

Analysis of Cross-Cultural Communication Barriers (Case Study of Husband and Wife of Sasak Tribe and Samawa Tribe in Poto Tano District, West Sumbawa Regency)

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Abstract

This research is entitled "Analysis of Cross-Cultural Communication Barriers (Case Study of Sasak and Samawa Tribe Husband and Wife Couples in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, Senayan Village)". This research is motivated by the phenomenon of elopement, early marriage, and the high divorce rate in the region, which is thought to be related to intercultural communication barriers. The purpose of this research is to find out and analyse the cross-cultural communication barriers experienced by married couples from two different cultural backgrounds, namely the Sasak Tribe and the Samawa Tribe. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of six married couples from different ethnic groups who live in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet. The results showed that the main barriers come from language differences that cause misunderstanding, loss of meaning, and awkwardness in communication. In addition, differences in norms or habits, as well as a lack of self-confidence, also contribute to increasing the risk of small conflicts in household relationships.

Keywords: Communication Barriers, Culture, Couples

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural communication occurs when two or more individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other. Each culture has a unique value system, life goals, and communication behaviour (Mughtar et al., 2016). Understanding other cultures determines the effectiveness of communication. According to Luthfi (2018), cross-cultural communication is the process of exchanging thoughts and meanings between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In practice, a person's culture greatly influences how to communicate and the success of the interaction.

Cultural communication barriers can occur due to differences in norms, habits, and values adopted by each individual. Communicants tend to accept information more easily from sources that have similar culture, language, religion, and belief systems (Wahyu Annas, 2012). Barriers in communication can also arise from differences in self-concept, lifestyle, interests, and interests.

The phenomenon of elopement, early marriage, and the high divorce rate are the main background of this research. In Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, Senayan Village, there is a marriage between individuals from the Sasak and Samawa Tribes. The tradition of 'merarik' is one of the most common forms of marriage, citing a lower dowry and a symbol of seriousness. However, the practice is often carried out by school-age children who have dropped out of education, posing a risk of conflict within the marriage.

According to data from Ibu Sabariah, a local Posyandu cadre, in 2021-2023 there were 32 cases of divorce between the Sasak and Samawa tribes. The year 2024 showed an additional 8 cases. In addition, from 2022 to 2024 there were 48 cases of early marriage. Cultural differences are also evident in the use of body signals. For example, the Samawa Tribe uses the index or whole finger when pointing, while the Sasak Tribe uses the thumb with the other fingers folded. In the context of eating together, individuals are not allowed to wash their hands or stand first if parents have not finished eating, as a form of respect.

This study aims to understand the communication barriers experienced by married couples of different ethnicities in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet. The communication barriers

identified include verbal and nonverbal barriers, which include differences in language, habits, and low self-confidence in communication. This research is important because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the couple's efforts in managing conflict due to cultural differences.

Edward T. Hall explains that effective cross-cultural communication is characterised by an openness to learning about the partner's culture, adaptability, and a willingness to deal with differences constructively. When couples are able to develop empathy and cultural awareness, they tend to find it easier to build harmonious communication and mutual understanding. Understanding these communication barriers is expected to help intercultural couples create healthy, respectful and emotionally strong relationships.

This research uses the Uncertainty Reduction Theory approach developed by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975. This theory departs from the assumption that every individual has an urge to reduce uncertainty when interacting with others, especially in initial communication. In this context, communication is seen as the main means of obtaining information and understanding the interlocutor so that the interaction becomes more effective (Utami, 2015). In intercultural relationships, uncertainty tends to be higher due to differences in values, language, norms, and habits.

According to Berger and Calabrese (1975), uncertainty can be reduced through several communication strategies, such as active strategies (seeking information through third parties), passive strategies (observing the interlocutor's behaviour), and interactive strategies (communicating directly). In practice, individuals tend to use a combination of these strategies to understand other cultures and adjust in cross-cultural communication.

Yuda Octapiansyah and Lalu Ahmad Taubih (2024) added that this theory is very relevant in the context of language differences, because uncertainty often arises due to misunderstanding, loss of meaning, awkwardness, and obstacles in expressing ideas. Some of the forms of barriers described include:

1. Misunderstanding, when the message conveyed is misinterpreted due to differences in language understanding
2. Loss of meaning, which is when the main intention of the message is not fully delivered
3. Communicative awkwardness, which is a feeling of embarrassment or discomfort due to limited mastery of language or different accents; and
4. Barriers to expression, which is the inability to convey ideas appropriately due to limited mastery of the language.

In addition to language differences, this theory also explains barriers arising from differences in norms and habits. Berger and Calabrese (1975) define norms as unwritten social rules that govern accepted behaviour within a culture, while habits are repetitive actions that become part of an individual or group's cultural identity. When two cultures meet in a relationship such as marriage, these differences can lead to misunderstandings in interpreting behaviour, discomfort in adjusting, as well as the emergence of negative perceptions of the partner's culture.

Under these conditions, uncertainty reduction strategies also apply to building cultural awareness, empathy, and openness in the face of differences. When individuals understand that negative perceptions and discomfort stem from ignorance of other cultures, they will be better able to develop open and flexible communication.

Another aspect that is focussed on in this theory is the barriers that arise due to a lack of self-confidence when facing intercultural situations. Individuals who lack confidence will feel hesitant in conveying ideas, fear making mistakes, and tend to withdraw from interactions. This can be exacerbated by high uncertainty, feared social risks, and psychological challenges such as shyness or excessive anxiety (Octapiansyah & Taubih, 2024). Therefore, uncertainty reduction strategies are also directed at strengthening self-confidence through increased cultural understanding, first-hand experience, and environmental support.

Thus, Uncertainty Reduction Theory provides a strong basis for understanding how cross-cultural married couples such as the Sasak and Samawa manage their communication to overcome barriers arising from differences in cultural background, language, and norms.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to describe and deeply understand social phenomena related to cross-cultural communication barriers in married couples from the Samawa and Sasak tribes. According to Sukmadinata (2009), qualitative methods are used to analyse events, beliefs, and social activities in a natural context. Meanwhile, Creswell (2015) asserts that this approach is relevant to uncovering the meanings that individuals or groups have towards a social issue. This research also refers to Paramitha's (2019) view, which states that in a qualitative approach, researchers are directly involved in the process of interpreting the data collected and then presented in narrative form.

The focus of this research is to identify the forms of cross-cultural communication barriers in the household life of couples of different ethnic groups, especially between Sasak and Samawa tribes. The research location is in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, Senayan Village, Poto Tano District, West Sumbawa Regency. This location was chosen because the community has a culture that is still very thick and there are many inter-ethnic marriages which are relevant objects of study. The research was conducted from September 2024 to April 2025. The informants in this study consisted of key informants, namely the Senayan Village Secretary (Mr Faizal), and six married couples of different ethnicities as the main informants.

The technique used in determining informants is a population study, because all couples who fulfil the criteria are within the range that can be thoroughly researched. The informant criteria included married couples from the Samawa and Sasak tribes who live in the area. The types of data used are primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through interviews with informants who had experiences related to intercultural communication barriers. Meanwhile, secondary data came from documents such as journals, articles, and books relevant to the research topic (Tsabita Fillah Fitria Misri, 2024).

The data collection techniques used in this research include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis in this study refers to the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was done by filtering out important information related to the research focus. Data presentation was done in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding of the findings. Verification and conclusion drawing were carried out to connect the theory and field results, in order to obtain a complete understanding of the problem under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Site

This research was conducted in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, Senayan Village, Poto Tano Sub-district, West Sumbawa Regency. This region is known as an area with cultural diversity, where people from the Sasak tribe and the Samawa tribe live side by side. This inter-ethnic interaction often leads to marriage. However, the different cultural backgrounds in inter-ethnic marriages often lead to various problems, especially in terms of communication.

Respondent Overview

The researcher interviewed six main informants, namely wives who come from the Sasak tribe and are married to husbands from the Samawa tribe. They have undergone intercultural marriages and experienced first-hand the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

Table 1: List of Research Informants

No	Name	Age	Tribe Origin	Length of marriage
1	Asamawati	27 years old	Sasak	1 years old
2	Suhaini	50 years old	Sasak	14 years old
3	Arianti	32 years old	Sasak	13 years old
4	Sahnim	40 years old	Sasak	15 years old
5	Mahnim	52 years old	Sasak	8 years old
6	Matasiah	50 years old	Sasak	15 years old

Source: field interview, 2025

Barriers to Language Differences

Language is the main tool in the communication process. In the context of cross-cultural marriages, language differences were the first barrier most felt by the informants. The local language between the Sasak and Samawa tribes has significant differences in vocabulary, intonation and speaking style. Respondent 1 said:

"Sometimes I misunderstand his intentions, I think he's angry, but that's just the way he talks."

This statement shows that the different tone of voice used by the Samawa tribe is often misinterpreted as anger, when it is not. This leads to misunderstandings in everyday conversations that can trigger small conflicts if not immediately explained. In addition to misunderstandings, some informants also experienced a loss of meaning when communicating. Respondent 3 said:

"I wanted to say something, but I didn't know the right words. So I just kept quiet."

Loss of meaning occurs due to limited vocabulary in the partner's language, which makes the message not conveyed to the fullest. This causes an imbalance in communication and can affect the emotional closeness of the couple. The obstacles to expression were also a complaint felt by some informants. Respondent 5 said:

"When my husband's family gathers, I can't say much because I don't understand the language."

This situation makes the individual feel socially excluded because they cannot participate in the conversation, which indirectly lowers their confidence in front of their partner's family

Differences in Norms and Customs

Every culture has its own norms and customs that are considered normal in that cultural environment. However, when two different cultures meet in a household, these differences can be a source of conflict if not addressed with mutual understanding. Respondent 2 shared:

"When I pointed with my thumb, my husband's family said it was rude."

In Sasak culture, pointing with the thumb is common. However, in Samawa culture, it is considered impolite, especially if done to an older person. This misunderstanding is a clear example of cultural misinterpretation that occurs due to ignorance or differences in perception. Many respondents also recognised the discomfort of being around their partner's family. Respondent 4 confessed:

"I was afraid of being wrong, afraid of being judged as rude because of different ways of speaking or eating habits."

This fear makes individuals prefer to remain silent and adjust passively. In fact, without open communication, misunderstandings will only get bigger. In addition, there was also a negative perception of the customs of the cultural partner. As stated by Respondent 6:

"If I get up before eating, it's considered disrespectful to my elders. But in my family, it's normal."

These different norms unwittingly lead to negative judgements of each other. If not accompanied by open communication, these differences will continue to be a barrier to harmony.

Lack of Self-Confidence

In the context of cross-cultural communication, self-confidence is needed for a good adaptation process. However, the informants revealed that cultural differences made them feel hesitant, anxious and afraid of making mistakes. Respondent 1 revealed:

"I feel like all my family looks out for me because I'm from a different tribe."

This statement illustrates the high uncertainty in communicating and interacting in a new environment. This uncertainty makes them uncomfortable in their behaviour, and they choose to avoid interactions. There was also concern about the risks and consequences of miscommunication. Respondent 3 said:

"I said one word wrong, my husband took offence, even though I didn't mean it."

This shows that small mistakes in language use can have a big impact on domestic relationships, and can lower an individual's self-confidence. Not only that, the informants

also felt the psychological challenges that arise from a lack of self-confidence. As Respondent 2 said:

"I'm sometimes afraid of saying the wrong thing, so it's better to keep quiet."

Shyness, fear of criticism, and excessive anxiety become obstacles to communication that should run smoothly. When communication is hindered, the relationship in the household will also experience tension.



Figure 1: One of the Samawa and Sasak Tribe Informants, in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, Senayan Village.

Source: Research Document

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of research on cross-cultural communication barriers in married couples from the Sasak and Samawa tribes in Jembatan Kemar Hamlet, it can be concluded that the main obstacles they experience include language differences, differences in norms and habits, and lack of confidence in communication.

Language differences lead to misunderstandings, loss of meaning, and obstacles in expressing thoughts fully. Meanwhile, differences in norms and customs lead to negative perceptions, discomfort and awkwardness in interpersonal relationships, especially when interacting with a partner's family.

Lack of self-confidence exacerbates this condition, where informants feel shy, fear misspeaking, and tend to withdraw from communication. These three barriers are interrelated and can disrupt domestic harmony.

The research also shows that despite these barriers, most couples are able to overcome them through adaptation processes, such as learning their partner's language, understanding different cultural habits, and building open and empathic communication. This approach is in line with the principles in the Uncertainty Reduction Theory by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975), which states that individuals tend to use communication strategies to reduce uncertainty in intercultural relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a follow-up to the results of this study, it is recommended that the village government and related parties provide educational space for people who enter into inter-ethnic marriages. The intercultural family development program can be designed in the form of effective communication counseling, basic cultural training, and inter-tribal dialogue involving local traditional and religious leaders.

In addition, local governments can also incorporate cross-cultural communication education into premarital guidance programmes, so that prospective couples have emotional and communication readiness from the start. This step is important to minimise domestic conflict and create harmonious relationships amidst cultural diversity.

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