



Understanding German Cross-Cultural Communication to Enhance BIPA Teacher Competence

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ABSTRACT

The incompetence of BIPA teachers to understand the culture of their students is one of the causes of the failure in BIPA teaching and learning process. Therefore, intracultural competence is a substantial component to the teaching competence of BIPA teachers. Germany is a country with a great number BIPA institutions for the European scope. There are at least fifteen BIPA institutions spread across the region, including Hamburg, Berlin, Bremen, München, Leipzig, Passau, Konstanz, Frankfurt, Köln, Heidelberg, Koblenz, Freiburg, Göttingen, and Bonn. Thus, understanding German cross-cultural communication becomes a material that BIPA teachers for German students need to accomplish. This study discusses German cross-cultural communication consisting of verbal communication, non-verbal communication, stereotypes, and values adopted by Germans using the cross-cultural communication theory of Samovar et al. (2016) and Mulyana (2015). Qualitative method was implemented in this research through note-taking and questionnaire techniques. The data sources were posts about German cross-culturalism available on various social media, from German people, and from the German diaspora. The results of this study indicated that there are differences in the use of dialect and language in verbal and non-verbal communication in Germany. It becomes very complex because of the different cultures, dialects, history, and traditions of each state (Bundesländer). This research can be a guide for BIPA teachers who have students with German cultural background to determine the proper communication strategy.

Keywords: *German cross-cultural communication, Intracultural competence, Stereotypes, Value.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural differences in the interaction between teachers and students in BIPA program (Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) are inevitable in the teaching and learning process. BIPA teachers and students must understand each other's cultural backgrounds so that cross-cultural communication can occur smoothly and misunderstandings can be avoided. Ideally, teachers should be able to become negotiators who understand verbal language, non-verbal language, and other values embraced in BIPA students' culture. Understanding the cultural background of BIPA students will help teachers understand their students and know how to act properly in dealing with BIPA students with specific cultural backgrounds.

Studies on cross-cultural communication have previously been carried out by Anindita and Woelandari

(2020) explaining the Practice of Intercultural Communication for Expatriate Students in the Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (BIPA). The results showed that in the practice of intercultural communication, students used a lot of primary communication patterns (verbal and non-verbal symbols, and secondary communication patterns). This study also found that students experienced various cultural phenomena including cultural adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and culture shock. This proves that communication is a process embedded in our daily lives that informs the way we perceive and construct our view of reality and the world. Therefore, cross-cultural communication in the context of BIPA learning is a process of delivering messages that occur from Indonesian culture to the culture of origin of BIPA students, or vice versa. This study described a literature review on verbal and non-verbal communication in Germany and the values adopted to provide guidance for

BIPA teachers in determining the best communication strategy in dealing with students with German cultural background.

Along with the development of BIPA in Germany, there are more than ten universities in Germany that hold BIPA programs in various cities, for example, in Hamburg (KJRI Hamburg & IKAT Hamburg), Berlin (KBRI Berlin & VHS Berlin), München (VHS München), Bremen (VHS Bremen), Koblenz (VHS Koblenz), Konstanz (HTWG), etc. BIPA learning in HTWG Department of Business, Cultural and Legal Studies (Hochschule Konstanz), a college of applied sciences in Konstanz, Germany, is under the “Asian Studies and Management” program. In normal situations, students were offered conversation classes lasting 3 x 90 minutes/ week each semester. However, after the pandemic, taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of distant learning, the learning frequency was reduced to two meetings/ week (90 minutes) (Nurhaina, 2020). This growth will increase the demands of BIPA teachers, those not only knowing, understanding, and loving their own culture in order to introduce Indonesian culture to BIPA students, but also understanding and considering the culture of BIPA students from Germany.

A study on needs analysis for BIPA students from Germany conducted in Goethe-Institute Indonesia elucidated a number of aspects to consider in developing materials; origin, hobbies, area of expertise, profession, education, and language proficiency (Sipinte & Sastromiharjo, 2018). It is unfortunate that the analysis could not provide sufficient information about German students’ culture to support teacher-student interaction, which may contribute significantly in the learning. As described in Mulyana (2015), by studying other people's cultures, we are studying our own culture, including its influence on the way as we communicate with others. Understanding cross-cultural communication will make our lives richer, our relationships with people from different cultures more fulfilling, and our careers more successful.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cross-Cultural Communication

In cross-cultural communication, there is verbal communication (language) and non-verbal communication (expression, attitude, gestures, etc.) The influencing factors in cross-cultural communication are (1) individual uniqueness, (2) stereotypes, and (3) objectivity. To avoid misunderstandings in communicating with people of different cultures, we must be effective communicators stated Ammaria (2017).

According to Buhlmann, Fearn, and Gaspardo (2003), intercultural communication is influenced, among others, by the following elements, 1) religion, 2) history, 3) power hierarchy, 4) individualism-collectivism, 5) time-space, 6) masculine-feminine. Communication is a language activity that is two-way. It involves speakers and speech partners. In addition to language, verbal elements (such as intonation, speed of speech, etc.), non-verbal elements (gestures and expressions), messages to be conveyed and the relationship between speakers are important factors in studying intercultural communication.

2.2. Stereotype

According to Darmojuwono (2007) Stereotypes can be distinguished between hetero stereotypes (stereotypes about other groups outside their group) and oto stereotypes (stereotypes about their group). Stereotypes affect communication strategies. Stereotypes are standard attitudes, beliefs, or opinions about people from other cultures. Stereotypes can come from facts. However, stereotypes can often be a combination of fact and fiction about people from certain cultural groups. Stereotypes can sometimes be useful for conducting research, evaluating, and interacting with people from other cultures as stated by Matsumoto (2008).

2.3. Culture Shock

Culture shock is a term used to describe a person's circumstances and feelings in dealing with new, different socio-cultural environmental conditions. The concept of culture shock was introduced by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg which describes the profound response of depression, frustration, and disorientation experienced by people living in a new, different cultural environment.

Furnham and Bochner say that culture shock is someone who does not know the social habits of a new culture, so they cannot display behavior that is in accordance with the rules of the behavior in the new environment stated by DeVito (2011).

3. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. According to Moleong (2007) qualitative research intends to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, etc., holistically, and explained by means of descriptions in the form of words.

The researcher used the literature study method to collect information from various literature sources regarding cross-cultural communication in Germany. With all existing technological advances, researchers managed to collect descriptive data from related literature and visual data in the form of experimental social videos

from Youtube and posts on social media to be compiled into a literature study. Supporting data were also collected from a questionnaire/ survey containing open-ended questions. The nature of the questions could add valuable data and potentially new findings in this topic. The questionnaires/ surveys were carried out to obtain direct confirmation from native German speakers about the information found in the literature study. The instrument was distributed online considering limitations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Communication Aspect to Consider by BIPA Teacher

4.1.1. Verbal Communication in Germany

Germany is located in central western Europe bordered by nine countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Poland, Czechia, Austria, France, Switzerland, Denmark) Now Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 smaller states (Bundesländer) each with its own constitution. Germany is very interesting because each country itself has its own culture, dialect, history, food, and traditions, but all of these countries speak German. German is the third most common foreign language in EU secondary schools. German is the third most common foreign language at the junior secondary level taught in the EU. The most common languages are English and French. Each country has its own version of the German language. However, most Germans learn how to speak "Hochdeutsch" or "High German" which is the standard dialect. A number of native German speakers participating in the survey came from Bavaria and used "Hochdeutsch". As many as 50% admitted using high German and around 25% answered depending on the interlocutor.

In German, there are many "*mehrdeutig*" or ambiguous terms. and the word is slightly elongated giving a broad meaning. Germans have a very vivid imagination and come up with words for everything like "*Backpfeifengesicht*" which means "Someone deserving of a face slap". Its literal translation is "cheek whistle face", and its actual meaning is someone whose face makes you want to punch them. Germans like to dub everything that comes out of foreign media and translate the word into German.

From the questionnaire, respondents mentioned several words with ambiguous meanings such as "*bank*" which means "a seat" or "financial institution" depending on the context of the sentence. The word that has the next ambiguous meaning is "*Auslaufen*" which literally means "leak". When put into the context of a sentence, however, it expresses "*Das Schiff ist ausgelaufen*" - *Das Schiff hat den Port verlassen*, which means "the ship has sailed" - the ship has left the port. The word "*Auslaufen*" can also

be used in the context of an expression when someone is drinking beer and the water is accidentally spilled. For example, "*Das Bier ist ausgelaufen*" - *Das Bier ist ungewollt aus der Flasche ausgetreten* means "the beer spilled" - the beer accidentally came out of the bottle.

Furthermore, "*Hammer*" which can literally be interpreted as "hammer" as a tool, can also mean an expression of something surprising or disbelief in something extraordinary, can bring a positive or negative connotation. The next very visual and ambiguous vocabulary is "*Schimmel*" which is a masculine noun that can be interpreted as a grayish horse, but this word can also mean mushroom.

The words in German may have the same meaning but are pronounced differently depending on which side of Germany the person is from. For example, in high German they say "*Auf Wiedersehen!*", but in Bavaria, they prefer to say "*Pfiat di Gott*". In Kölsch, they say "*Tschüss*", and in the Rhineland, they use "*Adjus!*" more often. All the words mentioned above have the same meaning of 'goodbye'. In fact, there are 50% of respondents use "*Tschüss*" and the remaining 25% use "*Ciao*" or "*Servus*" for the same meaning. This difference can be caused by respondents coming from different regions, or based on personal references. We can see here that communication is the delivery of messages from the source to the recipient of the message (Stanley, 2014, p. 4). According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2016) cultural notions are subjective and objective human-made elements. They in the past increased the likelihood of survival and resulted in the satisfaction of actors in an ecological niche, and thus spread among those who could communicate with one another. They had a common language and they lived at the same time and place. Every culture presents its members with a way of thinking and behaving. Culture consists of how we relate to other people, how we think, how we behave, and how we perceive the world.

4.1.2. Stereotypes

Germany is divided into five cultural regions: (1) East Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg Thuringia, Saxony), (2) North Germany, (3) Central Germany, (4) Baden-Württemberg & Rhineland, (5) Bavarian. East and Central Germany, has always been used to being its own country for 40 years, heavily influenced by the Uni Soviet (the Sorbians can be found here). Northern Germany has a coastal marine culture that is more closely identified with Denmark and the Netherlands. People in northern Germany are known to be quiet and aloof. Baden-Württemberg has a Swabian culture where they speak a thick dialect that even only 40% of German speakers understand. The Rhineland is to the west and has a more French-influenced culture, is more Catholic, has many large carnival celebrations.

A survey conducted by Geography Now! ([GN], 2017) was distributed to subscribers from Germany. There is an episode about Germany deliberating that they have autostereotype that Saxons are always indecisive, Berliners are always bragging about themselves, Swabians are stingy, Bavarians drink too much, Hessians talk too much, and Holsteiner do not talk much, but their silence is more suspicious.

Bavaria is a famous place for the stereotype of most Americans about Germans that they always wear *lederhosen* (traditional clothing worn by men) and *dirndls* (traditional clothing worn by women), living in half-timber houses (traditional houses with medieval architecture). Everyone visits the bar (beer houses) every day, and have *cuckoo* clocks (clocks that sound & shaped birds). Germans do not really like this stereotype, because it is always called excessive. The analogy is like saying all Americans are cowboys who have guns and ride horses (GN, 2017).

4.1.3. Non-Verbal Communication

In his book, Mulyana (2015) explains that non-verbal communication, such as shaking hands, is common in Germany. Generally, however, Germans now do not like skin contact with the same sex. In fact, as many as 50% of respondents stated that it is unusual to shake hands, and only 25% stated that they are accustomed to shaking hands. As many as 25% stated that personal preference is that at first, they are used to it, but since the Covid-19 pandemic shaking hands has become a bit less common.

According to research by Shuter (1977), German men interact more remotely and are less touching than in Italy and France. 'Thumbs up' mean 'good', but can also mean 'one', as in ordering a bottle/ glass of beer. To show 'excellence', a degree more than just good, Germans sometimes use the same sign as "okay" in America. For gestures of thumbs up as much as 50% of respondents stated that the movement is to show compliment. As many as 25% stated to show agreement, and the rest stated to show number/one.

To show someone is crazy like in Indonesia, touch the right index finger on the forehead in an oblique position or by shaking the palm of the hand in front of one's face. Raising the middle finger means the same as in America, this is a grave insult in Germany that can bring the perpetrators to justice. Respondents agree with this statement, as many as 100% of respondents stated that the gesture of raising the middle finger is a serious insult.

In Germany, it is normal to stare at someone in a public place. Germans point to something with their index finger (commonly used when answering a boss's question, but it is not polite to ask the boss for something while pointing at the object in question. All respondents as much as 100% stated that they are accustomed to using their index finger to point at something, but all

respondents as much as 100% stated that they are not accustomed to staring at strangers in public.

Next, putting a finger on the lips while saying "shhh" is telling 'silence' (same movement as in Indonesia). and it is the same as making a phone call "I'll call you later", which is taking out the little finger and thumb and folding the rest and bringing the hand to the ear. Then, the movement is like tapping on the table with all fingers clenched to give applause, and this is common among academics. If in general situations, such as after hearing the announcement of the championship, or after hearing a good speech, they would applaud normally. As many as 50% of respondents stated that they do not clap by tapping their fists on the table. While as many as 50% of respondents answered that they are accustomed to clapping by knocking, the remaining 25% answered others with an explanation that they would knock on the table if they are in a lecture situation, otherwise the respondents would clap as usual.

4.2. Values and Beliefs to Consider by BIPA Teachers

BIPA teachers are demanded to adapt fast in a new environment. They must have sensitivity to cultural situations and things that occur in their teaching environment to make the learning process run well. Things like experiencing culture shock are unavoidable, for that, and what needs to be done is to find as much information as possible about the culture, to make it easier to remember, and to compare it with the teacher's own culture so that differences and similarities can be understood (if any). This will help the teacher get accustomed to adjusting to a new environment.

Some values that Germans believe in and are accustomed to implement in their daily lives (Easy German, 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Geography Now, 2017; Mulyana, 2015) are as follows:

1. Germany has the largest music market in the EU, and the third in the world after the USA and Japan. Germans highly value cultural heritage and love to preserve it through music and art. Because of this also, artists in Germany get a 50% reduction in health insurance costs. There are about 130 national orchestras, and almost all of them supported by public funding.
2. Germans highly value work-life balance. On Sundays, all shops are closed, supermarkets, shopping places, restaurants, etc. No one is allowed to work and they have to spend time with their family or themselves. The most important thing is people want quiet, and quiet (peace & quiet) on Sundays. No matter what part of Germany you live in, whatever your neighborhood, Germans take Sundays very seriously. For example, playing loud music on Sundays is prohibited and you will get a complaint, using a drill (tacking nails,

moving things, etc.) or a tool that makes noise is prohibited. This is already written in the apartment regulations where you live, or people are aware of this, so if you make a fuss on Sunday, you will get complaints from neighbors (Easy German ([EG], 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

3. Foreigners who are not native Germans are usually surprised and a little stressed when waiting in line and paying at the supermarket because the process is very fast. For example, you have to prepare your own shopping bags (no free plastic/paper bags), grocery checkouts are quite energy-consuming because the cashier scans items at high speed and we ourselves have to pack our groceries into shopping bags, not the people working at the cashier no one else, which helps packing groceries as stated by Jade (2021).
4. Talking too loudly is considered rude on some occasions. For example, if you go out to eat with friends at a restaurant or are on the train (a public space) and you and your friends talk loudly or laugh, making noise or making noise will sound rude.
5. Violate traffic rules. Germans are very serious about traffic rules. For example, crossing the road must be at a zebra crossing and only when the crossing light is still red.
6. In Germany cycling is not just for sport. But many Germans use bicycles as a means of transportation for work, shopping, and other daily activities. Cycling is as important as driving a car and taking a city bus.
7. Although Germans are not always punctual, punctuality is very important. Germans are not only punctual, but they also expect people to be on time. For example, Germans value the importance of time, and people who aren't punctual are considered rude (especially if it's the first time they've met). German concept of time believes that time runs in a straight line, from the past to the future (even to the afterlife) that whoever neglects time, the neglected time cannot come back again and will be lost. This is the same as the principle of time in Islam, emphasizing the importance of time discipline, diligence, and hard work. Germans are not spontaneous people. They schedule their time for the highest efficiency rather than waiting and seeing what happens.
8. Germans like planning, even for free activities such as vacations, or relaxing at home. The Germans will plan what to do that day. Hence, they are not very spontaneous. For example, the reason Germans are not very spontaneous is that they have planned the day and do not want their routine to be disturbed.
9. Germans do not really like small talk. It is also said that strangers greeting each other is strange. They do not like making small talk, but close friends they will

talk about life, good expressions, even about philosophy each week.

5. CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural communication in Germany is very interesting because each state (Bundesländer) in Germany has its own culture, dialect, history, food, and traditions, but all of these countries have German speakers. The difference in the use of dialect and language in verbal and non-verbal communication, and also in terms of people's values becomes very complex because of these differences. In this case, hopefully, this research can be an alternative guide for BIPA teachers who have students with German cultural backgrounds to determine the right communication strategy. This communication ability may influence the success of delivering messages in BIPA learning process. By considering social communication skills such as empathy, tolerance, individual language skills, roles, experiences of intercultural interaction, etc. In addition, sensitivity to one's own culture and the culture of BIPA students is also one of the determinants of the success of communication that occurs in the BIPA learning process.

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