

## **ASSERTIVE FORM OF THE LOCAL CITIZEN TO REFUGEES IN PEKANBARU, INDONESIA**

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### **Abstract**

In other situations, dissimilarity such as in language difficulties between host community and refugees would lead to a problem. Regardless, both local citizens and refugees in the Pekanbaru city research area can develop good relations. Indonesia is known as a country with assertive behavior, therefore by using qualitative, this research looks at the manifestation of that assertiveness. The discovery may contribute to the discussion of the Indonesia-refugees theme in the global academic level and intercultural communication act in Indonesia. The study found that the locals prefer appropriate behavior over language ability as the engagement factor for their sustainability relationship with refugees. When they are in conversation and face difficulty in language, the locals will enthusiastically wait for the refugees to finish their sentences, listen to the words spoken by refugees, and try out their meaning.

**Keywords:** *host community; refugee; communication behavior; assertiveness; intercultural*

## **Introduction**

Communication is considered as the primary tool to facilitate social interaction (Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012; Grindheim, 2013; Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013), ones should use it as the primary effort and the first step to start an adjustment in a new environment, which in this topic this can be used by the refugees to the host community. One of the tools that are often used by people to communicate is language in their verbal communication.

However, the language barrier is known as the most common obstacle reflected as a potential stressor encountered in cross-cultural settings (Wang et al., 2018). The lack of language ability of foreigners in a native country can cause misunderstanding (Grindheim, 2013), difficulty in social adaptation (Jaji, 2014), delay in completing tasks in the workplace (Bacinskiene, Laura; Jakimovska-Garbauskaite, 2016), social isolation and health problems ( Atwell et al., as cited in Almohamed & Vyas, 2016), also the feeling of restriction (Hebbani et al., 2018).

The importance of being able to speak the same language can be seen from previous studies that in job hunting in Australia, 11 refugee men were interviewed to see their experience about the matter. As a result, the research found that the company would possibly disregard potential employees due to the language barrier and lack of understanding of the local culture (Fleay et al., 2013). In addition, this matter also affects home-sharing preferences for international travellers, that they prefer those who have the same language as them (Wang et al., 2018). All in all, language is important.

So, according to previous findings when a person has language difficulties, other difficulties will soon follow. Broadly speaking, we understand that language similarity holds an important position as a means for a person to fulfil his or her needs. Wouldn't it be a difficult situation if it turned out that someone couldn't speak the local language but he had to live in the area for a long time? How can he survive in that place?

This situation happens to refugees in Pekanbaru city, Indonesia. Refugees are forced to leave their home countries to survive in neighbouring countries or in countries directed by UNHCR to accommodate them (UNHCR, 2021). One of the countries whose role is to accommodate them is Indonesia. Indonesia acts as a transit country, while refugees wait for the next steps from UNHCR. This uncertain waiting period means that they have to stay in Indonesia for an indefinite time (Curby, 2020).

**Table 1. Refugees' Origin in Research Area in 2015**

<b>Nations</b>	<b>Total</b>
Palestine	33
Myanmar	32
Iraq	27
Afghanistan	11
Iran	8
Somalia	5
Srilanka	4
Syria	1
Jordan	1
Pakistan	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>

Source: Pekanbaru City Immigration Office, 2015

Having to stay in Indonesia for a long time means they will be in contact with the local community. As an individual, they certainly feel the need to know the area in which they live. Then how can this be done when both parties cannot use each other language.

In Pekanbaru, between the locals and refugees, both parties speak different languages but managed to interact every day. Although the situation is seemed impossible, the locals and the refugee who don't speak the same language apparently can have a good relationship with the locals and they even have a *favourite*.

That being said, it could lead to the understanding of Indonesia has assertive culture and is passionate to maintain harmony so they tend to avoid conflict (Irawanto, 2009). The previous study about Minang, Java, and Batak tribes' level of assertiveness has a result of they are in the

medium category in a percentage 67.74% (Afdal et al., 2019). As to how the previous study has measured, in the research area the local is consists of these tribes also, however, this research uses the qualitative method, subjectively wants to see the manifestation of the assertive behaviour from the communication perspective point of view.

The discovery may contribute to specific variables of assertiveness derived from the conditions of the community concerned, which also bring discussion material of Indonesia-refugees theme in the global academic level and also might have practical use in the future for this is as well have a role in intercultural communication act in Indonesia.

## **Research Method**

This study is the continuation of the researcher's previous study in discovering communication patterns between local citizens in Pekanbaru City and refugees around them. Including the beginning of the previous research until this very moment, this paper limits the topic to discuss how the citizens of Pekanbaru City communicate with refugees. This study took more or less four years of observation for the whole study of the community. Specifically, data collection for this theme alone took approximately eight months of observation and interview of local citizens and refugees.

The research field was in Pekanbaru City as one of 13 cities pointed by the Indonesian government to accommodate international refugees in Indonesia. The specific area discussed in this research was the local citizens' neighborhood where the community house consists of 48 rooms with 125 refugees from 11 countries who occupy that dorm-like building.

The data was collected by using observation and interviews. Data from observation was analyzed by discourse analysis, and data from the interview was analyzed by thematic analysis. Informants were asked with a semi-structured interview and available for probing questions during the interview while also sticking to the research objective. These methods of data collection were tested in the pilot study first that then evaluated before conducting actual data collection.

This study used purposive sampling for informants because the goal is to have those who have the most relevant and plentiful data, given to

the topic of study (Yin, 2011). For that purpose, there were set characteristics to ensure that the informants were those who were well-experienced in interacting with a refugee. The requirements are as follow:

- The one who comfortably communicate with refugees
- The one who lives side by side around the refugees building area
- The local permanent citizens, not a newcomer or temporary citizens who live in the same area or block
- The willingness to be involved as informants in this study.

There were five informants from Pekanbaru citizens as the host community, and there were a pair of adult refugees from Myanmar and two adults from Iran involved in supporting the statement. As this study is from a local citizen's point of view, the data profile of refugees is not provided.

**Table 2. Informant's Profile**

No.	Initial	Gender	Age	Brief Background
1.	Yul	Female	52	The wife of the leader who often interacts with refugees.
2.	Dre	Male	23	The son of the leader, a young local citizen who likes to mingle with the young refugees.
3.	Jok	Male	49	A local citizen who used to work as a security guard.
4.	Sya	Male	45	A local citizen who works as a security guard.
5.	Gar	Male	45	A local citizen who annually mingles with refugees.

Source: Researcher's Document (2019)

## Results and Discussion

According to the data from observation and the focus on, the researcher categorized the assertive behavior of the local citizen when they are in conversation and when face misunderstandings. As the result, when they are in those situations, local citizens show an understanding behavior and problem avoidance behavior when they are engaged in a conversation. In detail, this can be understood through the following description.

### Understanding Behavior

Local citizens stated that they choose to understand when communicating with the refugees. They said they are aware that refugees may not speak the Indonesian language. Therefore, it's no use to force them to be able to do so. In addition, local citizens acknowledged that there were times they were triggered by the refugee however they chose to understand and not get angry at them.

For being understanding, **Sya (45)** said,

*"...ya... kita harus sabar. Orang itu kan tak tahu. Jadi kita harus ngerti."*

That can be understood as "We have to understand that they don't understand."

In support of Sya, **Gar (45)** then said,

*"Kalau saya sih, gampang aja. Bawa diem. Saya harus jaga mood dan perasaan supaya ga marah-mara ke mereka."*

Gar said that he will take it easy and keep silent. He said he should keep his mood and the situation so he doesn't get angry. From this, it can be inferred that Gar chose not to get angry when refugees do something, he considered inappropriate.

## Problem Avoidance Behavior

In the research area, the locals are using cultural traits such as the use of honorific and a traditional language (they mostly use Minang language which is one of the traditional languages in Indonesia).

So, if the problem is only about hearing where one another misses the point about the topic, local citizens will repeat and mix the sentence with gesturing, speak slower, repeat the words, and mimic while mentioning the keyword of the sentence.

If the problem is the use of honorific, the locals don't just let it go like that. They taught them the basics such as how to address the elderly and themselves in greeting and conversation. For example, when the local is an adult male, has kids, and is known as someone older than you, then the locals prefer to be called "*Pak*" it sounds like "Puck", it means "Mr." in English. The same thing applies to adult women with children, they use "*Bu*" it sounds like "Boo" which means "Mrs." in English as the pronoun for them.

In addition, if the local is a teenage boy or someone who looks young from the appearance and doesn't have kids, however, you are not sure about it. The locals used to call them "*Bang*" from "*Abang*" it sounds like "Bunk", it means "older brother". *Abang* is another name for an older brother. This word comes from the Malay language. However, if it is a teenage girl, the local will call them "*Dek*" it sounds like "Deck" in English and it has a meaning of "younger sister".

An informant named **Yul (52)** told a story when a young refugee says hello to her and tried to talk to her in the Indonesian language, "*Hai. Kamu sudah makan?*" Alternatively in English, it is similar to "Have you lunch?". From the sentence, the young refugee did not add the honorific "*Bu*" to address Yul. However, knowing refugees might still not be used to it, she still answered it.

However, she also corrected the refugee immediately. "*Harusnya. Sudah makan, Bu?*", English it's like "Have you lunch, Mam?". Yul then added that even though she taught the refugees about the honorifics and somehow, refugees did not do it, she chose to understand. She thinks the refugees may not get used to it yet. However, if it came from local to local

citizens who did not address Yul with the honorific, she would possibly be offended.

At last, if the conversation is stuck and no one gets the point, the local citizens and refugees will close it with laughter, and they would pass the topic there just like that and find another topic to remain engaged in conversation. Local citizens will laugh sometimes followed by small nods when they do not understand the topic of conversation delivered by the refugees.

Based on a related study by Petraki & Ramayanti (2018), Indonesian usually use humor as a relationship-building strategy. So, it entirely explains the intention behind the jokes delivered by the local citizens to refugees even though they have a language barrier; it is possibly because the locals tried to build a relationship with refugees another nation with a similar trait is Japan that uses laugh for fulfilling a self-serving remedial function in conversation (Stadler, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

During the data collection phase through interviews, informants often repeat and emphasize sentences that express an understanding and a tolerance toward refugees. While Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko (2012) study with the focus on foreign workers in Korea, stated host country language proficiency had been shown to facilitate the interaction between foreign workers and the host community by inducing and fostering the interaction.

In contrast, in Pekanbaru City, host language proficiency is not seen to facilitate the interaction because even though both parties having a hard time with the language barrier, they are all still engage in communication in their daily interaction.

In the matter of *language barrier* and *the use of honorifics*, even though it was necessary for them, the locals tolerate the matter when refugees do not use it. However, they will explain to them so refugees could meet their expectations.

This is also related to the communication style of Indonesian which is indirect communication. This shapes them not to focus on the language but on the gesture or the meaning behind that. Also supporting Indonesia



as a collectivistic country, where the feeling of connection to each other is great for the member (Shoji Nishimura et al., 2010; Smith, 2011), makes this member of collectivism behave in such a way that they can maintain the harmony (LeFebvre & Franke, 2013).

Which applied to the outer group like the refugee. This resulted in the locals' initiation an understanding, tolerance, and commitment to avoiding problems in their communication behavior when communicating with refugees.

Besides the fact that the locals chose to understand and avoid problems. The identity of Indonesia is a highly diverse country with many ethnic groups, religions, cultures, and customs meaning that Indonesia is very plural. However, it's not polar so that the potential impact of misunderstanding that may result in conflict tends to be low (BPS, 2019).

All in all, regardless of the language ability, the locals rely more on the attitude brought by the foreigner whether it is suit to their expectation or not.

In the field, the refugees and local society's good relationship are caused by the similarity and the understanding of each other in the matter of culture and habit, so that is the manifestation of the assertiveness of the local that makes the language does not matter as the main factor of the adjustment.

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