
Comparison Study of Indonesian Third-Culture Individuals and Non-Third Culture Individuals in Regards to Communication Accommodation in Intercultural Business

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Abstract

Third Culture Individuals (TCI) are people who spent a significant amount of time outside their passport country during their developmental years. Due to their exposure to different cultures, they are inclined and have the ability to adjust their communication and behaviour accordingly. Communication Accommodation focuses on Convergence and Divergence, the communication strategies when individuals adapt to each other's communication language and behaviour. Convergence occurs when individuals adjust their communication to be more similar to their communication partner. Conversely, Divergence is when individuals accentuate differences. The aim of this study is to compare communication Convergence and Divergence levels of Indonesian TCI and non-TCI by adopting a pre-existing scale measuring four dimensions (Approximation, Interpretability, Discourse Management and Interpersonal Control). Data was gathered through an online survey with 140 respondents who are Indonesian TCI and non-TCI.

Results show that even though both groups are convergent, TCI are more convergent and accommodating..

Keywords: Communication Accommodation Theory, Convergence and Divergence, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Identity, Intercultural Business Communication, TCK, Third Culture Kids, Third Culture Individuals.

I. INTRODUCTION

With rapid changes in global technology, transportation, and immigration policies, humans are able to commute and settle anywhere in the world. In a global society, people bring different work habits and cultural practices differently. According to a research by a global market agency, Finaccord (2018), the number of expats around the world has risen to approximately 66 million worldwide with the largest share consisting of individual workers. The number is expected to rise to over 87 million in the next few years.

Third Culture Individuals (TCI) are defined as individuals who have spent their developmental years outside their passport countries. The term was coined in 1960 by John and Ruth Hill describing TCI as individuals who have a high mobility lifestyle and cross-cultural upbringing. Considering TCI having diverse interactions with people from different cultures on a daily basis, their identity and self-concepts are developed based on these interactions. Everyone needs, to a certain extent, adjust their ways of communicating to the individual(s) they are speaking to. Hence, throughout their whole lives, TCI have to adjust their communication to be understood by people that do not come from the same cultural background as theirs.

Within intercultural business communication, Communication Accommodation can be found when two speakers shift their communication styles in two different ways: 1) Convergence, the strategy to which individuals adapt their communication to be more similar to others and 2) Divergence, the strategy to accentuate the differences between self and the other. These strategies are achieved through adjusting their linguistic, paralinguistic and behavior depending on the person(s) they are communicating with.

This study will address Communication Accommodation strategies by comparing Indonesian TCI and Indonesian non-TCI to see whether there is a difference or not and how they differ. The results of this study are expected to provide more findings both in regards to TCI and Communication Accommodation. Moreover, the findings can be

applied into real-life situations such as in academics, jobs, intercultural business communications and other situations that involve cultural understanding.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Third Culture Individuals

Third Culture Individuals (TCI) or often referred as Third Culture Kids (TCK), are individuals that have spent most of their developmental years outside their parents' culture. They often build relationships to many cultures, yet do not have full ownership of any of the said cultures. Even though they may assimilate all of the cultures experienced, TCI cannot fully identify fully to any.

The differences that separate TCI from non-TCI are: mobility, developmental years spent in host country, developmental years spent in passport country, culture of host country, cultural identity and relationship to host country (PoIvan Model), educational experience and languages spoken.

Mobility is the amount of times TCI have moved from one country to another, mainly in their developmental years. Due to high mobility, TCI are exposed to different cultures throughout their lives. Commonly, TCI is able to speak two languages fluently; one of his/her passport country and one of the host countries. Furthermore, as for educational experience, TCI are forced to adjust their communication to specific curriculums and ways of teachings, depending on the place they are currently studying.

B. Communication Accommodation Theory (Convergence & Divergence)

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was developed by Howard Giles who believed that it is likely for individuals to change the way they speak when interacting with others. They modify their speech, vocal patterns, and gestures to accommodate others. CAT focuses on patterns of Convergence and Divergence in communication and behaviors.

Convergence, defined by Giles, Nikolas and Justine Coupland in 1991, is "a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors". Convergence can be achieved through verbal and non-verbal communication. When individuals feel attracted to someone, they are more likely to prompt Convergence. The attractiveness can be caused by a number of reasons such as having similar beliefs,

personality, behavior, status, credibility, etc. Another motive for Convergence is to adjust their way of communicating based on the person(s) they are talking to gain likeness and approval. Successful convergence results in effective communication since both parties are exposed to the same symbols and meaning thus creating a mutual understanding.

Divergence, or non-accommodation, in contrast to Convergence, is the emphasis of differences in speech and non-verbal behavior between themselves and others. It has to be noted that Divergence does not equal to ignorance or inattentiveness but rather to maintenance meaning that individuals choose to maintain their original linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal behavior. Giles (1987) asserted that people, especially in racial groups or ethnic groups, deliberately maintain their original speech and language to emphasize their identity and culture. Another important reason is to maintain social power and differences between people from different socio-economic classes and status.

There are four dimensions in Communication Convergence and Divergence:

1. Approximation refers to when individuals adjust their speech patterns, tone, etc. to be similar (converge) or different (diverge) from another;
2. Interpretability focuses on adjusting the use of language so that the receiver of the message can understand;
3. Discourse management is the adjustment of communication based on the conversational needs. For instance, knowing the needs when to not talk about a certain subject or when to change the topic of the conversation; and
4. Interpersonal control is to adapt communication based on role relations and status. In interpersonal control, when individuals converge, they try to place their status equal to the other but when they diverge, they emphasize on the difference of the status between one another.

In CAT, people have options whether to use the same languages and non-verbal systems or differentiate themselves from others. These choices are referred to as Convergence and Divergence. These choices are either done consciously or unconsciously, depending on the needs of the individuals.

III. METHOD

In order to investigate the level of Communication Convergence and Divergence between Indonesian TCI and non-TCI, a quantitative approach through a 7-point likert scale questionnaire with 3 parts was chosen. Respondents from both groups are aged 20 to 29 years old. All respondents must have an Indonesian passport and are currently residing/ repatriated in Indonesia. Since there is no precise definition of TCI, in this study respondents who have spent at least 4 of their developmental years (aged 6 to 18) outside Indonesia are considered TCI while non-TCI are the respondents who have spent less than four years outside Indonesia.

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part contains basic demographics and will determine whether the respondents fit the criteria to fill in the questionnaire. The second part is to profile the respondent as a TCI or a non-TCI based on the characteristics of Schumacher (2016)'s TCI Characteristics. Lastly, the third part consists of determinants on the level of Communication Convergence and Divergence strategies. The items of the questionnaire are adopted from a previous study done by Dumanig, (2015). The study provides a quantitative measure for Communication Convergence and Divergence levels.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The questionnaire collected 140 responses in total; 70 Indonesian TCI and 70 non-TCI. The overall study of this paper examined based on these responses. Results concluded factors as to why TCI are more capable of applying Convergence strategies in communication is because of their exposure to multicultural settings throughout their developmental years. 81.4% of TCI respondents spent more than 7 years abroad in the ages of 6 to 18. Conversely, 75% of non-TCI spent less than a year abroad. Furthermore, 62.9% of TCI respondents attended international school abroad whereas the majority of non-TCI respondents attended local private schools and national schools in Indonesia. Lastly, the number of languages spoken by both TCI and non-TCI are roughly the same. However, 47.1% of non-TCI respondents speak 2 languages whereas 41.4% of TCI respondents speak 3 languages.

Table 1. Indonesian TCI and non-TCI Characteristics

TCI Characteristics		TCI	Non-TCI
Languages Spoken		2 languages: 31.4%	2 languages: 47.1%
		3 languages: 41.4%	3 languages: 32.9%
High School Type	International school abroad:	62.9%	Private school: 35.7%
			National school: 28.6%
Years Abroad (Ages 6-18)	7-9 years:	35.7%	0 years: 75.0%
	10+ years:	45.7%	
Years in Indonesia (Ages 6-18)	1-3 years:	38.6%	10+ years: 90.0%
	4-6 years:	37.1%	

Following the data collection, a reliability test of the scale was conducted with 140 respondents; 70 were TCI and the other 70 were non-TCI. For the Communication Convergence and Divergence, the Cronbach's Alpha is excellent ($\alpha = 0.953 > 0.9$). The calculation per-dimension, the Cronbach Alpha are $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$. The test items are consistent and reliable. The overall means of Communication Convergence and Divergence among TCI and non-TCI combined is $M = 5.83$ ($SD = 0.74$), showing both groups are mainly more convergent rather than divergent. Looking at groups separately however, shows that TCI ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 0.74$) are significantly more convergent compared to non-TCI ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.12$).

Table 2. T-test results of Communication Convergence and Divergence Per-Dimension on TCI's and Non-TCI's

Communication Accommodation Dimensions	TCI	Non-TCI
Approximation	6.01	4.75
Interpretability	5.96	4.97
Discourse. Management	5.80	4.80
Interpersonal. Control	5.59	4.41

Note

* $p < 0.05$ is statistically significant

*(1 = Strongly Divergent, 4 = Neither/Nor, 7 = Strongly Convergent)

A. Approximation

TCI (M= 6.01, SD= 0.75) scored higher in Approximation compared to non-TCI (M= 4.75, SD= 1.40), in addition to being the highest-scored dimension for TCI (M = 6.36, SD = 0.75). The main factors of the results are TCI's mobility and time spent outside their passport countries. Since TCIs are exposed to multicultural settings, they are able to distinguish between different types of cultural situations and individuals. Every culture in the world has different behaviours, languages and other aspects that are acceptable in some places but different in others. Hence, TCI are obliged to accustom themselves to different cultures. As TCIs move from one country to another they learn from various cultures and combine the knowledge gained to develop fully their communicative behaviours. All TCI have experienced living abroad for at least four years while the majority of non-TCI have not experienced living abroad. With that, TCIs have more varied communication and situation encounters than non-TCI. Through their journey, TCI have to adapt and adjust their communication styles. In addition, they have become more familiar and more experienced in adjusting their communication styles as they please.

Approximation is the dominant strategy during interactions. Individuals can either adjust their verbal, non- verbal and behaviour to be more similar or more different than others. A good intercultural business communication requires expertise in Approximation strategies, which include the other person(s)'s language and other aspects of their communication (e.g. culture, background, etc). Every language and culture are different – verbally, non-verbally and behaviorally. Without the fluent knowledge of the different cultures and languages, Approximation would be hard to master.

A. Interpretability

Interpretability is crucial for both TCIs and non-TCIs to master so that their messages are delivered efficiently. Even though TCIs still scored higher than non-TCIs, non-TCIs scored the highest in this dimension compared to the other dimensions. It is quite a challenge to achieve the Interpretability methods in communication, as it takes into account the other person's knowledge and disposition.

In communication accommodation, Interpretability can be defined as the comprehension of what is being said by the person(s) they are speaking to. This comprehension leads to the adoption of Interpretability strategy, where individuals decrease (convergence) or increase (divergence) their diversity of vocabulary, simplifying (convergence) or making more complex (divergence) their sentence structure, and becoming louder to increase clarity. Interpretability focuses on the information expressed and the partner's ability to understand the said information.

An example of convergence in Interpretability is avoiding the use of jargon or terms that only apply to certain fields and/or individuals. Instead, individuals accommodate and use vocabularies and syntax that will be most likely to be understood by the person(s) they are speaking to. On the other hand, divergence in Interpretability is using terms that can only be understood by certain groups or individuals, regardless of the understanding of the person(s) they are speaking to. In this research, Interpretability is related to Indonesia being a high-context culture and collectivism; speakers are expected to "read between the lines" and uphold in-group values. Which is why, Interpretability skills are highly upheld since it is important for Indonesians to understand the abilities of the person(s) they are speaking to and communicate accordingly to them.

A. Discourse Management

Discourse Management among TCI are more convergent as well ($M= 5.80$, $SD= 0.84$) compared to non-TCI ($M= 4.80$, $SD= 1.22$). Discourse Management refers to the adjustment of communication based on the needs of the conversation. It also includes emotional expression, which is the adjustment of emotional needs of the person(s) the individual(s) is speaking to.

Discourse Management strategies include selecting topics that are of mutual interest and do not cause conflicts or misunderstandings between the individuals and the person(s) they are speaking to. To converge in Discourse Management, individuals adjust their conversation topics, flows and tones to suit the person(s) they are speaking to avoid discomfort and conflicts or misunderstandings.

In intercultural businesses, Discourse Management is crucial as well as it controls the flow of interactions. Different cultures do businesses differently, where some things are acceptable in some cultures might not be in others. By applying Discourse Management, individuals are able to quickly grasp the cultural context

and might have the advantage of gaining sympathy from the other group, ensuring smooth transactions and discussions. Doing businesses with other cultures, we are bound to have certain topics that are not very pleasant to discuss or offensive. Even though TCIs have the upper-hand being exposed to different cultures, results suggest that Discourse Management is the one strategy dimension in which even non-TCI can master fast. When doing intercultural business communications, individuals can do a pre-research in regards to the other groups' cultural background to determine what sorts of topics are allowed or best not to be discussed.

B. Interpersonal Control

Interpersonal Control, both TCI and non-TCI lean more to Convergence in their communication and behavior strategies and yet TCI (M= 5.59, SD= 1.12) are more convergent compared to non-TCI (M= 4.41, SD= 1.11). Even so, both groups score the lowest in this dimension compared to the other dimensions.

Both TCI and non-TCI are leaning towards Convergence rather than Divergence is highly influenced by the shifts in how youths in general are communicating nowadays. Professional settings such as education institutions and working environments are currently pushing through hierarchies by using a different approach in communication where everyone is allowed to deliver their ideas and contribute deeply. In fact, these occurrences are not just happening in Indonesia but globally as well. Even so, in Indonesia people still uphold high cultural values where older people or people from higher status have to be respected. This can be seen as how Indonesians have to refer to other people with 'Pak' (Sir) or 'Ibu' (Mam) or even 'Kak' (for someone older). First name basis is not very common in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in international settings people often address each other on a first name basis. TCI are able to do this strategy better as they are used to different cultures and they tend to see more towards the context and in what ways the people they are communicating with will feel more comfortable.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper is to compare Communication Accommodation between Indonesian TCI and non-TCI through the 4 dimensions of Communication Accommodation Theory: Approximation, Interpretability, Discourse Management and Interpersonal Control. The findings show that both TCI and non-TCI are more leaning towards Convergence in their communication and behavior. Even so, TCI are more convergent than non-TCI overall. In all the 4 dimensions, results show that TCI are in fact more convergent compared to non-TCI.

Our findings suggest that TCI are more convergent than non-TCI highly correlates with the multi-cultural exposure TCI have to face throughout their whole lives, specifically during their developmental years. Everywhere they go, TCI are forced to learn about other cultures and adjust their communication and behavior. This continuous process has pushed TCI to develop their Communication Accommodation skills. On the other hand, non-TCI's Communication Accommodation skills are more correlated to the Indonesian culture of having to accommodate the people they are talking to.

In the end, we can conclude that both groups are leaning towards Convergence rather than Divergence because both TCI and non-TCI have the same goal of communicating: to be understood by other people and get their message across.

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