

Tour Guides' Intercultural Communication Strategies In Toraja

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Abstract

This study presents Torajanese tour guides' strategies in intercultural communication based on four dimensions, they are knowledge, communication skills, traits and interpersonal relationship. The result of this study revealed that tour guides in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi handled conflicts or conflicts that may be encountered in intercultural communication according to the competencies they have learned and experience in the field. The majority of respondents said that English proficiency, friendliness and broad understanding of tourist attractions are important points in their work. Thus, by understanding this, communication problems that may occur can always be resolved properly.

Keywords: Toraja, tour guide, intercultural communication

Introduction

Tourism is a social, economic, and cultural phenomenon that involves the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business purposes. Tourism is a complex phenomenon and can be fully understood with a multidisciplinary approach (Candela & Figini (2012). The world is facing a Covid-19 epidemic, the government has banned travel due to the global health and social economy, this has led to a weakening of the tourism sector around the world. According to the most recent issue of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) dropped by 72% in January-October 2020 relative to the same period last year, owing to poor virus control, low traveler confidence, and new travel restrictions enacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a rebound in international tourism is expected to occur in the second half of 2021, according to the UNWTO. By professional training for the workforce and infrastructure support, it is possible to resurrect tourism for the future.

As tourism needs to deal with foreigners directly, the English language as an international language is essential for the tourism industry especially for those who interact directly with tourists such as tour guides. Tour guide is one of the popular jobs in the travel and tourism industry including in Indonesia (Dahlan, 2015). Tour guides are responsible for accompanying tourists and providing directions and guidance to tourists. They interact and communicate directly with tourists from various countries. As Asmin and Hasby (2017) stated that in tourism, English is used as an instructional

language (*lingua franca*) that is commonly used in transactions and communication both oral and written by foreign tourists. In addition, cultural understanding is also very necessary for a tour guide, tourism is an activity that involves direct contact between cultures, and all that this includes gastronomy, folklore, and customs (Xalikova, 2020).

In recent years, researchers have found that tour guides have a difficult time interacting with their visitors. It can be seen in the article of Golberg, et al (2018); Matovic & Simic (2018). Elmoghazy (2019), and Xalikova, (2020). There are many interesting findings from the previous researches, especially those related to intercultural communication. Before the pandemic, the number of international tourists visiting Toraja was quite large, they came from various countries in Asia, America, and Europe. Tana Toraja, which literally means land of Toraja, is a highland in Indonesia's Southern Sulawesi region, and it is well-known as the Land of Heavenly Kings. Tana Toraja has always been the choice of international tourists when visiting the Sulawesi island. Toraja is famous for its exotic culture and unique funeral rituals, the unique cultures of Toraja are the main attraction for foreign tourists to come.

Intercultural communication occurs when a message that must be understood is sent by members of a particular culture for the consumption of members of another culture (Samovar & Porter, 1994:19). Moreover, Liliweri (2003) describes the process of intercultural communication as interpersonal contact and interpersonal communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Matsumoto (2000) defines cross-cultural communication as the exchange of information between people who have different cultural backgrounds. The term cross-cultural communication has a relationship with intercultural communication because basically there is no difference between the two in the context of communication. Intercultural communication examines the problem of interaction between people from different cultures. The primary instrument for passing on the customs of one generation to another is the language because that language plays a vital role in the development of human civilization. Language is used in communication for creating culture, then culture itself will ultimately determine the communication system and what form of language is appropriate for it (Kuswarno, 2008:11).

In the international tourism context, tour guides are playing a variety of roles in interacting with international tourists. Their contact with tourists takes place in a complex and varied environment that includes professionalism, commercialization, and local culture (Huang, 2008). Communication skills are the most important thing for a tour guide to ensure a great experience for tourists. Moreover, Xalikova states that tour guides play an important role in the tourism sector as intercultural mediators. Likewise, guides must meet all the competencies such as language competence, cultural competence, and technical competence. Therefore, it is important to have English language skills and be aware of cultural differences between tourists. Tour guides also need to know how to entertain their guests and stay informed and knowledgeable about

the subject of the tour and ensure the safety and happiness of the guests. This puts them in a difficult and challenging situation, the ability to avoid communication misunderstandings due to different cultures they have to deal with all the time. This has attracted the attention of researcher to explore the tour guides' strategies in handling intercultural communication.

Method

Grounded theory was used as a framework of this study. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) it is a qualitative approach that generates theory from data. By applying this method, whatever is relevant to the area being investigated will emerge, and it also emphasizes the importance of the researcher's role as an interpreter. The data for this study was collected by interview. The interview questions followed the Intercultural Communication Competences by Leclers and Martin (2004) which consisted of four dimensions; knowledge, communication skills, traits and interpersonal relationship. Due to pandemics, it is quite difficult to collect data in the field through direct observation. Therefore, interviews are considered to be an effective way to gather data in qualitative research. Depth interviews were conducted with five English-speaking tour guides in Tana Toraja. Data analysis in Grounded Theory research is systematic (Emzir, 2011:210), the standard format consisted of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the end, the researcher developed, described, and explained the challenges and strategies faced by tour guides in intercultural communication

Dimension	Sub dimension
Knowledge	Cultural knowledge
	Local knowledge
	Emergent knowledge
	Procedural knowledge
Communication skills	Language ability
	Good rhetoric
	Active listening
	Body language
Traits	Entertainment ability
	Extroversion
	Consciousness
	Confidence
Interpersonal relationship	Nice appearance
	Leading role
	Customer orientation
	Empathy

Figure 1. Intercultural Communication Competences by Leclers and Martin (2004)

Results

Culture is one of the factors that influences communication. It is also considered to be one of the factors that impedes the development of effective communication. For instance, when a tour guide communicates with tourist, often miscommunication is due to cultural differences. Intercultural communication is one of the areas of communication research that investigates how people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other, in the same or different ways among themselves, and how they communicate across cultures. As a process, intercultural communication certainly cannot be separated from communication barriers such as the emergence of misunderstanding of norms or inappropriate roles, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism. However, these obstacles must be overcome so that effective communication can be achieved.

The findings of the study shown that tour guides' strategies to achieve their goals of effective and appropriate communication were in line with Leclers and Martin (2004) had said about the intercultural communication competence such as knowledge, communication skills, traits and interpersonal relationship. The following are the details of the interview results.

a. Communication Skills

The researcher asked, "should English language skills must be mastered by a local tour guide?", all the respondents said "Yes, especially speaking and listening skills". The next question is "what is your strategy regarding the language barrier?" the respondents said that "We have to master English first in order to communicate with foreign tourists. Although some of them do not speak English, but our ability to explain is able to avoid misunderstandings with the help of body language usually". In addition, the respondents added that a tour guide also have to be an active listener. The ability to focus on the speaker, understand the information and messages conveyed and can respond seriously are essentials in communication. Moreover, three of five respondents said that the entertainment ability is also one of the skills that a guide should have, like be able to tell suitable jokes. Relate to the question "how do you learn a foreign language?" all of the respondents said that they learn it by taking course, by YouTube, and books. They added, if the courage to practice directly in the field is very important in improving their ability in listening and speaking.

b. Cultural Knowledge

Cultural differences are not limited only to food, language and dances but also related to interactions between humans including non-verbal behavior, beliefs, time orientation, attitudes, habits, traditions, ways of dressing and body movements and other things. For tour guides, the benefits of understanding other cultures are felt when providing services to tourists, how to behave, how to respond to requests, how to meet expectations, how to appreciate services, especially with regard to service levels and the creation of a friendly atmosphere. The impact of differences in culture is important to

understand, especially in the tourism industry, an industry that is full of intercultural and cross-cultural atmosphere. If this difference is not understood in depth, it will cause culture shock (Kusherdiana, 2018).

Based on the interview, the respondents said “to be able to serve my guests well, I used to study the habits of them before, such as taboos things according to them and also their customs. I usually ask them at the beginning of the meeting to avoid misunderstanding”. Related to local culture, two respondents said that “a tour guide must have broad understanding about tourist destination in their area, so that there is no mistake in conveying information to tourists.” The interviewee asked “how do you deal with cultural differences?” the respondents said “with more experience we will begin to understand and learn about the culture of each tourist from a different country, then mutual understanding will be maintained if we are open to each other and think from their point of view too”. The respondents also said that cultural differences are not a big problem as long as we can communicate well and openly.

c. Traits

Using appropriate, matching, clean, and neat clothes can show an attractive appearance in front of others. Tour guides who have a good appearance will also not make guests think twice to three times to be guided, because from their appearance alone they are able to convince the guests. The researcher asked “what character should a tour guide have?”, they responded that “I think good etiquette and manners, it must be the hallmark of a tour guide”. Other respondents said “Friendly, funny, interactive and punctual”. All of the respondents agreed that being friendly is the main character of a tour guide. In addition, they said that “attractive appearance is also the main attraction of tour guides in addition to their confidence and extensive knowledge”.

d. Interpersonal relationship

Interpersonal relationship related to customer orientation, leading role and empathy. All the respondents said that it is essential for a tour guide to have a good interpersonal relationship with tourists, they said that a good relationship with the tourists will greatly help their work, “we work in hospitality industry, so personal character and professionalism are the keys to success in tourism industry” they said. According to Leclers and Martin (2004), interpersonal relationship consisted of customer orientation, leading role and empathy. Related to customer orientation, respondents said that “it is where we put the customer at the beginning, middle and end of the business”. They added, “we also have to fulfill the responsibility of guiding tourists according to their tour package”. Here tour guides play an important role in leading and coordinating between suppliers including tours, hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions. In maintaining good interpersonal relations with tourists, tour guides have to know how to read what the tourists want, their expectation, and understand their feelings during the trip. One of the respondents said that “sometimes we face conflict due to diverse cultural and social backgrounds but as a tour guide, we understand that people show and communicate their emotions in different ways. These all are in line with

Chang (2012) stated that the performance of tour guides has a positive effect on perceptions of trustworthiness, perceptions of benevolence, and tourist satisfaction.

Discussions

The study's findings confirmed that tour guides' strategies for attaining their goals of effective and appropriate communication were coherent to what Leclers and Martin (2004) said about intercultural communication competence, which include knowledge, communication skills, character traits, and interpersonal relationships. The specifics of the interview results are listed below.

The findings of this study have significant implications for improving the quality of tour guides training and for upgrading the learning materials in the tourism department as a whole. This study reflects on questions such as: "What English communication skills should tour guides have to master?", "Should tour guides be trained in intercultural communication skills? "What strategy is the best for training tour guides to improve their character and personality? and "Is it important to teach cultural differences to tour guides?". The researcher following summarized the implications of this research as follows:

1. English communication skills should be enhanced. The English language has become a world language, even in the tourism industry. English is a must-have skill for tour guides because it is a lingua franca. However, based on the findings, it can be seen that language barriers contribute significantly to misunderstandings between tourists and tour guides. A tour guides have to understand the language of tourists and local languages so that they can bridge communication. Here, communication competence is needed, communication competence is the ability to use language or communicate in a culturally appropriate way in order to achieve an intended goal (Tarvin, 2014). According to the tour guide in Toraja, the English language is important to master by them, at least the speaking skill. Therefore, the researcher suggests to the tour guides training center and tourism education to apply context-based communication in teaching and learning. Moreover, Huang (2011) said that mindful communication is necessary for tour guides working with international tourists.
2. Training approach for intercultural communication skills. For a tour guide who frequently interacts with people from other cultures and social backgrounds, this is essential skill to be mastered. As we know, a tour guide must deal with tourists from different cultures, values, customs, communication styles, and behaviors. Therefore, teaching cross-cultural understanding to the tour guides can improve their awareness of cultural differences. Until recently, cognitive goals have traditionally taken priority in intercultural training programs, followed by behavioral goals. The goal of emotional training is sometimes referred to as the third separate component

of intercultural training, but it is often given less time and effort than the other two. This might be because emotive objectives are regarded as less essential, or because the belief that affective abilities cannot be meaningfully enhanced by training persists. However, expert argues that emotional is the most essential component in intercultural communications and it should be effectively reflected in training programs. Therefore, based on the notion of social intelligence, an integrated approach to intercultural negotiation and training needs to be presented (Wawra, 2009). Understanding that various cultures have diverse norms, standards, social mores, and even cognitive processes is indeed necessary for intercultural communication. This is in line with Halualani (2011) has discussed about the significance of including critical intercultural communication concepts and practices in intercultural communication courses in an academic setting.

3. Professional character/personality training is needed. Personality refers to an individual's distinctive thoughts, behavior, and feelings. Essentially, it refers to how one draws people by his actions and words. An individual's personality may be developed if he has a purpose in mind and commits firmly that he would develop himself in all parts of life, both inside and externally. Lamb et. al (2021) states that a character-focused course that is developmentally and contextually relevant can foster the development of certain virtues. Good tour guides have empathy, friendly, funny, interactive and punctual. However, not all tour guides have these characters, because differences in character can be innate to everyone from birth. However, if the tour guide is given professional training how to behave and have the character needed to work, the results will be different. Personality development is not some rocket science. This might be built up gradually over time.

Conclusion

In summary, this research shows that the training and certification of tour guides is very important, but should be treated as a long-term strategy. Not many universities in Indonesia offer special courses for tour guides, but short training to become a tour guide can be found in several places, there are also some people who become instant tour guides in several tourist destinations. This can be an assessment of the professionalism of the tour guide in the eyes of tourists. The findings of the adopted strategy have many implications for language education and tourism. To cope with the development and globalization of the tourism industry, we must go beyond regular training. This is because the service industry requires capabilities and skills. In this case, both long-term and short-term training are needed. In addition, educators are also expected to apply appropriate methods in learning English for tour guides. In addition, the researcher also expects the local government to foster and monitor the training of tour guides in their area. Professionalism of tour guides is needed to support the development of tourism in Indonesia.

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