Interpretation of Verbal and Nonverbal Communication in the Japanese Workplace

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ABSTRACT
This study explores the views of Indonesian workers on the communication aspect in Japanese workplace. In particular, this study aims to interpret the employees' communication patterns in the company which involve procedures like greeting, receiving instructions, making appointments, using polite languages, giving signals, etc. It also examines the differences and similarities between Japanese and Indonesian communication patterns in the workplace. Research participants in this study were thirteen Indonesian workers which data collected through interviews. The results showed that most of the informants perceived the Japanese work culture as a reflection of disciplined behaviour, detail orientation, collective values, loyalty, and politeness. The aspects of Japanese work patterns that are common to Indonesian culture are politeness, collective values, and loyalty. On the other hand, there are quite large differences between the work patterns of Japan and Indonesia, namely discipline and detail orientation. The quite striking result of this study is that almost all participants stated that in all aspects of communication patterns and work rules in Indonesia is much looser than Japanese. As a follow-up to this research, it is necessary to examine and explore how the strategies of Indonesian workers adjust to the Japanese communication culture.

Keywords: *Business communication, communication style, cross-cultural understanding, non-verbal communication, verbal communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of Indonesians living in Japan has advanced simultaneously with the development of Indonesia-Japan cooperation. Based on Japanese State Statistics in 2017, the number of Indonesians living in Japan was 46,350 people spread across assorted regions and with various arrival destinations. When viewed from the history of Indonesian workers flew to Japan, Okushima (2009) explains that in the pre and second world war, a slight number of Indonesians migrated to Japan, whereas after entering the 1970s there had been an upsurge of the people flew to Japan as the Japanese economy progressed, including from Indonesia. In the 1980s, through diverse collaborations between the two countries, more Indonesians departed to Japan as foreign students, workers, and other purposes.

The differences between Indonesian and Japanese work cultures including performance, team-work cooperation systems, and work rules have more or less caused separate problems in communication. Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2010) states that someone who communicates with people with the same cultural background will unconsciously use the same rules to such

an extent that communication runs effectively. On the contrary, if someone is in intercultural interaction, the communicating rules will be varied. The different rules will lead to disparate communication contexts. Widianti's survey (2015) found that Indonesian workers faced problems at the beginning of their tenure in the Japanese work system. These problems include mastery of Japanese language which often caused misunderstandings, the difficulty to adapt to large volume of work, the *Hon-ne Tatemae* culture (the attitude of straightforwardness and pleasantries) in communication which is confusing, and the superiors' attitude when mistakes occurred have sparked conflict and discomfort. Consequently, the feelings of surrender have arisen and termination of work (resign) are conducted in some cases. Based on these conditions, this study examines the problem of intercultural communication that focuses on the interpretation of Indonesian workers towards verbal and non-verbal communication in Japanese companies. The analysis in this study is based on the first step of Cross-cultural Adjustment according to Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), which includes the degree of psychological adjustment in a person, or in other words the degree of comfort, and

intimacy that felt through a new cultural environment. Since based on the current conditions in Indonesia, the number of people who have experience working in Japan raises the problem of intercultural communication at workplace.

1.1. Literature Review

In the process of forming theories related to cross-cultural communication, Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2014) shows there are six theories that have encouraged the emergence of many intercultural communication studies. The six theories selected consisted of one theory on cultural communication (speech code theory), two theories on cross-cultural communication (face negotiation theory and conversational boundaries theory), and three theories on intercultural communication (anxiety/uncertainty management theory, communication accommodation theory, and unified communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation). Regarding speech code theory, Philipsen (2005) defines speech code as a construct that is explicitly formulated by analysts to interpret and explain communicative acts in a particular speech community. Face negotiation theory is based on the merging of ethical concepts of individualism-collectivism and independent-interdependent self-interpretation with the concept of facial processing from Goffman (1959) pioneering ethnographic works (face negotiation theory, Ting-Toomey, 1988) which was originally developed to explain cultural diversity in conflict styles following the path of individualistic-collective culture. In a recent alteration, facial negotiation theory integrates cultural-level dimensions and individual-level attributes to explain facial attention behavior, conflict styles and facial processing. This theory in intercultural communication later evolved as introduced by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) which is a new area of research by proposing a related yet separate theory of identity management by extending the concept of facial processing to the context of intercultural encounters and relationship development.

Similarly, the theory of conversational boundaries in the realm of intercultural communication is explained by Kim (2001) that the diversity of behavior is goal-oriented in intercultural communicators. This theory began as an attempt to explain differences in individual communication behavior following the cultural-level dimensions of individualism and collectivism.

Gudykunst's theory of anxiety/uncertainty management is shown directly and specifically to explain "communication effectiveness" which is defined according to the correspondence between the sender intended meaning and the receiver's interpretation of it in intercultural encounters. From its initial formulation Gudykunst (1995) to its most recent updated revision Gudykunst (2005), this theory holds that the ability to

manage these two psychological experiences is essential for increasing the effectiveness of intercultural communication. In its refinement, this theory appears in Berger and Calebrese's (in Gudykunst, 1995) theory of intergroup anxiety such as Stephan and Stephan's (1985) intergroup anxiety and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981).

Moreover, communication accommodation theory as explained by Berger, Roloff, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2014), offers a broad-based and layered explanation system consisting of macro-level, situational, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of constructs. In its most recent streamlined version, the theory identifies key factors in each dimension: (a) three factors from the socio-historical context ("intergroup history", "personal history", and "norms and values". "social/cultural"), (b) two types of initial orientation of individual communicators (intergroup or interpersonal), and (c) norms governing direct interaction situations. Direct situational norms, in their turn, interact with each of the communicator's "psychological accommodation" strategies (accommodating or not accommodating), "behavioral tactics", "perception/attribution", and "future evaluation/intentions" with respect to other communicators.

As previously explained, discerning intercultural communication important theories related to the face negotiation theory by Gudykunts, Stewart, and Ting-Toomey (1985) describe how communicators from diverse cultures regulate their communication when dealing with each other. Kim (2001) with conversational constraints theory looks at how people from different cultures choose communication strategies. Burgoon, Manusov, and Guerrero (2016) with expectancy violations theory focuses on how communicators from different cultures respond when their expectations are not met. In addition, Gudykunst (1995) with uncertainty management theory which focuses on how communicators reduce anxiety and uncertainty in cross-cultural communication situations. Based on these theories, this study investigates respondents' responses and interpretations of the communication symbols they encounter when interacting at the workplace.

2. METHOD

This study aims to describe the phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptation experiences of Indonesian expatriates working in Japan. Therefore, the researcher employs a descriptive qualitative method as it explores experiences and then reveals how the process of cross-cultural communication and adaptation is experienced and felt by Indonesians while working and living in Japanese society. Tracing the experiences of cross-cultural communication and adaptation of these workers was carried out over a long period of time with continuous data collection steps. This study uses a subjective

approach by uncovering communication and adaptation struggles from the respondents' experiences, using phenomenological research methods, tracing, and investigating problems. They were raised based on real experiences and perspectives on adaptation and communication in Japanese culture.

Sources of collected data are in-depth interviews and questionnaires as additional data, typically about how the experience of interacting and communicating in the workplace in Japanese work culture, namely with colleagues and superiors. The interview process was carried out in diverse ways according to the conditions. Particularly, it was done at the informant's residence and other places in Japan, although some interviewees were conducted using the internet via video-call, and some informants were interviewed domestically when they visited their hometown. This activity was carried out continuously, and the researcher made several contacts with the informants to confirm the answers at the previous meeting. Data recording is accordingly collected and re-checked before being used for the analysis step.

At the stage of processing interview data, a pseudonym is used to replace the respondent's name. The descriptions this research's respondents are as follows:

(1) Ten respondents had experience learning Japanese, namely studying Japanese majors at universities, which automatically learn about its culture and society.

(2) Respondents had experience of living in Japan for numerous periods of time, when they study in universities through separate programs.

(3) Respondents selected to be interviewed were employees who worked in Japanese companies who had served more than three years and less than ten years and one respondent had more than ten years.

(4) Respondents are Indonesians who work for Japanese companies in the field of automotive production, electronics, advertising companies, halal food production, training for workers, and one respondent works in a nursing home.

(5) Ten respondents were Japanese Language Education Department's alumni who are research students, so that researchers know the respondents quite well and know their level of Japanese language skills.

(6) Respondents and researchers have a long history of interaction, so that researchers know the respondents well. Respondents' participation in this study was voluntary participation.

With this reference, the handled data collection technique is using in-depth interviews about the experiences of respondents who know the phenomenon of communication in Japanese companies. In this study,

interview questions for respondents was focused on: (1) what is experienced and felt while communicating with colleagues and superiors; (2) what is experienced and felt when adjusting to the way of working in the company; (3) what is experienced and felt when there is difficulty in communicating; (4) how the adaptation process is pursued so that they achieve comfort; (5) how are the experiences of the respondents in their daily life in the neighborhood and in other public facilities; (6) how is the respondent's interpretation of communication with Japanese people based on what they have experienced. Interviews were carried out by making an agreement with the informants, outside of working hours and at a representative place to conduct interviews.

Selected respondents started working in Japan and had worked for at least one year, to explore experiences at the beginning of their working period in their new environment, namely experiences upon arrival, culture shock, conflict, and amenity (meaning full life). Some of the interviewees also have had experience living in Japan through student exchange programs for several months to a year while in college, or apprenticeships and job training assigned by the company.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Verbal Communication Experiences

Respondents in this study found distinct communication experiences when interacting with Japanese people at work. Verbal communication that revolves around Japanese culture is reflected in the demeanor when asking for something or refusing something. The use of polite language when giving advice (read: commanding) to subordinates generally uses the expressions *".....janai desu ka"* (Don't …..), *"…....yoroshii desu ka"* (Would you please if….), and so forth, which shows politeness and expect others to agree and do so. For respondents, the instructions will be easy to understand if the supervisor states directly what should be done. As also explained by (Azar, 2016) regarding the diversity of the use of words in Japanese, and the multiple contexts in the use of words and expressions. To illustrate, the expression *"doumo"* (thank you) in other contexts will have a different meaning. When a manager meets an employee and the employee says *"ohayou gozaimasu"* (good morning), the manager replies with the word *"doumo"*, which in this context means "the same to you". In the experience of an American colleague who witnessed the conversation, there was a negative assessment of the manager who returned the greeting with a *"doumo"* which showed an arrogant impression and elevated his position as a manager. This misunderstanding occurs due to a lack of understanding of the languages' variety.

"Once upon a time, I was planning a training, then the mentor said "Kore no hou ga ii janai desu ka"

(Isn't it good like this, huh?). I think it's just a suggestion, I'm working on it as I think. Then the next day the mentor asked, "What happened yesterday?" I replied, "Yes, I continued as I planned". The mentor said "It's not like that, yesterday it was not just a suggestion, it should be done". Wow, I'm so confused by this way of talking, why don't you just order me according to his opinion." Experience 1 (E1)

The use of structural negative expressions to suggest something (order) in Japanese verbal communication culture is very common, even commonly used as a form of ethical attitude. Like the experience above, expressions that contain the meaning of orders, reprimands, satire, rejection and so forth, are wrapped in sentences that contextually indicate the speaker's intentions. Japanese, as one of the high-context cultures, can be found clearly in interactions in the workplace. In Japanese society, the term *"enkyoku"* (Euphemism) is known for using beautiful language to maintain ethics and harmonious relationships. Edizal (2001) explains that *enkyoku* is used with the intention of expressing something in a circle. This message delivery pattern is considered a wise way without offending other people's feelings.

"So, the first week was very confusing, sad, because I mainly didn't understand what they were saying. So I think, if you don't have enough language skills and you will go to Japan, it won't be fun. After a week, I was able to understand the boss's instructions little by little. There were a lot of misunderstandings in the beginning, it was often like when Japanese people ask "Yoroshii desu ka" which can have various meanings, there is "Is it okay to do this?", or it could also mean "It's okay if you don't do it this way, isn't it?", so I misunderstood when they asked "Yoroshii desu ka" but the context is negative. That's one of the misunderstandings. The boss didn't ask me, and I didn't ask him what this meant either." (E2)

Alston and Takei (2005) explain that no one will be able to communicate successfully with Japanese unless the person who communicates uses Japanese. Japanese is a formidable language especially for westerners, and in America, Japanese is categorized as one of the most challenging to learn. In fact, this assumption is also felt by Indonesian workers even though they have gone through studies in the Japanese field. Cultural shock at the use of language has also led to mistakes at workplace. This experience occurred in almost all respondents.

The language practice in Japanese society's communication behavior is not interpreted as what it says. Ishii, Shogen, Teruyuki, Hasegawa, Sakuragi, and Ishiguro (2013), explain that "meaning is not inherent in words", but a word will be interpreted contrastingly by people who hear it. Given the above, the assumption that what is clearly said will certainly be conveyed is not correct because even though it is said clearly, there are

certain things that are not conveyed. Thus, Japanese people believe that the use of euphemistic expression can be used to avoid being offence, rude or impolite. Edizal (2001) explains the word *Daijoubu* which means *Dai* (big) and *Joubu* (strong). It usually means "It is okay", but in various uses it can also mean rejection, indicating something that is certain, and something that is not harmful as can be seen in the following excerpt taken from the respondent's experience.

"At that time, I made the wrong report. I asked if it should be revized and he answered, "Daijoubu" (it's okay). So, I let it be since he said that it's okay, but it looks like the "Daijoubu" here meant it's okay that it's wrong, but it still must be corrected. In the end, he fixed it himself." (E3)

Meanwhile, regarding verbal communication behaviour Azar (2016) explains that verbal communication behavior explains that while in other American or European cultures, verbal communication is displayed clearly, complete, easy to understand, expressive, articulate, unambiguous, and interesting, especially in negotiating situations. However, he adds that this is different in Japanese culture in which verbal communication is aimed at offering a flexible in Japanese culture, verbal communication is more aimed at offering a flexible, smooth and harmonious relationship, thereby fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Therefore, ambiguous attitudes, *tatemae* (small talk), and swirling speech emerge, which are intended to maintain the harmony of the relationship. As can been seen in the following excerpt (E4).

"People said Japanese people are Hakkiri iwanai (not speaking clearly), iimawashi (talking in circles), tatemae (small talk) and they all are so true. When I was still in Indonesia, it didn't feel like that. Maybe the Japanese are already used to our culture, but when you're in Japan, it totally can be felt, sometimes you want to be angry because you feel too much and cover up the truth." (E4)

Alston and Takei (2005) state that in a negotiation, Japanese businessmen tend to use *Tatemae* (small talk) at the beginning of the meeting and will be used intensively throughout the meeting and various joint activities until they reach *Honne* (true intention) communication. *Honne* is direct communication, which is to express what he feels and thinks, while *Tatemae* is usually used in formal situations by not showing true thoughts and feelings. In Japanese culture communication, Japanese people generally will try not to say "No" explicitly, yet use various expressions and idioms wrapped in words with the same meaning. In the respondent's experience, it was found that there was a normative culture in interacting with superiors. Non-disclosure when refusing, especially to superiors, causes misunderstandings and in the end the respondents feel uncomfortable, and their work is in vain or not appreciated. The high-context culture of Japanese

society can also be seen from the respondents' experiences, that where the use of vague expressions also occurs even when giving orders to employees.

3.2. Non-Verbal Communication Experiences

In terms of non-verbal communication, Japanese people can be said to be relatively sensitive to the demeanors shown by other people. The frowning face shown by others, quickly recognized as an expression of displeasure. Similarly, distance is indicated by taking a sitting position. The following respondents are new workers at their company who experience discomfort over the attitude of distancing themselves from their Japanese colleagues.

> *"I haven't been able to mingle with my colleagues. When it comes to lunch, I eat in the meeting room, but don't join other Japanese friends, far apart." (E5)*

The non-verbal approach shown by the act of keeping a distance is one of the characteristics of Japanese culture. For instance, in relationships between workers or even friendships, they tend to distance themselves from each other. As an illustration, Ikeda and Kramer (2000) explain that in Japanese culture awareness of distance can be seen in the structure of Japanese houses which have wall partitions in each room, so that in the house there are hallways as the boundaries of each room. In non-verbal communication, distance between individuals is intended to maintain the privacy of oneself and others. Taking that distance can mean respecting the privacy of others and maintaining comfort.

> *"Nowadays, it is more of a way of thinking that makes misunderstandings. For example, there is an Anmoku (silent) habit in Japanese people. So they want us to understand what we want to do. Most of the time I kept quiet and didn't ask, he didn't explain either." (E6)*

Similar to that experienced by the respondent, the silence *(Anmoku)* is being perceived as approval from his superiors, and he understood what he wanted. On the contrary, respondents found that verbal interactions in the workplace are expected to be more intensive, such as the *Horenso* (report, contact, and consult) norm which is applied as one of the work ethics. In other circumstances, the silence of the Japanese can mean dislike or indifference. For example, a boss's silence towards his employees can be a danger signal because it shows ignorance before eventually being terminated or fired.

The start of work and study (new school year) generally begins in April. This regulation applies throughout Japan both in schools, colleges, and in offices or companies. Whether new or current employees attend the new employee acceptance ceremony in their respective companies. The wear of black (dark) suits with white shirts and simple ties has become tradition at the ceremony. As explained by Mulyana (2010), fashion is

an important nonverbal aspect that can show bonds to culture. It is common for businessmen to wear full clothing including a suit and tie to show bona fide. This tradition is also carried out by all Japanese companies throughout the region as a sign of the start of the new employee's tenure. The use of such uniforms also shows the value of "equality/status" of new employees and none of them is superior to the others. Bright and flashy colored clothes are usually avoided as a symbol of maintaining the equality norm. Likewise, Indonesian expatriates as well as from other foreign countries who start working in Japan, must be present at the occasion with these clothes. The tradition is more or less known by Indonesian expatriates who have studied Japanese. For this reason, they have prepared one of them to take part in the new employee recruitment ceremony.

> *"The first time I started working, in early April I participated in the new employee recruitment ceremony. Wearing a dark suit uniform, and I found out about the uniform from a company person when I had a job interview. After that, I attended training for two months, I had not been placed in a division, so I was still combined with the others. In training activities, we were asked to participate in the Kengaku (review) of the factory, then we were told how to work there, and taught manners, such as using Keigo (soft language), how to deal with guests, how to work and so on. And it's not just for foreigners, but Japanese people too, like Horenso (report, contact, consult), all of them are taught about Horenso." (E7)*

Given the above, it can be explained that there are quite significant contrasts in giving and receiving messages between Japanese and Indonesian cultures. This large gap causes opportunities for psychological conflicts such as discomfort, culture shock or not being accepted by the communication events they encounter.

3.3. Communication Interpretation in Company

Respondents' interpretation of verbal and non-verbal communication is explained as follows. The hardships of understanding some verbal situations conveyed by their superiors, such as instructions, refusals, rebuttals and reprimands have been admitted by almost all respondents. These difficulties, especially at the beginning of his working period, were caused by not being able to adjust to the communication at his company. This problem is considered by respondents as a cultural shock that causes discomfort. Furthermore, the struggle of establishing communication with Japanese people to become familiar in informal situations has become an impression. As stated by the respondent, *"Personally, apart from the work environment, I don't think I fit in well with Japanese people. It seems difficult to approach them, doesn't it?"* which shows that interactions can occur in the workplace, yet not outside the work environment. This perception cannot be

separated from the perception of the typical closed Japanese, especially when they are dealing with foreigners. Consequently, the respondents considered that it is very difficult to achieve intimacy in informal situations in the typical Japanese way of communicating. However, there were also respondents who expressed opinions based on their experiences, *"But Japanese people are also different. If they are older, they are usually friendlier. Or Japanese people who have often been abroad, are more open-minded, so their attitude is also open, willing to accept foreigners around them."* This statement shows that the elderly and people who have a lot of experience living abroad are more open to foreigners and have a desire to socialize with people from different cultures.

> *"What makes me happy is because I met Indonesian people, we gathered to joke and talked to each other, so it lessened the stress. Moreover, when I started to join the futsal group, I joined the Japanese playing futsal and they were unexpectedly kind to me. It turned out that in order to mingle with the Japanese, we must first enter into their group. There's a friend of mine who doesn't participate in any activities, all he did was work-go home-repeat, so he doesn't have any Japanese friends."* (E8)

From the statement above, the way Japanese people socialize can be said to be more likely to be normative and collective. Therefore, someone communicating has a clear reason and a definite purpose of conversation rather than talking without direction. This shows respect for each other as respondent who provide certain topics of conversation. Conversations with certain topics are considered to be more beneficial than just talking aimlessly. As explained by Azar (2016), Japanese communication styles tend to be interdependent, mutually beneficial, and have the goal of building harmonious and lasting relationships. Therefore, people will talk if they feel they have a purpose such as asking for information about something or discussing hobbies. On the other hand, typical Japanese communication tends to be collective even in informal situations. Equation of hobbies or communion is considered to expedite the socialization and close friendships than people who do not commune. In a sports community, Japanese people will be so close to each other that trust is established. As experienced by the respondent, a new intimacy is felt after he entered a certain community in Japanese society. While people who don't try to fit into certain social groups or move on their own are less likely to have friendships or communion, they will have a hard time adjusting. Respondents have a desire and try to establish communication with the futsal community, and this shows that they have not only cognitive and affective communication, but also operationally as a condition for successful adaptation as revealed by Kim's theory of cross-cultural communication and adaptation.

The respondents' experiences through their testimonies of paying attention to the typical Japanese communication can be said as one of their efforts to understand and try to adapt to Japanese society. Respondents in positions as foreign workers, whether they like it or not, have to try to understand the habits or attitudes of Japanese people which are considered unfavorable or unacceptable. His life in the Japanese cultural environment for a long period of time requires him to be able to survive. However, respondents gave an optimistic view in terms of interpretation of communication in the workplace, especially in terms of order and discipline in the office as follows:

> *"Regarding self-adjustment, for me Japan is discipline at work. I like it because when I see Indonesians who are often undisciplined and disorganized, I don't like it. In the office, my workload is heavy, but I can enjoy it. If the salary is relatively large, yes, maybe because it is a big company too. The company produces spark plugs that are distributed to Toyota, Honda, and so on, so yes, it's a big company too."* (E9)

The respondent acknowledged the discipline that is considered good and can be followed even as a new employee. On the contrary, some respondents think that Indonesians are judged to be undisciplined at work. The Japanese work culture is interpreted as ideal according to some respondents, which has helped them to adjust to some extent. As Kim (2001) explains, the alignment between the norms in the host environment with self-thinking, will support the adaptation process. Regarding the routine at work, it is described that the working space conditions in the company are generally quiet, rarely can the sound of chatter or jokes be heard. The only sound that can be heard is the sound of people typing on a computer or the occasional sound of sneezing or coughing. Japanese employees usually seem very serious about their work, and in some place there are even companies that require turning off their cell phones when working hours start. As explained by Azar (2016), for Japanese people to work means they must have a high spirit and work ethic to produce good output. As a result, for the Japanese it is a shame to make a product that is not of good quality, and they try to make the best product possible. Meanwhile, relating to the relationship with seniors, the interpretation of personal communication with superiors is exemplified in the following statement.

> *"I am glad to have a tutor who is more open. He is several years older than me. Now we are more intimate and we don't use soft language anymore when talking to each other just as friends do."* (P10)

In the process of adaptation in the company, such as the respondent's experience, it was helped by the presence of seniors who were open and encouraged them to try to learn about the work environment in the company. The junior-senior relationship he experienced

was felt by the informant to have given him comfort in carrying out tasks. In the uses' variety of Japanese, there are language levels such as expressions of honorific and ordinary forms. In honorific language, expressions levels of exalting the interlocutor and expressions of humbling oneself are used. In general, Japanese people will use honorific language in a formal manner when dealing with seniors, superiors, colleagues or on a higher status basis. In Japanese culture, the relationship intimacy is shown by the use of language. Japanese people usually no longer use honorific language if the relationship is close. In fact, people will feel strange and uncomfortable when using honorific language even though the relationship is already close. Japanese people accordingly use ordinary forms of language in friendly relations. As experienced by respondents, comfort at work is influenced by proximity to seniors, so that the adaptation process is felt to be easier.

> *"But now I have close Japanese friend, we happen to be the same age. We often go out and play together, and he teaches me a lot of things." (E11)*

Likewise, the experience of the respondent above who communicated with local residents began to feel that he was experiencing development. Intimacy with friends is interpreted as a factor that supports the adaptation process in the work environment as well as being a communication bond outside the company through joint activities.

Respondents' interpretation of verbal and non-verbal communication in Japanese communication is described in the following discussion. Communication in this discussion is interaction outside the office, in the neighborhood and in public facilities, where respondents find their communication experiences. As explained in the previous chapter, the communication behavior of Japanese people, in some conditions, cannot be understood by the informants. As the following confession, the occurrence of conditions involving a group of neighbors around the house that he could not understand.

> *"I feel very strange about that, unlike in Indonesia, when people finish their work, people chat first while drinking coffee and so on. Turns out that it is not the same in Japan, everyone just goes home there is almost no communication, even though all are neighbors. This is very strange." (E12)*

The respondent gave a slightly different interpretation of the friendship he experienced. Making friends outside the office is easier and more flexible, namely with volunteer groups. Based on the researcher's observations, Japanese people who take part in volunteer activities are usually retired people who fill their time in their old age. These types of volunteer activities are generally language teaching to foreigners, discussion services for immigrants, environmental thinkers, intercultural

Table 1. Agreement on Japanese culture based on respondents' experiences

Communication	Agreed	Less agreed	Not agreed
Interpersonal communication	Sensitivity of non-verbal symbols and empathy	*Tatemae* (small talk), ambiguity, talk in circles	Inflexibility, overly normative attitude, closed attitude
Social communication	-	Closed attitude	Inflexibility, opinions towards foreigners

exchange groups, and so forth. They actively participate in volunteer activities and have independent funds to be involved in these activities. This suggests that the atmosphere in these activities is relatively intimate and informal. Moreover, the moment was perceived by the informants as an opportunity to socialize and adapt to the local population. Many foreigners also benefit from their involvement in this volunteer activity as a way to make more lasting friendships, that is, even though they have returned to their homeland, communication continues through various media. However, only two informants of this study participated in the volunteer activities, due to time constraints or because the information had not yet been received by them.

From the experiences of the respondents above, it is understood that there are several categories of interpretations of Japanese communication. The categories are summarized as in Table 1. Basically, respondents assess themselves as people who have a sense of tolerance and are able to adapt. However, the respondents considered that the rigidity and closed attitude of the Japanese were less acceptable in interpersonal *communication*. On the other hand, in social communication, respondents cannot accept the attitude of Japanese people who are too normative and discriminatory thinking towards foreigners.

4. CONCLUSION

In personal communication activities at workplace, living environment, and society, the verbal and non-verbal communication skills possessed by respondents are supported by the knowledge of the Japanese language and culture that they have learned in their homeland, and this becomes a provision for the adaptation process. Personal communication in the workplace, namely with superiors, colleagues, and clients/colleagues. Some respondents had struggles in using Japanese, specifically of special terms related to work, and the dialects of the area where they work. The use of Japanese language and lack of understanding are the causes of wrong perceptions and misunderstandings when interacting.

The habit of Japanese people in using ambiguous, circling, and indecisive expressions when giving orders, refusing, or giving warnings, was responded ~~to~~ inappropriately by respondents due to their lack of understanding and experience of interacting with Japanese people. Personal communication skills are seen in interactions at the workplace, yet only a slight amount of interactions occur in the home environment due to the lack of opportunities to meet people around them and different patterns of communication behavior. The absence of personal communication at home is also caused by the condition of the people of big cities who tend to be individual in their daily lives. The lack of opportunity for interaction with the community around the house also hinders adaptation and assimilation with the people around them. However, there are also respondents who have certain communities so that they can experience personal interactions and friendships.

Regarding the respondent's interpretation and view of Japanese communication style, there are several verbal and non-verbal symbols that are accepted as normal. However, there are also several experiences which show that the symbols they encounter are incomprehensible and even unacceptable to the respondents as people from Indonesian culture. This condition shows that the symptoms of ethnocentrism color the perspective on Japanese culture. Alternatively, the adaptation process, which has not lasted long, still has a major influence on the response and perception of the symbols it encounters. To summarize, it can be said that people from Indonesian culture tend to be adaptive along with the development of understanding and experience in the work environment of Japanese culture.

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