

## Language and Intercultural Communication: Belgian Business Owner with Indonesian Workers in Murianto Workshop, Jepara, Central Java

Bahasa dan Komunikasi Antar Budaya: Pemilik Bisnis Belgia dan Pekerja Indonesia di Murianto Workshop, Jepara, Jawa Tengah

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### ABSTRACT

*Intercultural communication happens when two or more people from different cultural backgrounds interact and communicate each other. However, due to the difference, they often face constraints during conversations. This study explores the dynamics of intercultural communication between a Belgian business owner and his Indonesian workers in the Murianto Workshop in Jepara, Central Java from the perspective of the business owner. Drawing upon the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and the Conversational Constraints Theory (CCT), the study discusses the interplay of cultural adaptation and communication strategies. The objectives of this study are to understand the implementation of CAT and CCT by the owner of the workshop, and to identify the communication constraints faced by the owner. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview conducted with the business owner and presented descriptively. The finding shows that the owner implements the CAT's convergence by adapting to local culture. Although many of his actions reflect collectivist tendencies, he establishes boundaries with his workers to maintain a professional work environment. From the CCT, the constraints faced by the owner are about clarity and effectiveness concerns. The constraints he faced are related to the change of communication strategy from a direct to an indirect approach. The business owner should invest in language learning to enhance intercultural communication, bridge cultural gaps, and show genuine interest in local culture. Balancing local customs with professional boundaries is crucial and open dialogue and guidelines can foster a harmonious work environment.*

**Keywords:** *intercultural communication, Communication Accommodation Theory, Conversational Constraints Theory, Belgian business owner, Indonesian workers*

### INTISARI

Komunikasi antarbudaya terjadi ketika dua orang atau lebih dari latar belakang budaya berbeda berinteraksi dan berkomunikasi satu sama lain. Namun karena perbedaan tersebut, mereka seringkali menghadapi kendala saat percakapan. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika komunikasi antar budaya antara pemilik bisnis berkewarganegaraan Belgia dengan pekerja Indonesia di Workshop Murianto di Jepara, Jawa Tengah dari sudut pandang pemilik bisnis. Dengan memanfaatkan Teori Akomodasi Komunikasi (CAT) dan Teori Kendala Percakapan (CCT), penelitian ini membahas keterkaitan antara adaptasi budaya dan strategi komunikasi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami penerapan CAT dan CCT oleh pemilik usaha, serta mengidentifikasi kendala komunikasi yang dihadapinya. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara semi terstruktur yang dilakukan kepada pemilik usaha dan disajikan secara deskriptif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pemilik menerapkan konvergensi CAT dengan beradaptasi dengan budaya lokal. Meskipun banyak dari tindakannya mencerminkan kecenderungan kolektif, ia menetapkan batasan dengan para pekerjanya untuk menjaga lingkungan kerja yang profesional. Dari sisi CCT, kendala yang dihadapi pemilik adalah masalah kejelasan dan efektivitas. Kendala yang dihadapinya terkait dengan perubahan strategi komunikasi dari pendekatan langsung menjadi tidak langsung. Pemilik bisnis harus berinvestasi dalam pembelajaran bahasa untuk meningkatkan komunikasi antar budaya, menjembatani kesenjangan budaya, dan menunjukkan minat yang tulus terhadap budaya lokal. Menyeimbangkan adat istiadat setempat dengan batasan profesional sangatlah penting dan dialog serta pedoman yang terbuka dapat menumbuhkan lingkungan kerja yang harmonis.

**Kata kunci:** komunikasi antar budaya, Teori Akomodasi Komunikasi, Teori Kendala Percakapan, Belgia

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Auwalu Issa, Yunusa & Garga (2015), intercultural communication means communication across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication can happen when two people from different backgrounds interact. This exciting phenomenon occurs in the Murianto Workshop. The most exciting matter is the owner is Belgian with Dutch as his first language, and the workers are Javanese that speak the Javanese language as their first language. Both parties did not speak Indonesian at first, but the owner has been studying the Indonesian language for two years. Still, they use Indonesian as their daily language to communicate. This is interesting since the language choice aligns with Nguyen and Hamid's finding in Nguyen (2021) which explained neutrality as an accommodation strategy. Neutrality is when the speakers use a language that is not the first language of both parties. In intercultural interactions, language choice is a communication strategy where both parties act on and negotiate the relationship between them and their interlocutor, as explained by Nguyen (2021).

In this case, the fact that the language chosen is Indonesian is a result of negotiation. This strategy referred to accommodation in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Giles & Coupland (1991), which examines how language and how people speak change depending on who they are talking. This theory is structured by two main language functions: convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the situation when a person uses the same language as the person they are speaking to connect with or maintain a closer relationship. In this case, each adjusts communicative behavior in verbal and non-verbal ways, such as staring, smiling, and giving hand gestures, as explained by Giles & Coupland (1991), whereas divergence is the opposite. Divergence is when a person emphasizes the differences in their language versus the language of the person they are talking to. Divergence can be seen as the response of the interlocutor while communicating. In other words, divergence occurs when there is no attempt to emphasize equality during communication, referring to the explanation of Alviana in Ulhikmah (2019).

Communication Accommodation Theory also has four principles that underlie the concept of this theory. The first communication is not purely influenced by the characteristics of the immediate conditions at the time. Still, it is also influenced by the historical and social background in which the interaction is embedded. The second principle emphasizes that communication is not only a matter of exchanging ideas, information, facts, or emotions, but also membership in a special social class is often negotiated when interactions occur through accommodation. The third principle is that the people involved in the communication have high expectations regarding the optimization of the accommodation process. The last principle is that the people involved in communication utilize strategies, especially convergence, and divergence to assert good attitudes toward each other and each social group. Giles and Ogay in Ulhikmah (2019) believe that if all four principles are met, the interaction can be balanced between the need for social and differential inclusiveness.

Intercultural communication frequently encounters conversational constraints stemming from different cultural backgrounds. Kim defines conversational constraints as the reasons why and how conversational choices vary across cultures (2006). Kim (2006) identified five conversational constraints in Conversational Constraints Theory: concern for clarity, concern for avoiding hurting the hearer's feelings, concern for non-imposition, concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, and concern for effectiveness.

Clarity is defined as the likelihood that an utterance will make one's intention clear and explicit. Clarity plays a vital role in delivering the intended message to the hearer because,

without clarity, the conversation will not go smoothly. Concern for avoiding hurting the hearer's feelings is explained as the speaker's perceived duty to help the hearer assert and maintain a positive self-image. Direct utterances without abrupt mitigation are more likely to hurt someone's feelings than innuendo. This is by conveying the implicit message that the speaker does not care about the relationship, but only about achieving the result as the means. Another constraint is a concern for non-imposition, representing the degree to which speech is non-obtrusive. Interfere with the hearer's autonomy or the hearer's freedom of action; this kind of concern is grouped in more abstract terms, such as negative politeness, which avoids restricting the freedom of others. Therefore, the concern for minimizing imposition is primarily considered a means of protecting the hearer's negative face. The importance of this constraint can vary across cultures, but previous research has confirmed the importance of minimizing the imposition in many cultures.

The fourth of five focuses on avoiding negative evaluations from the audience. It expresses concern that the utterance does not cause the listener to experience disgust, devaluation, or rejection. Concern for effectiveness refers to a person's desire to achieve the desired outcome from the interaction. Communication effectiveness is defined as the accomplishment of goals or tasks. Ratings of communication skills correlate with effectiveness in achieving conversational objectives. This result demonstrates the significance of social interaction effects.

Murianto Workshop is a solid wooden teak workshop specializing in high-end chair making owned by a Belgian citizen, NE, and located in Jepara, Central Java. Founded in 2013, the business has grown to 22 employees, including 18 active workers and four non-production workers. Initially targeting European markets, NE planned to produce tabletops but later shifted his focus to chairs. Despite the challenges of learning the Indonesian language, NE's stepfamily helped him communicate with local workers. The Indonesian language was chosen as the language of negotiation to accommodate both NE and the workers. Despite initially having a positive impression of Indonesia, NE experienced culture shock when he began to understand the language more. As a foreigner, he realized that some people took advantage of him and decided to take a step back in his second year in Indonesia.

The writers are interested in examining how intercultural communication happens with Belgian business owner with Indonesian workers in Murianto Workshop with two key theories; Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory. The writers' interest is based on an understanding of language choice, which is one of the important factors supporting clear communication in running a business. Besides, this research is important because no journal or source discusses the intercultural communication of Belgian business owners with local workers in Jepara. Thus, this research is urgent to discuss intercultural communication in the frame of Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory.

This research focuses on the implementation of the Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory in Murianto Workshop by analyzing the communication strategies to see the implementation of Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory and see how well communication is going between the Belgian business owner and the local workers.

The research on intercultural communication of Belgian business owners with local workers in Jepara has never been conducted before. However, there are some studies about intercultural peer communication in an international class and some previous research that discuss intercultural communication. 1. The first research by Trang Thi Thuy Nguyen (2021), examined Vietnamese students' experiences of language choice practices in intercultural interactions with their local Taiwanese peers. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with students from five different Taiwanese universities where both English and

Mandarin Chinese are used as mediums of instruction and communication. Findings suggest that the students frequently used English as a language of neutrality to communicate with local students. The differences between this research and the writer's research are the subject and the research place. The similarity is the theory used, which is the Communication and Accommodation Theory.

2. The second research conducted by Dziya Ulhikmah (2019) discussed the communication accommodation of Ugandan students in a student dormitory at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. This research aims to determine the accommodation process that occurs between Uganda students and Indonesian students in the PESMA (boarding school) KH. Mas Mansur, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Data were gathered from interviews, documentation, and observation. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. Findings show that there was an accommodation in the form of convergence, divergence, and over-accommodation. The similarity between this research and the writer's research is the theory used, which is the Communication and Accommodation Theory. The differences are the subject and the research place.

3. The third research by R et al. (2020) discussed the phenomena of convergence and divergence in students of English Language Education at Ganesha University of Education. This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive design which is expected to describe the use of the Convergence and Divergence strategies within the reason for using each strategy. The analyzed variables are speech rate, pauses, utterance length, and lexical accommodation. The data is collected through observation and interview sessions. The study results show that students can use multiple strategies in each variable based on current circumstances. The similarity with the writer's research is the theory used, which is the Communication Accommodation Theory. Meanwhile, the differences are the subject and the research place.

4. The fourth research conducted by Carie S. Tucker King & Kylar S. Bailey (2021), discussed how US students and faculty can improve international students' classroom experiences. For this study, the data collection method was an interview. The data population was more than 40 international students but only received 6 responses and interviewed four people. The result was categorized into 3 categories, namely, what our university is doing well, what the US students can do to improve the international students' experiences, and what US faculty can do to improve the international students' experiences. The differences between this study and the writer's study are the subject, the research place, and the theory used. Meanwhile, the similarity is on the main topic which is intercultural communication.

This research is conducted because previously, no research discussed this topic with the specific object, which is a Belgian business owner with local workers in Jepara, Central Java. This research will examine how language and the way people speak change depending on who they are talking to and identifies the constraints during communication. This research also includes a brief explanation of the organization and descriptive research results. The data was taken through interviews in March 2023. The sample selected for this study was specifically selected based on suitability with the research theme. The other limitation is the subject, so the result obtained in this study may not apply to another case outside of this designation.

In this research, the data is obtained from only one source, which is Niels Evens, the owner of Murianto Workshop, so the point of view is limited. The writers could not obtain the data from the workers due to the owner's unwillingness. The observation was also not feasible to conduct due to the limitation of time that the writers had. The data gained from the interview is from eight years span, starting from 2015 to 2023. The objective of this study is to understand the implementation of Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory by the owner of Murianto Workshop in Jepara, Central Java, and also to

identify the constraints during the communication between the owner of Murianto Workshop and the workers.

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## **METHODS**

Initially, the writer planned to collect the data by interviewing the owner and workers and observing the workshop. Still, due to the owner's unwillingness, the writer collected the data only by interviewing one person that is the owner of Murianto Workshop. The data gathering technique was collected offline through a semi-structured interview on April 27, 2023. To get a better understanding of Murianto Workshop, the writer also gathered information from Instagram and YouTube of Murianto Workshop. Before collecting the data, the writer arranged the interview and emailed the Murianto Workshop's owner. In the interview, twenty questions were abbreviated from the Communication Accommodation Theory and

Conversational Constraints Theory. During the interview, the writer recorded the conversation with the informant's consent. The writer used the interview as the research protocol to answer the research question. Semi-structured interviews are widely utilized in qualitative research and serve as the primary source of qualitative research. DeJonckheere and Vaughn explain that this approach typically involves a conversation between the researcher and the participant, facilitated by a flexible interview guide (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2018). The process may also include additional questions, prompts, and remarks for further clarification. DeJonckheere and Vaughn believe that by employing this method, researchers can gather comprehensive information, delve into participants' perspectives, emotions, and convictions regarding a specific subject, and thoroughly explore personal and occasionally delicate matters (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2018). The interview was conducted with the owner of Murianto Workshop for approximately an hour. The writer was planning to interview the local workers of Murianto Workshop as well, but due to the owner's unwillingness, the writer only interviewed the owner. Since the interview data is expected to answer the research questions, the interview questions were divided into two sections. Section one is from the Communication Accommodation Theory and section two is from Conversational Constraints Theory.

After the data were collected using the mentioned research protocol above, the writer analyzed the data. Several steps done in the process of analyzing the qualitative data are explained below:

### **1. Transcription**

After the interview, the writer transcribed the recorded interview. In this process, the writer converted the audio recording into a written transcript.

## 2. Categorization

After obtaining the transcript, the writer categorized the data into the research questions and objectives. The table below shows samples of categorization the writer made related to Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory:

**Table 1 .Indicators and Questions from the Communication Accommodation Theory**

Principles	Question	Principles Indicator (1-4)	Answer Form
	What is your first language?	1	Open-ended
1. Communication is influenced by various factors.	How do you communicate with your workers when you aren't fluent in Bahasa Indonesia?	1, 2	Open-ended
2. Communication extends beyond simply exchanging factual, information, ideas, and emotions.	Do you use non-verbal communication (hand gestures, reading lips, etc.)?	1, 2	Open-ended
3. Interactants hold expectations regarding the appropriate levels of accommodation.	Do you try to understand the local language, or do you make them try to understand your language?	2	Open-ended
4. Interactants employ specific communication strategies, such as convergence (adopting a similar communication style) and divergence (emphasizing differences in the communication).	Why do you decide to learn Bahasa Indonesia?	3, 4	Open-ended
	How do you learn Bahasa Indonesia?	4	Open-ended
	When did you start using Bahasa Indonesia as your daily language?	4	Open-ended
	What is the challenge in speaking Bahasa Indonesia?	3	Open-ended

(Source: Ulfani's document, 2023)

**Table 2. Indicators and Questions from the Conversational Constraints Theory**

Conversational Constraints	Question	Indicator (1-5)	Answer Form
1. Concern for clarity.	Have you ever encountered conversational constraints while speaking with your workers?	1	Open-ended
2. Respect for avoiding the other's feelings.			
3. Concern for non-imposition.	Do you consider avoiding the other's feelings important during communication?	2	Open-ended
4. Concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the other.			
5. Concern for effectiveness.			

(Source: Ulfani's document, 2023)

## 3. Analysis

Once the writer had the data transcribed and categorized, the data then were analyzed and interpreted descriptively using the Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (Giles, 2007) and Conversational Constraints Theory by Kim (Kim, 2006). In this process, the writers aimed to find a connection between the data and the theories.

#### **4. Synthesis**

Finally, the writers summarized the findings into a coherent narrative consistent with the research goals. The aim is to summarize the essential findings and draw conclusions from the analysis.

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#### **Synthesis**

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### **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The findings answer the objectives of the study which include to understand the implementation of Communication Accommodation Theory and Conversational Constraints Theory by the owner of Murianto Workshop in Jepara, Central Java, and also to identify the constraints during the communication between the owner of Murianto Workshop and the workers.

#### **Communication Accommodation Theory**

According to the four principles in the Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles and Ogay (2007), communication is a complex process influenced by several factors, including the immediate situation, participants' initial orientations, and the socio-historical context. It goes beyond exchanging factual information and emotions, as individuals also negotiate their social identities through accommodation. Stereotypes and norms shape expectations about accommodation levels. The use of communication strategies like convergence (adopting a similar style) and divergence (emphasizing differences) signal attitudes and contribute to the delicate balance between social inclusiveness and differentiation. These concepts are fundamental to Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and have been extensively studied in empirical research.

From the interview questions, there are two questions from the first principle, two questions from the second principle, two questions from the third principle, and three questions from the fourth principle. NE, the Belgian business owner, speaks four languages. His first language is Dutch, followed by French, English, and Indonesian, lastly. Coming out from the second question, in the beginning, at the time that NE was not fluent in the Indonesian language, the workshop was more like a hobby shop with NE and H (NE's step family), so he hadn't had workers. Still, NE tried to learn the Indonesian language before starting the workshop and recruiting the workers. It also answered the third question, and it shows that NE learned the Indonesian language rather than making them understand his language. This aligns with convergence, one of the main functions of language structure in Communication Accommodation Theory. Convergence refers to the situation in which people use the same language as the person they are speaking to in order to form or maintain a closer relationship (Giles, 2016). Using Indonesian in communication proves that NE implement convergence to get closer with his workers since he knows that his workers understand Indonesian.

In this case, NE is a newcomer or "stranger" and his effort to learn the Indonesian language is a form of adaptation and maintaining a closer relationship with the locals. According to Gudykunst and Kim, the term "stranger" refers to an adult individual who seeks to be accepted or, at the very least, tolerated by a group that they are approaching (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). The stranger aims to establish a sense of belonging or to establish some level of acceptance within the group (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). A key motivation for convergence

is the desire for mutual consent—the premise is similarity attraction. The more interactant resembles the interlocutor, the more they like or respect the interactant and the more social rewards they can expect (Giles & Ogay, 2006). Also, converging speakers are generally rated more positively than diverging and sustaining speakers and are considered more efficient in communication and collaboration (Giles & Ogay, 2006). Here, NE is a newcomer that planned to stay and grow his business, so he adapts and learns Indonesian language.

NE has learned Indonesian with the help of H. H taught Indonesian to NE daily and taught him the local carpentering terms too, and NE kept them all neatly in a notebook. Not only direct coaching from H, but NE also purchased a Dutch-Indonesian dictionary to help him learn, although he rarely opened the dictionary. His ability to speak Indonesian language has skyrocketed after he started texting, and two years later, he finally became fluent in the Indonesian language and could switch spontaneously from English to Indonesian language without thinking. His Indonesian fluency also signified the time when his workshop started to recruit local workers. The fact that NE uses Indonesian language when he talks to his workers complies with the explanation by Giles and Ogay, who stated that this constant movement toward or away from others by changing communicative behavior is called accommodation (Giles & Ogay, 2006).

The reason why NE learned Indonesian language because it is a form of adaptation, like the European mindset. For NE, learning the Indonesian language is like jumping onto the water and learning to swim later. In this idiom, the water he refers to is the workshop he did not plan to have previously, and by learning to swim he means to learn the Indonesian language since the workshop is located in Jepara, Central Java, Indonesia. He believes that learning the Indonesian language is the most efficient way to get to the core things, especially when he intends to start a business. At that time, he did not take the formal Indonesian language lesson nor hire a translator to help him because he was not in a rush. He was living with his stepfamily in Jepara, which was an exciting way for him to get established in the Indonesian culture. Also, NE feels that Indonesians support foreigners who want to learn the language. In the interview, NE told the writer that people would still understand and respond to him even when he speaks a completely wrong Indonesian sentence. For him, it shows that Indonesian people are friendly to foreigners who wants to learn the Indonesian language. It also motivates him to keep learning and practicing.

Related the challenges in learning Indonesian, NE explained that it is reading and watching the news for him because the news usually uses a formal Indonesian language that is different from the daily Indonesian language. However, it is not a big issue for him, as the challenge is understanding the Javanese language that people use daily in Jepara, including his workers. After two years living in Jepara surrounded by the locals who speak Javanese language as their daily language, NE has started to understand the Javanese language. By listening to his surroundings people speaking Javanese and asking for the meanings, he learned the language. The process of learning Javanese language is slower than the Indonesian language, but since he heard people talking in Javanese language daily, he becomes familiar with it. Unlike learning Indonesian, he does not have a dictionary to help him learn the Javanese language. From the process, it can be concluded that the method for learning the Javanese language is purely listening, understanding, and practicing. Despite of the challenge, NE uses the Indonesian language mixed with the Javanese language. It is because most of the carpentering terms and tools names are more familiar in the Javanese language, and they can't be translated into the Indonesian language, so only the local Jeparanese can understand. Again, this shows that NE proves the convergence strategy in the Communication Accommodation Theory. Of the various coordination strategies speakers use to achieve these goals, convergence has been the most studied.

### **Conversational Constraints Theory**



Based on the Conversational Constraints Theory by Kim, there are five conversational constraints identified: concern for clarity, respect for avoiding hurting the other's feelings, concern for non-imposition, concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, and lastly, concern for effectiveness (Kim, 2017). According to the theory, clarity refers to the likelihood that an utterance clearly states its intention. The second constraint, respect for avoiding the other's feelings, refers to the speaker's perceived duty to help the listener assert and maintain a positive self-image. The third constraint, the constraint for non-imposition, is defined as an effort to minimize imposition, which, therefore, is primarily understood to protect the hearer's negative facial expressions. Next, concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer. This constraint expresses concern that the utterance does not provoke disgust, contempt, or rejection in the listener. Lastly, concern for effectiveness. It refers to a person's interest in achieving a desired outcome in an interaction. Communication effectiveness is similarly defined in terms of goal attainment or task completion.

Regarding conversational constraints when talking to the local workers, NE explained that, for him, the constraint is that he cannot speak straightforwardly like he usually speaks to his European colleagues. Thus every time he needs to speak to the workers, he sometimes has confusion about what he is going to say, how he is going to say it, and in which order he is going to say it, which is very unspontaneous for him, so he counts it as a conversational constraint. Although, by the time he lives here and his Indonesian language skill, he feels like his skill in indirect communication is getting better. According to him, it is important to have a level of intercultural understanding in order to make the process work. It is about understanding not only the Indonesian language but also about understanding the local mindset and knowing the common way of reactions of the locals. To communicate with the workers, NE usually held one on one session. As the owner and the managing director, it is his responsibility to keep his workers happy as well as keep the order flowing. According to NE, to make the workers happy, everyone needs one on one pep talk occasionally. The purpose of this pep talk is to get to know each other, not only work-related but also in person.

Regarding ensuring the intention is clear during communicating with the workers, NE explained that he has a way of doing it. To clarify communication, NE invite workers outside of work to make them feel comfortable. Once they are comfortable, then it is easier for NE to talk about his intention. Sometimes, NE also comes directly to the worker's house to have one on one session. By doing that, NE wants to make sure that he is open for discussion about work or the worker's personal life is also okay to talk about during the session. The third question about his approach to the workers is already answered in the first question. There, NE clearly stated that in communicating with the workers, he couldn't use the European way, which is to talk straight to the point. He knows that the workers are not used to it, so he always has a bit of little talk before going to the point that he is trying to convey. With that being said, the answer to the third and fourth questions is related. NE cannot go straight to the point while communicating with the workers, so he always tries to have a little talk first to begin the conversation and that is a form of avoiding the hearer's feeling.

In creating a good persona, NE pointed out that it is indeed important for him, especially because he is the owner of Murianto Workshop. For him, structural hierarchy is very important, and there has to be respect for the boss. As he realizes that he works with a skilled professional carpenter with lower education people, NE wants to be a good example for his workers. For example, when it is work time, NE wants his workers to focus. However, when it is free time, he lets them know that they can relax, talk to each other, or even drink together. The answer to the fifth question is also still related to the sixth and seventh questions about avoiding inconvenience during communication. To conclude from his answer, NE is very keen to maintain his authority and persona in front of his workers. He always thinks through before communicating with the workers so that they feel comfortable talking to him. However, NE

also wants to have boundaries with the workers, meaning that he does not want to get too close to them. In the interview, NE explained the reason behind the boundaries he set, saying that it is for his own good because when the workers get too close, they become unprofessional in a way that bothers NE, such as complaining too much, borrowing money, etc. The unpleasant experience then made him pass down the work order to his supervisor, which also a local, so the supervisor tells the workers what NE ask them to do daily since he is not visiting the workshop every day.

The next and last question is about making other people comply with his workers. It is essential for him, especially when he works with people who still need to learn a lot about working ethically. Also, since his workers only consist of twenty-one people, everyone has to be reliable to one another. That is also the reason why he sees the workshop as a football team rather than just a bunch of workers. Despite the mental and physical exhaustion that the woodworkers undergo every day, NE wants to make sure they provide the best results. For that to happen, everyone must be happy.

Concluding from the findings, the way NE, the Belgian business owner of Murianto Workshop, communicates with the local workers can be determined more collectivist rather than individualistic, according to Kim (2017). Kim (2017) defined the concept of individualism by (a) placing importance on self-reliance, (b) having low concern for in-groups, and (c) maintaining a certain distance from in-groups. In contrast, collectivism is associated with a tendency to be more concerned about the consequences of one's actions toward group members and willing to sacrifice individual interests to achieve harmony and collective interests. Also, collectivism is characterized by (a) prioritizing the views, needs, and goals of the in-group over oneself, (b) being ready to cooperate with in-group members, and (c) experiencing strong emotional attachment to the in-group. In this case, the way NE learned the Indonesian language is an example of a collectivist act. He sacrificed the Belgian culture of straightforward communication and adapted to the local way of communicating with the workers to achieve the workshop's goals. Not only that, but he also cooperated by learning and speaking the Javanese language, which is the worker's daily language.



Figure 1. The traditional blessing ceremony with the workers  
(Source: *Murianto Workshop's documentation, 2023*)

One more example of NE's collectivist act could be seen in the way he conducted the traditional blessing ceremony in Muslim culture for the workshop in a way that contradicted his beliefs. In the traditional blessing ceremony, NE also invited the local religious leader and the neighbors. The fact that he is not a Muslim himself shows that it is a big action of tolerating and respecting the local Javanese and Islamic culture. Here, it shows that NE's totality of adaptation is supported by Kim's theory, which believes that the dominant culture within a given context or society determines which speech style is considered normal (Kim, 2017). This means that individuals belonging to other cultural or linguistic groups may be expected to learn and adapt to the communication style of the dominant culture. It is possible, in this process, for individuals from minority cultures to be considered deviant, irrational, or inferior as compared

to the communication norms of the dominant culture. This reflects the power dynamics and biases that can exist within intercultural communication contexts. Luckily for NE, the bad perception from the locals during his early learning process does not occur.

Conversely, he also set a boundary with the workers, which contradicts the previous facts. Referring to his statement, the boundaries he set between him, and the workers are related to the old, traditional, working ethic positioning the boss at the top of the structural hierarchy. In his generation, if someone is working for another, they must learn to be loyal to the boss who 'put food on their table'. The boundary he set means to teach the workers when to talk, to listen, and to respect the boss. Throughout his workshop, NE tries to incorporate that value as much as he can since it is what brought him here in the first place. NE believes that setting boundaries and establishing a clear chain of command is necessary for a successful workplace, particularly one with a male-dominated workforce. He believes that without establishing these boundaries, workers would not understand when it is appropriate to speak, when it is appropriate to listen, and when it is necessary to show respect to their boss.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the Communication Accommodation Theory, the writers formulated eight questions related to convergence and divergence. The result shows that NE Evens is fully adaptive to the local culture in Jepara, or can be referred to as convergence, according to the Communication Accommodation Theory. From the beginning, NE knows that he is going to work with the locals who only speak the Indonesian and Javanese languages, so he adapts by learning the Indonesian language. The method that he used to learn the Indonesian language was learning by doing and practicing with the help of his stepfamily. After two years of learning and practicing, he finally feels confident enough to speak the Indonesian language fluently. NE did not find significant challenges in learning the Indonesian language. For him, the real challenge was to learn the Javanese language. However, NE tried his best to understand the language because his workers use Javanese as their daily language. NE is now fluent in both languages and can switch from the Indonesian language to the Javanese language spontaneously. In communicating with the local workers, NE mixes the Indonesian and Javanese languages to make himself understandable to the workers.

NE, when communicating with local workers, faces conversational constraints that prevent him from speaking straightforwardly as he does with his European colleagues. However, living in Indonesia has improved his indirect communication skills over time. NE emphasizes the importance of intercultural understanding, including knowledge of the Indonesian language, local mindset, and common reactions. NE ensures clarity of intention by creating a comfortable environment outside of work, inviting workers to discuss both work and personal life. NE avoids using a direct, European communication style and engages in small talk before addressing the main point, aiming to avoid any negative emotional response from the listener.

NE also emphasizes the importance of creating a good persona due to the structural hierarchy and respect for the boss in his workplace. He wants to set a good example for his workers by being focused during work hours and allowing relaxation and socializing during free time. Based on the interview, NE's communication style with local workers can be considered collectivist rather than individualistic. Aligned with the Communication Accommodation Theory, he adapted to the local way of communicating, sacrificing his straightforward Belgian culture, and learned the Indonesian language, including Javanese, the workers' daily language. These examples comply with Kim's theory, which suggests that individuals from minority cultures are expected to adapt to the communication style of the dominant culture, reflecting power dynamics and biases within intercultural communication contexts.

Overall, out of five constraints identified in Conversational Constraints Theory by Kim, NE only faces two of them: concern for clarity, and concern for effectiveness. These constraints are a result of the shift in his communication style from direct, which is the European way, to indirect, which is closely associated with the Indonesian approach. However, NE does set boundaries with the workers, which is contradictory to his adaptive behavior. The boundaries he set are meant to avoid unprofessional behavior and unpleasant experiences. He adheres to traditional working ethics that position the boss at the top of the structural hierarchy because he believes that establishing clear boundaries and a chain of command is essential for a successful workplace, especially in a male-dominated workforce.

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