

Face Negotiation in Conflict Resolution and Friendship Building amongst Indonesia's Javanese and NTT Youth in Solo

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This research examined facework in Face Negotiation Theory (FNT) and its relation to conflict resolution in intercultural interactions between youth groups in Indonesia. Indonesia is a multiethnic society with a history of communalism. This study used a critical discourse analysis of interviews and works of literature on facework and forgiveness and friendship building between majority and minority cultures of Javanese and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) university students in Solo, a city which is known to be the spirit of Javanese culture. The results showed that being able to forgive, as well as having the ability of self disclosure helps youths in establishing a friendship. This served as a foundation of a peace-building approach through FNT in creating harmony, understanding cultural differences and eliminating prejudice, especially in parties with cultural conflict history.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Facework, Intercultural Friendship, Conflict Resolution, Indonesia, Javanese, East Nusa Tenggara.*

Introduction

Cultural conflicts in Indonesia started as early as the country was established. As the nation grew, the rift of resistance slowly erupted following the transformation of the state institution, starting with the role of religions, political agencies and with the representation of ethnic groups to the definition of Indonesia as a nation in the New Order era (Bertrand, 2004). This transformation mobilised many parties from central government to local agents such as emphasising elite forces to provoke, the power struggle between elites, exclusion of minority

groups as well as mobilising religious parties in constructing specific identities while denying the diversity of Indonesian citizens (Bertrand, 2004; Bornman, 2003). The upsurge of violent unrest in 1998 marked the end of Suharto's New Order era and it was recorded as one of the country's largest ethnic conflicts following an authoritarian regime (Barron & Sharpe, 2008; Klinken, 2002). The issue continued following the movement towards nationalism, creating included and excluded groups between ethnicities in Indonesia (Bertrand, 2004). Globalisation had created a rush of a new identity for the local cultures of Indonesia, following the rise of printed media. The printed media, with the use of vernacular language, maximised its circulation which enabled the cultivation of an idea of an imagined community called nationalism (Anderson, 2001). The acceptance of nationalism was an easy task, as printed media injected this ideology daily and was accepted by many resulting in the encouragement of uniformity over diversity (Anderson, 2001). These transformations showed how locality rose as a response to the loss of diversity, prompting individuals to start seeking similar cultural backgrounds or communities that allowed them to feel a sense of belonging (Bornman, 2003). This locality built even more local communities that were reinforced by religions, nations and communal groups, and is believed to be the source of discrimination and cultural exclusivity (Castells, 2010), which resulted in local disharmony.

Until now, Indonesia is still suffering from horizontal conflicts, including prejudice between ethnic groups. For example, in the initial interview, the authors found that the Javanese perceived people from eastern Indonesia as a minority with a temperament, that were brusque, and trouble makers; while people from eastern Indonesia perceived Javanese people as being too soft and tending to hide their true feelings. In 2019 the Papua students were discriminated against by the East Java residents and law enforcers due to a misunderstanding over the students' attitude and were branded as anti-nationalist groups, resulting in a wave of protest and unrest in Papua Island (Pamungkas, 2019). This showed that poor intercultural knowledge will create disruptions, and even justified stereotypes of different cultures. Such conflicts are just one of the many problems faced by the world as well as Indonesia. Efforts are needed to form an understanding of cultural communication and conflict reconciliation to uphold the Indonesian symbol of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or Unity in Diversity. One of the ways of understanding cultural issues is through the use of face negotiation between youths as they are believed to be the agent of change (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2012:8). Face Negotiation Theory (FNT) assumes that every individual within different cultures will constantly negotiate face through facework (Ting-Toomey, 2009). The facework will be different from each culture depending on how these individuals perceived themselves, their goals and duties; as well as self-construal during the cultural conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2009). The use of FNT is a dynamic process that depends on individuals' interaction experiences and the usage of their communicative strategies to overcome conflict (Griffin, 2012). The study of FNT had been widely used to compared cultural differences within different countries such as the US, European countries and Asia (Adegbola et al, 2018; Imai, 2017; Anthony & McCabe, 2015;

Lim, 1994). However; limited studies have been conducted in terms of different ethnicities within one country such as Indonesia. According to the country's statistic agency, there are 145 main ethnicities in Indonesia, not to mention each of the ethnicities having their own sub-ethnicities (Ananta et al, 2015), making the country prone to intercultural conflict. Cultural conflicts in Indonesia have shown that the country is still far from a peaceful atmosphere (Abdilla et al, 2019) as well as upholding the nation's unity in the diversity symbol of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This is due to the local communities within Indonesia, following its history of having been established based on a communal community (Tomagola, 2005).

Youths can develop critical thinking about intercultural issues (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2012). As prejudice is developed at a very young age, understanding facework of different cultures will ensure respect enhancement and group inclusion as a positive goal to reduce prejudice and cultural conflict (Aboud et al, 2012), and this can be done by initiating friendship (Gareis et al, 2018). However, the problem arises as students tend to prefer socialising with people of the same group, such as ethnicity, nationality and even religion which results in mono-cultural networking (Gareis et al, 2018). In Indonesia, a case study in a religious based school showed that elementary and secondary students are less likely to have friends of different ethnicities and more likely to have friends of 'kids from our own turf' (Javanese: '*cah kene dewe*'), due to the fear of difference, prejudice and stereotype towards other ethnic groups (Setiawan, 2019; Hill, 2016). Research in the US stated that while diverse classrooms enable youth to bond across ethnic groups, connecting outside the classroom and initiating friendship through self-disclosure serves as a critical point to create an emotional closeness resulting in more long-lasting and intimate friendship (Lessard et al, 2019; Maier et al, 2013).

Though vast studies regarding the importance of self-disclosure, emotional closeness and friendship have been conducted inter-culturally (Gareis & Jalayer, 2018; Maier et al, 2013; Nakazawa & Chen, 2009) little is known about Indonesia and the use of FNT. FNT can serve as a unifying conceptualisation between intercultural youths to ensure behaviour adaptation, communication effectiveness and relationship building such as friendship (Fletcher et al, 2014; Sudweeks, 1991). For this assessment, the authors chose ethnicities to be different as possible, in the degree of cultural norms, population, dominant religion as well as infrastructure development, which concluded in the selection of Javanese in Central Java province and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province. Research on NTT is still understudied, as many are oriented on Indonesia's major Islands such as Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and Papua (Pohan & Yahya, 2018; Puspita, 2017). The Javanese ethnic group is known to be the largest population with 95 million people, in which 68 percent of its population live in their provinces and the remaining 32 percent are scattered around Indonesia (Ananta et al, 2015). Islam is known to be the dominant religion in Java Island (Ananta et al, 2015). As the largest ethnic, the Javanese are not only dominant in number but also indirectly affect the country's ideology and cultural practices especially Indonesia's political culture (Tomagola, 2005). Meanwhile, the NTT is made up of

10 major ethnicities and is 1.77 percent of Indonesia's total population (Ananta et al, 2015). The dominant religion in NTT is Catholicism (Ananta et al, 2015), and the province is known to be greatly underdeveloped. Many of NTT sojourners in Java Islands are students. Solo, a city in Central Java was selected as the research location. The city of Solo is branded as “the Spirit of Java” which offers the integration of cultural heritage, as well as Javanese characteristics, norms and traditions to be implemented in daily lives and this slogan is highly reinforced by both the local government and its citizens (Nugroho, 2014). This will affect NTT students in adapting to the culture as well as establishing friendships. With a lack of studies in friendship building with the use of FNT, the authors propose to conduct a study on how the FNT facilitates self-disclosure to initiate intercultural friendship of Javanese and East Nusa Tenggara people in Solo, Central Java.

Literature Review

FNT is used in a variety of discussions in intercultural research, and the theory made an assumption as follows (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003): 1) every individual in various cultures always negotiates face in different communication circumstances. The results are varied depending on the cultural variables of individualism-collectivism, power distance, and cultural contexts; 2) the concept of the face becomes problematic within uncertainty avoidance of high and low cultures. One's identities are called into question as people in cultures strive to avoid unstructured and unpredictable situations (Sudweeks, 1991); 3) social environments such as culture, individual and situational variables influences face concerns, such as self-face, others-face in terms of face-saving; and lastly; 4) face concern influences the use of facework and conflict approach in an interpersonal or intergroup interaction.

Ting-Toomey's FNT examined the influence of culture on communication and Hofstede's cultural variables of individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance of high and low cultures was applied as well as Edward Hall's cultural context concept to explain cross-cultural differences in interpersonal communication and conflict negotiation (Griffin, 2012; Sudweeks, 1991). These variables have been implemented in many types of research globally. Research also showed that FNT was used to discuss cultural barriers and how each individual reaches an agreement to respect differences (Infante et al, 2010).

Cultural differences can provide disturbing experiences due to differences in perception, communication, interpretation, creating face loss and threat, such as feeling embarrassed, misunderstanding and hostile (Neuliep & Johnson, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2009; Sudweeks, 1991). However, as individuals of different cultures communicate and start to have a unified concept of their difference, restoring their losses can be established (Neuliep & Johnson, 2016). This facework is a specific verbal and non-verbal message that helps the individual in maintaining or restoring face and to build up 'pride' of their face, proving useful in conflict

management and resolution (Aliakbari & Amiri, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2009). Prior research on FNT has produced a variety of facework following conflict management in a cross-culture of intimate and professional interpersonal relationships (Ting-Toomey, 2017; Lan, 2016; Zhang et al, 2015; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

Though the study of FNT had been widely used, most of it is in quantitative methodologies (Guan & Lee, 2017; Arundale, 2006). The theorist of FNT is open to any pluralistic methodologies (Ting-Toomey, 2017), which urges the authors to implement FNT in light of the qualitative research method. Facework can be used in the application of the verbal and non-verbal communication process. As youths attempted to initiate intercultural friendship, misunderstanding was unavoidable as they faced tensions, felt awkward and were defensive due to their differences (Broome et al, 2019). Understanding facework between youths will help in establishing respect, openness and empathy (Kochoska, 2015) and this will help youths to have a mutual disclosure and emotional closeness (Maier et al, 2013). The use of FNT will also help youth to have a critical and broad perspective to understand the background of cultural issues and conflict and adapt in different cultural situations (Ting-Toomey, 2017; Kochoska, 2015).

Research Method

This article used a qualitative approach in addition to a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and literature review on FNT to assess the efficacy of FNT in intercultural friendship among Indonesia's youth. As many as 6 students, consisting of 3 Javanese (J1, J2, J3) and 3 NTT students (N1, N2, N3) were interviewed. The research used a constructivist paradigm. In line with Fairclough's CDA, communicative events comprise three elements which are text, discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Thus the interview results were analysed in the following stages (Fairclough, 1989): 1) text description that referred to a certain representation, relation and identity within the discourse; 2) interpretation of discourse and its relationship to the production and public consumption; 3) explanation of the relationship between social-cultural context, interpretation and its effect. Following the interview analysis by the CDA, the result were compared through a literature review.

As for literature review, the steps were conducted as follows (Cresswell, 2012): 1) authors identified key search terms in the literature consisting of articles and books related to face negotiation, friendship, cultural conflict and intercultural relationship; 2) locating the literature and distinguishing different ideas from each article and database; 3) critically evaluating and selecting works of literature that were related to the article; 4) organising the literature; and lastly 5) writing a literature review to be included in the article.

Result and Discussion

Perception of Javanese and NTT Culture

Indonesia adheres to the collectivistic culture. Most ethnicities of Java and NTT also adhere to collectivistic culture (Sihombing, 2013; Manafe, 2011). However, most of the representations of the country are seen through the lenses of Javanese culture, reflecting its domination and creating conditions that are prone to cultural conflict due to limited and forced choices for those of minority cultures in Indonesia (Bertrand, 2004). This condition was clearly shown especially in political elections, in which many citizens of Indonesia choose leaders based on their community rather than their ability; the condition worsens as religious issues are put into the spotlight (El Rahman, 2019; Hamdi, 2019).

Conflicts due to communal favouritism also occurred between youths, such as clashes between students of different ethnicities (Syambudi, 2018) as well as the refusal of certain ethnicities to live in student boarding houses (Qomah, 2018; Ulya, 2016). Identity-based ethnics' favouritism is the strongest when compared to other cultural identities, as ethnical identity was established within the familial relationship and from a young age (Tripambudi, 2012). Research in Indonesia has shown that many students suffer from discrimination based on cultural differences such as physical appearance, cultural norms and faith; resulting in many of those sojourner students staying within a dorm designated for those of the same ethnics due to fear of discrimination (Qomah, 2018; Tripambudi, 2012). However, issues due to cultural differences such as prejudice and stereotypes can be resolved with communication as shown in the bold words below:

*“At first I was living in a dorm for NTT, I felt **scared** of my coming here. It is different from back home. I know I can't live like this; I **need** to expand my experience. So, I took a step forward, and start to live in a boarding house. By then the Javanese (students) started befriended with me and I was more **open-minded** towards them. They say I was seen as a rather **exclusive** community and seems hard to approach during my stay at the NTT dorm.” – N1*

The statement by N1 of being scared was due to ignorance by both the dominant and minority groups in interacting with one another. The ignorance was also enhanced following the belief that those of minority groups, in this case NTT students, only want to be involved within their group as N1 stayed in the NTT dorm. However as N1 tried to be more approachable by moving to a boarding house, all initial negative perceptions by both N1 and Javanese students were sorted out following the interactions of N1 and Javanese students. Both ethnicities represented by each student started to see themselves on a personal level rather than as a certain ethnicity.

One of the FNT studies suggested the need for a balancing variable when research on culture is carried out, especially between individualists, collectivists and communal cultures, so that research results become effective and balanced (Fletcher et al, 2014). The balancing variables are perceptions, cognitive meanings, language use and translation that are appropriate or equivalent between researchers and respondents (Fletcher et al, 2014). This also corresponds with CDA's elements of text, discursive practice and social practice.

In the case of Indonesia, low and high cultural context should also be added as a balancing variable. Javanese is known to be a high context culture and NTT is low context culture. Javanese consider the importance of a situation as a whole when interpreting an event, making this culture have the tendencies of difficulty in sending non-verbal messages and seeing the importance of indirect behaviour. As for NTT students, they see the importance of the explicit content, so that a direct response is highly appreciated, as shown by the following statement. The bold words by J2 showed how the Javanese interpretation of situations is important and it needs to be understood by people around them, even with those of different cultures.

*"I was angry that she cornered me into answering why I was absent these past few days from campus. It is a personal matter and she should know **my silence means** I need some time alone."*- J2

*"They, the Javanese are **scared** to express something they don't like, not to mention in resolving issues. Rather than stated clearly, they keep it to themselves. They are **weak** against confrontation, so **different** from us from the East."*- N2

On the other hand the use of the word "weak", "scared" and "different" by N2 shows the firmness that the Javanese are perceived as someone inferior to the NTT in terms of resolving issues and conflict. This also showed ethnocentrism, in which the NTT feel superior in terms of directness and conflict resolution. However, this statement also emphasises that the NTT students are concerned with being misunderstood as minorities, following the inability of Javanese students to have a conflict resolution in a face-to-face manner.

In this study, the balancing constructs as mentioned by Fletcher et al (2014), occurred during campus orientation. In the orientation, the students were asked to do activities as a group while being guided by seniors and supervisors. Perceptions, understanding cognitive meanings and the difference in language were slowly introduced during the orientation and were continued as the students started their new journey in the university. Communalism's point of view, as well as cultural context that was established in their family and environment, was slowly reduced as the orientation gave students time to understand their new environment and heterogenic groups. As seen in the youths' statements below:

*“At first the campus gave us several days for orientation and we were divided into a group which consisted of individuals from different parts of Indonesia. My group consisted of people from Bali, Java, and NTT. So we start off **asking lots of questions** towards each other difference, then we like to study together for assignments, then we hang out together and turns out **we are fit to one another**. We have the same goals; the same hobby and our personality are not much different.” – N3*

*“**I like it**, the group. I **like to ask** about their culture, what makes it different from me, what are the same ones. This helps me in **gaining a new perspective**. We sometimes learn each other language, but mostly I taught the Javanese language to help them understand daily conversations.” – J1*

The statement of “asking lots of questions” can be seen as a form of communication and interaction which resulted in likeliness “we are fit to one another”; “gaining new perspective”, and is a proof that the activity was able to provide cultural understanding and lead to peace-building (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015). When this balancing construct is established, students in terms of Javanese and NTT hardly stated their difference based on cultural background, race, and belief, but rather on their psychological issue as an individual. In this study, the balancing construct resolved some intercultural communication issues such as ethnocentrism and stereotype of a certain culture through interaction and communication. This justified the Inter-Ethnic Relation Group Theory (IERG) theory that reducing discrimination, prejudice, ethnocentrism and stereotype can be done through contact and communication strategy to enhance inclusion and respect between inter-ethnic friendship (Aboud et al, 2012).

Javanese and NTT Students Facework in Building Friendship

The use of facework is a relational and interactional phenomenon, such as building friendships (Arundale, 2006). In an attempt to build intercultural friendship, a variety of situations will occur which affect the use of facework resulting in face loss and face threat, such as the feeling of embarrassment or facing opposition (Samp, 2016).

The attempt of building a friendship will also involve face need in a form of positive or negative face or the act of wanting to be respected and loved by others, and being free as themselves in the latter (Samp, 2016). The desire of either a positive or negative face will affect the use of facework whether it is face loss, face threat or face restoration. The NTT students are dependent on a positive face, while the Javanese students can show their negative face as they are a dominant culture in Solo.

*“I always **tried to be accepted**, I **minimized my ego**, like the feeling of everything, has to go my way. I know that sometimes our perception is subjective, so it will create tension.” – N2*

*“We already **really close** now, so that when I started saying I don’t like certain things, she just **accepted** and we go our **separate** ways in terms of doing our hobbies.” – J2*

*“I always **tried to understand** them, our **differences**, especially my friends from NTT and Kalimantan. **I don’t make the same effort** for my Javanese friend.”- J3*

Based on the above statements, there is a tendency of NTT students to abide by the Javanese norms or ways of living so as to be accepted, such as “minimising ego”. The NTT students also put themselves to accept requests by the Javanese students to hinder of being disliked, justified by “separate ways”. However, the statements also showed an emotional closeness such as “really close”; and “don’t make the same effort”, that enabled students to communicate their likes and dislikes in order to understand one another, especially of those of a different culture.

Facework and Power Distance in Friendship

In intercultural communication, face loss is likely to occur due to communication gaps such as interpreting expression and impression (Jwa, 2016). The act of face loss can be a verbal or a non-verbal message, such as self-mockery which widely found in collectivistic culture (Jwa, 2016). Self-mockery is often done by the NTT students as well as the act of letting go when face loss occurs to avoid conflict.

*“Well, it is **normal to be made fun off** because how I talk is different. Sometimes I feel embarrassed, but I **just let it go**, as I believe that **it was for fun**. If I acted on it, we will fight and they will think of me as someone **too serious or inflexible**.” –N2*

However, the statements show a power distance between friendships. The NTT students accept oppression or “being made fun off” as something normal and they are afraid to be thought of as inflexible or too serious. Power distance is a perception that sees inequality as something normal or meant to be (Merkin, 2006). This shows that the Javanese students are seen as a group higher in hierarchy compared to the NTT students. The power distance is also affected by location or environment, in this case, the NTT students are the minority as well as sojourners in Solo City in Central Java.

The anxiety of being thought of as inflexible is a face threat to NTT students and will create a distant relationship with the Javanese students. This issue shows the necessity of reconciliation attempts that can restore individuals’ faces that were damaged, through the act of forgiving and being forgiven. In this study, both Javanese and NTT students gave room for explanation and were able to self-disclose for conflict resolution, proving that the youth are open-minded toward differences as shown in the bold sentences.

*“Once I fought with my Javanese friend from campus. For a week-long, she ignored my Whatsapp messages. When we met on campus, she didn’t even say hello. I stay quiet, and when I visited her boarding house. Then after asking her to tell me what is my fault, **she told me the entire attitude that I thought was normal, turns out to be unacceptable.** She thinks that I was too harsh on her, but that was like my normal voice tone. After **I explained it to her, she accepted and we both asked for forgiveness to one another. We are closer now than ever.**”*

– N3

*“My NTT friend was surprised when I sent her Christmas greetings. She thought I will not congratulate her and stay quiet. She told me, Islam forbid me so. **I was a little bit sad at her remarks.** So I told her, that not all Muslims are against saying ‘Merry Christmas’ and I **explained to her my point of view** regarding tolerance to other religions. **She was happy I explained it to her,** and I am happy as well.” – J1*

Youths’ facework experience in FNT will be different for every person depending on one’s knowledge of cultural sensitivity, awareness and ability to conduct intercultural communication. Adding facework will help with one’s willingness to self-disclose to initiate friendship (Maier et al, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 2009).

For youth to be able to initiate and maintain a friendship, it is dependent on one’s ability to self-disclose and forgive to foster understanding, affirmation and care, as well as develop emotional closeness (Afif, 2019; Maier et al, 2013). To initiate friendships and create emotional closeness in an intercultural situation, one must overcome tensions, defensiveness and misunderstanding causing differences, as well as having the ability to forgive through communication (Afif, 2019; Broome et al, 2019; Aboud et al, 2012).

The above discussion also justifies that youths can develop critical thinking and minimise their prejudice of other cultures following the use of FNT in daily communication. This also proves that understanding facework will ensure respect and group inclusion as a positive goal to reduce prejudice as well as a foundation of peacebuilding through friendship (Gareis et al, 2018; Aboud et al, 2012)

Conclusion

The FNT can facilitate friendship between Javanese and NTT students in Indonesia. Though existing literature focused on comparing individualistic and collectivistic cultures, this theory assesses inter-ethnic relationships within Indonesia’s collectivistic culture. The notion of communalism had been cultivated in a familial environment, making Indonesia prone to cultural conflict and disharmony. Youths are proven to be able to develop critical thinking



towards intercultural issues, to self-disclose and to initiate as well as maintain friendship through the act of forgiveness. Face loss is inevitable in terms of interacting with those of different cultures as well as establishing friendships between youths of different ethnicities. In an attempt to minimise the impact of face loss, an NTT youth tends to let things go as a way to hinder conflict. The study also showed the existence of power distance between Javanese and NTT students' friendship in Solo City, in which the Javanese are placed higher in hierarchy. FNT is implemented with the use of balancing variables of perception, language and cognitive meaning and translation. This created a different point of view in which students no longer stated differences based on ethnicity, race, and other cultural backgrounds, but more of an individual psychological attitude. The use of FNT in daily intercultural communication, especially between friends, not only will reduce cultural conflict but also give access to group inclusion, respect and peacebuilding.

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