior problems and foreign languages.

Also, the reason why PLI is difficult to cooperate with PEJ is lacks Japanese skills, so PLI feels that it is difficult to communicate in Japanese. From PLI's answer, we can see that PLI reflects where the difficulty of working for a Japanese company lies. Japanese is a difficult language to learn because it has many characters and grammar that Indonesian does not have. It takes a long time to really master Japanese. The next issues PEJ experiences are language behavior, workplace culture, foreign languages, individuals, and social abilities. On the other hand, from the PLI side, only two people explained the problem and the solution, so only two problems were found: the problem of social skills and the problem of foreign languages. However, in general,

the payment strategy they use is a divergence strategy that involves direct communication and direct involvement. However, some people have adopted a divergence strategy of one from the PEJ side and one from the PLI side. Divergence strategies should be avoided in communication as they keep people away from the group. Broadly speaking, the strategy used by PLI and PEJ using the adaptive capacity expressed by Kim (2011) is understanding, and recognizing and accepting differences is the cognitive ability of cultural understanding. Strengthening communication and debate and confirming that it is not yet understood is the ability of cognitive complexity. Finding the right time for casual conversation outside of work is part of the aesthetic coordination of being directly involved in the activities of the locals. In addition, learning the languages and cultures of Indonesia and Japan is a cognitive ability and a knowledge ability about the local communication system. Getting used to listening to other people's conversations is an emotional ability of adaptive motivation. In addition, I will explain the difference in creativity / intelligence operational habits between Indonesia and Japan. Communication with English and other languages is the flexibility of identity. It is included in the ability to adapt, using easy-to-understand expressions.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that 80% of Japanese people admit that it is difficult to work with Indonesians, and only 23% of Indonesian respondents who firmly say that it is not difficult to work with Japanese people. The difficulty that PEJ experiences is mainly due to differences in labor culture, which is 50%. The difficulties PEJ experiences are in five categories: language behavior problems, labor culture differences, cultural differences (manners), foreign languages, and individuals. The difficulty of PLI lies in two categories: language behavior problems and foreign languages. PEJs and PLIs need to be aware of the difficulties they experience in order to improve communication in the future. In addition, divergence strategies in communication need to be avoided as they keep people away from the group and disrupt the relationship between PLI and PEJ. In addition, PLI and PEJ need to understand each other's cultural differences, strengthen communication and improve personal relationships. The better the relationship, the better the work.

The implications of this research can be described in 3 important points as follows:

1. Japanese language learners who plan to work in a company know what difficulties PEJs face working with PLI so that they can better prepare themselves.
2. To educational institutions that prepare Japanese speakers to see what difficulties PLI is experiencing so that they can prepare their graduates.
3. To Japanese companies that employ Indonesian Japanese speakers to pay attention to what they don't like in communication so that each can understand each other better.

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