THE INTERCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN AND AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS’ NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR: AN EFFORT TO DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL ENGLISH LEARNING MATERIAL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background and Significance of the Research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Scope of the Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research Objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Limitations of the Research</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Outline of the Thesis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Definition of Nonverbal Behaviour</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Classification of Nonverbal Behaviour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Review of Previous Research: Identifying the Gaps</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Culture and Behaviour</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Culture, Perceptions and Stereotypes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 The Reflection of Indonesian and Australian Cultural Characteristics in Nonverbal Behaviour and Its Effects on Communication</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Ethics Approval</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Intercultural Analysis</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Ethnographic Techniques in Data Collection and Analysis ............. 21
3.4 Research Objects and Respondents ........................................ 23
3.5 Research Time and Place ..................................................... 24
3.6 Steps of Intensive Analysis .................................................... 25
   Analysing data by using coding process .......................... 25
   Determining, discussing and interpreting themes .......... 26
3.7 Review of Literature about English Learning Material .............. 26

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS ............................................. 27

4.1 Students’ Nonverbal Behaviours in Tutorials .......................... 27
   4.1.1 Proxemics .......................................................... 27
   Seating arrangement ..................................................... 27
   4.1.2 Kinesics Behaviours while listening ............................ 33
   Eye gazing ................................................................. 33
   Head nodding ............................................................ 33
   Sitting posture ........................................................... 35
      Leg-Crossing .......................................................... 37
      Putting feet up on chairs ........................................... 38
      Putting feet up on tables in tutorials (Australians) ........ 39
      Position of hands ..................................................... 39
   Body movements ......................................................... 40
   Body stretching and yawning ............................................ 40
   4.1.3 Kinesics Behaviours while Speaking ............................. 41
   Gazing ................................................................. 41
   Sitting posture .......................................................... 41
      Sitting on tables ....................................................... 42
   Hand movements, body movements and facial
   expressions ............................................................... 42
   Pointing ................................................................. 44
   Smiling and laughing .................................................. 45
   4.1.4 Other Kinesics Behaviours ......................................... 47
   Hand raising ............................................................ 47
   Using hands to give / receive something ......................... 48
   Kinesics behaviours when students come late ............. 48
4.1.5 Kinesics Behaviour in Conversations and Greetings … 49

Body orientation, eye contact and waving …………………. 49

4.2 Students’ Nonverbal Behaviour outside the Classrooms …… 49

4.2.1 Kinesics and Touching Behaviours in Greetings and Leave Taking ………………………………………………………………. 49

4.2.2 Kinesics and Touching Behaviours in Leave Taking …….. 51

4.2.3 Proxemics, Kinesics and Touching Behaviours in Conversations ….......................................................... 52

Space in conversations .......................................................... 52

Position of body ................................................................. 52

Body orientation ............................................................... 52

Eye contact ................................................................. 53

Facial expressions ............................................................ 54

4.2.4 Other Proxemics Behaviours ….................................... 55

Space while walking together ................................................ 55

Space between males and females in gatherings ……………… 55

4.2.5 Other Kinesics Behaviours …........................................ 57

Sitting posture on the floor, sitting and lying on the lawns .......................................................... 57

Sitting posture in cafes and libraries …................................. 58

4.2.6 Other Behaviours (Combinations of Proxemics and Kinesics) ….......................................................... 59

Passing people in the corridor ................................................ 59

Skipping over someone’s leg (Australians) ………………………… 60

4.2.7 Public Display of Affective Behaviours (Proxemics, Kinesics and Touching Behaviours) ………………………………………… 60

4.2.8 Physical Appearance (Dress Codes) ….......................... 62

4.3 Indonesian Students’ Perception ….................................... 65

4.3.1 General Perception about Australian Students ………… 65

4.3.2 Perception about Australian Students’ Informal Behaviours in Tutorials ….......................................................... 68

4.3.3 Perception about Australian Students’ Facial Expression ….......................................................... 69

4.3.4 Perception about Australian Students’ Dress
4.3.5 Perception about Public Displays of Affective Behaviours ........................................ 71

4.3.6 Perception about Australian Students' Sitting Behaviour in the Library and on the Lawns ........ 72

4.4 Australian Students' Perception ................................................................. 73

4.4.1 Australian Students' Perception about International Students ........................................ 73

4.4.2 Australian Students' Perception about Formal Behaviours in Tutorials ........................... 75

4.4.3 Australian Students' Perception about Head Nodding ........................................ 75

4.4.4 Australian Students' Perception about Moslem Female Dress Codes ............................... 76

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION ................................................................................. 78

5.1 Similarities and Differences between Indonesian and Australian Students' Nonverbal Behaviour ....................................................................................... 78

5.1.1 Similar Behaviours in Tutorials ........................................................................ 78

5.1.2 Different Behaviours in Tutorials ......................................................................... 81

Smiling ........................................................................................................ 81

Body posture while sitting, body movements, yawning and body stretching ......................... 84

Sitting on the floor in classrooms ........................................................................ 84

Body movements and facial expressions (including smiling) while talking ......................... 85

Pointing behaviour ........................................................................................ 86

Hand raising to ask questions in tutorials ................................................................ 87

The Use of Hand ............................................................................................ 88

Nonverbal behaviour when students come late ................................................................ 89

5.1.3 Similar Behaviour in Public Places around Universities ........................................... 90

5.1.4 Different Behaviours in Public Places around Universities ...................................... 90
5.1.5 Summary of the Factors behind the Similarities and Differences between Indonesian and Australian Students’ Nonverbal Behaviours

Togetherness .............................................. 101
Similar classroom behaviours ...................... 101
Similar communicative behaviours ............... 101
Conflict avoidance tendency ......................... 101
Face saving .................................................. 102
Power distance: respect to authority and the
importance of status awareness .................... 102
Emphasis on nonverbal behaviour .................. 103
Religious influence ........................................ 103
Harmony maintenance .................................... 104
Ingroup-outgroup division ............................ 105
Environmental factor .................................... 105

5.1.6 Some Important Considerations .................. 106

5.2 Intercultural Problems ............................. 108

5.2.1 Problems (and Possible Problems) in
Indonesian-Australian Intercultural Interaction
within Indonesian and Australian Contexts ........ 108
Similar tendency in seating arrangement in
tutorials: barriers of intercultural interaction ........ 108
Smiling and other facial expression: indication
of lack of freedom in expressing ideas ............. 112
Body posture, body movements, yawning
and body stretching: formality vs informality .... 114
Hand raising as signal of asking questions ....... 114
Nonverbal behaviour when students arrive
late ................................................................. 115
Smiling at strangers ..................................... 115
Eye contact .................................................. 116
Passing people in the corridor ...................... 116
Eye contact, hand shaking, hugging, cheek
pressing, and proximity in inter-gender
interactions .................................................. 116
Sitting on the floor, sitting and lying down
on the lawns ................................................. 117
Dress codes .................................................. 118
Public display of affective behaviour ............. 121
Queuing behaviour ........................................ 121
5.2.2 Other Nonverbal Behaviours that Might be
Problematic for Australian Students Studying in
Indonesia ..................................................... 122
Pointing behaviour ....................................... 122
The use of hands ......................................... 122
Head nodding and head tossing .................... 123
Sitting posture (putting feet up on
chairs and tables) ......................................... 123
5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications of
the Research Findings .................................... 123
ABSTRACT

This study investigates similar and different nonverbal behaviours of Indonesian and Australian students (focusing on proxemics, kinesics, touching and dress codes), examines the students’ perception in relation to the behaviours, and isolates or predicts intercultural problems. It aims at creating learning resources to be used in English classes in Indonesia.

The data collection involved observations and interviews. Initial data analysis was conducted at the same time as the data collection, followed by an intensive analysis using a coding process.

Some similarities were found. There was a tendency among Indonesian students to sit together, reflecting their collectivist value. This tendency may also be evident among Australian students. Similar patterns of eye gazing, hand movements, sitting posture, body position and body orientation probably demonstrate the universality of communicative behaviour. In both cultures, head nodding indicates paying attention, or in certain situations, may be interpreted as a flattering gesture. However, the flattering meaning may result from a different degree of head nodding display in Indonesian and Australian contexts. Many of these similar behaviours need further investigation using video recording.

Many differences were found. In tutorials, Indonesians were more likely to be formal and restrained, in contrast to Australian informality and expressiveness. Different practices in the use of the hand were also identified. Dress code was one of the most significant areas of difference, together with the public display of affective behaviour, and the preference to sit on the floor or to sit and lie on the lawns. Eye contact, gender-mixing in gatherings and some touching behaviours may be problematic for a few Indonesians. Further discussion also shows that smiling to strangers commonly practised by Australians can be unusual in Indonesia. In contrast, head nodding, eye contact and head tossing that have specific cultural meanings in Indonesia appear to be unproblematic in the Australian context.

It was concluded that the different behaviours indicate that several issues – including conflict avoidance, face saving, respect for authority, harmony maintenance, ingroup-outgroup divisions and religious regulations – are practiced in different ways and valued to differing degrees in Indonesia and Australia. The analysis also revealed a strong indication that in
Indonesian culture, nonverbal behaviour has similar emphasis with, and often can be more significant than, verbal behaviour. In Australia, the emphasis would be more likely to be on verbal expression.

It seems that some of the differences did not result in negative perception among students. However, certain things may result in problems at various levels - ranging from uncomfortable feelings, and lack of interactions, up to the formation of negative perception about a culture. Having tolerance and willingness to evaluate a matter from different perspectives can be useful to minimize ethnocentrism and avoid any negative stereotypes.

As part of this study I conducted a literature review about intercultural learning and created two examples of learning material, both focusing on nonverbal behaviours. The first material is intended to raise the issue of cultural difference, and the second one raises the ethnocentrism issue.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to <Karmila Mokoginta> and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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