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## Intercultural Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Between Lembak and Javanese Communities in Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu

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### Abstract

This study aims to understand how the *Lembak* and Javanese communities interact amid significant language differences. The research was conducted in Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu, focusing on both verbal and nonverbal interactions in daily life. Language and cultural value differences often pose challenges in intercultural communication. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with members of both ethnic groups. Data analysis was conducted interactively, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The findings reveal notable differences in verbal language use, specifically lexical ambiguities and "linguistic shock" caused by the distinct phonological endings of the Col dialect, which create initial communication barriers. Strategies to bridge these differences include using Indonesian as a lingua franca, joint language learning, and linguistic adaptation by migrants. Nonverbal communication through body gestures, facial expressions, and intonation also plays a crucial role, although cultural differences, such as the interpretation of direct eye contact as confrontational by Javanese or Javanese silence as indecisiveness by *Lembak*, can lead to misunderstandings. The study implies that cultural awareness, openness, and adaptive communication skills are key to fostering harmonious social interactions in multicultural societies.

**Keywords:** *Intercultural Communication, Lembak Ethnic, Javanese Ethnic.*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana masyarakat *Lembak* dan Jawa berinteraksi di tengah perbedaan bahasa yang mencolok. Lokasi penelitian berada di Kabupaten Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu, dan berfokus pada interaksi verbal maupun nonverbal dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Perbedaan bahasa dan nilai-nilai budaya sering menjadi sumber tantangan dalam komunikasi antarbudaya. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan anggota kedua kelompok etnis. Analisis data dilakukan secara interaktif, meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan mencolok dalam penggunaan bahasa verbal, khususnya ambiguitas leksikal dan "kejutan linguistik" yang disebabkan oleh akhiran fonologis khas dialek Col, yang berpotensi menimbulkan hambatan komunikasi pada tahap awal. Strategi untuk menjembatani perbedaan ini meliputi penggunaan bahasa Indonesia sebagai *lingua franca*, pembelajaran bahasa bersama, serta adaptasi linguistik oleh migran. Komunikasi nonverbal melalui gerak tubuh, ekspresi wajah, dan intonasi juga memainkan peran penting, meski perbedaan budaya, seperti penafsiran kontak mata langsung yang dianggap konfrontatif oleh warga Jawa atau keheningan warga Jawa yang dianggap sebagai ketidaktegasan oleh warga *Lembak*, dapat menimbulkan salah tafsir. Temuan ini berimplikasi bahwa kesadaran budaya, keterbukaan, dan kemampuan berkomunikasi secara adaptif menjadi kunci untuk membangun interaksi sosial yang harmonis dalam masyarakat multikultural.

**Kata Kunci:** *Komunikasi Antarbudaya, Suku Lembak, Suku Jawa*

## A. Introduction

Indonesia is a multiethnic country characterized by the diversity of ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. This diversity makes intercultural interaction an inseparable social reality in everyday life. However, Indonesia's social history also shows that ethnic and cultural differences can, under certain circumstances, escalate into open conflicts. Several events, such as the Sampit Conflict (2001) between the Dayak and Madurese in Central Kalimantan, the Sambas Conflict (1999) in West Kalimantan, the Ambon Conflict (1999–2002), the Poso Conflict (1998–2001), and clashes between indigenous Lampung communities and Balinese migrants in South Lampung (2012), demonstrate that identity tensions can be triggered by accumulated social, economic, political, and cultural issues.

Although these conflicts are not solely caused by cultural differences, various studies indicate that communication practices and differing interpretations of social symbols often exacerbate tensions. Furthermore, Jandt, (2017), in his analysis of intercultural conflicts, he demonstrates that entrenched communicative stereotypes and cultural prejudices significantly deepen social divides and hinder the development of mutual trust between groups. These biased perceptions often serve as psychological barriers that prevent individuals from accurately interpreting others' communicative symbols. While Jandt's study provides essential insights into the general mechanics of ethnic tension, his research primarily addresses global conflict scenarios, which differ from the unique context of everyday interethnic negotiation found in rural areas like Rejang Lebong. Third, Jackson, (2019) argues that a lack of intercultural communication competence often exacerbates deep-seated prejudices, leading to miscommunication that can accelerate social friction and conflict in increasingly polarized societies.

Hall, (1976) differentiates cultures into high-context and low-context cultures. High-context cultures tend to convey messages implicitly, contextually, and symbolically, while low-context cultures emphasize clarity and directness. Meanwhile, Gudykunst, (2004), through the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory, explains that the effectiveness of intercultural communication is determined by individuals' ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Ting-Toomey, (1988), through Face Negotiation Theory, also highlighted that each culture has different orientations in maintaining "face," which affects how individuals deliver criticism, rejection, or disagreement.

Based on these perspectives, the study of intercultural communication becomes critical. One particularly interesting form of intercultural interaction to examine is the communication between the *Lembak* and Javanese ethnic groups. The *Lembak* are an indigenous ethnic group inhabiting the Bengkulu Province, primarily concentrated in the Rejang Lebong and Central Bengkulu regencies. Historically and linguistically linked to the Malay cluster, they maintain a unique identity through their own traditional customs and the use of the *Col* language as their mother tongue in daily interactions.

Unlike in major conflicts elsewhere in Indonesia, interactions between the indigenous *Lembak* and migrant Javanese communities in Rejang Lebong Regency occur in a relatively harmonious environment. Nevertheless, the cultural

differences, where the Lembak tend toward a straightforward and egalitarian communication style, while the Javanese maintain a more hierarchical and indirect cultural orientation, present complex communication dynamics that merit scholarly analysis.

There are two primary academic reasons for choosing Rejang Lebong Regency as the research site. First, Rejang Lebong provides a unique and intensive context for intercultural interaction. In this area, the *Lembak* community, as the local ethnic group, and the Javanese community, as migrants, not only share social spaces such as village deliberation meetings, communal work (*gotong royong*), economic activities, and neighborly relations but also develop distinctive patterns of cultural adaptation. This intensive interaction allows for the direct observation of verbal and nonverbal communication practices in a peaceful setting, where miscommunication emerges subtly and is creatively resolved through everyday social negotiation.

Second, studies on intercultural communication in Indonesia have historically been dominated by research in regions such as Java, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, often within the context of major ethnic conflicts. In contrast, Bengkulu remains relatively underexplored in empirical studies of interethnic communication dynamics at the village-community level. Therefore, selecting this location contributes significant novelty and expands the scope of intercultural communication research in Indonesia, particularly within the specific cultural landscape of southern Sumatra.

In communication, cultural differences are reflected not only in verbal language but also in nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, voice intonation, eye contact, gestures, and politeness norms. The Javanese are known for a subtle, indirect, and harmony-oriented communication culture, often using insinuation or symbolic language to convey meaning. In contrast, the *Lembak* tend to adopt a more straightforward and open communication style, conveying messages directly with minimal symbolic interpretation.

These differences in communication styles can lead to miscommunication in daily interactions. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) argue that such tensions are especially pronounced between cultures with differing “face-concern” orientations, in which one group prioritizes self-face maintenance through directness while another prioritizes mutual face maintenance through indirectness. Bennett (2014) further emphasizes that developing intercultural competence requires moving beyond mere tolerance toward genuine empathetic perspective-taking, a process that both the Lembak and Javanese communities appear to be navigating in their daily interactions. For instance, in both informal and formal conversations, the Javanese tendency to avoid direct refusal may be interpreted by the *Lembak* as indecisiveness or dishonesty. Conversely, Lembak’s direct, to-the-point speaking style may be perceived by the Javanese as impolite or harsh, even if such intentions are absent.

Social interaction in a multiethnic society requires communication skills that are not only linguistically effective but also culturally sensitive. In this context, verbal and nonverbal communication serve as primary media for building mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation. However, differences in cultural

backgrounds often cause messages to be interpreted differently from the sender's intended meaning, resulting in latent and recurring miscommunication.

Based on the author's preliminary observations and initial interviews in Durian Mas Village, interactions between the Lembak and Javanese communities are heavily influenced by their differing communication styles. Members of the *Lembak* ethnic group tend to employ a direct, assertive, and open communication style in both verbal and nonverbal expressions. Meanwhile, the Javanese emphasize caution, politeness, and indirect communication as means of maintaining social harmony. These differences are clearly observable in various everyday social settings, such as village deliberations, neighborly interactions, and communal work (*gotong royong*).

In village deliberation forums, for example, some *Lembak* informants reported that they often express their opinions directly and explicitly to resolve issues efficiently. However, this mode of expression is often perceived by some Javanese as too harsh. Conversely, some *Lembak* expressed confusion about what they perceived as a lack of assertiveness among the Javanese. Differences in interpretation are also evident in nonverbal communication, such as eye contact and voice intonation, which are interpreted differently by the two groups.

Miscommunication in these interactions does not always lead to open conflict; it often manifests as hidden tension, reluctance to interact further, and the emergence of intergroup stereotypes. This indicates that the main issue lies not in ethnic differences per se, but in differing cultural frameworks for producing and interpreting communicative messages.

Several previous studies have examined intercultural communication in Indonesia. Mulyana and Rakhmat (2006) highlighted the characteristics of communication among various ethnic groups, but their study was general and did not specifically focus on interactions between two ethnic groups in village communities. Studies on the Dayak–Madurese conflict mostly emphasized collective violence rather than everyday communication dynamics. Research on Javanese culture tended to focus on values of internal harmony rather than on comparative relations with specific ethnic groups. This research was conducted to observe how communication occurs in the adaptation process of the Sundanese ethnic community in Permu Immigration Village within a multicultural society. This study is considered interesting by the researcher because the established interaction has shown an integrative nature between tribes; however, how the behavioral and cultural components of the Sundanese ethnic group adapt to their surrounding environment needs to be explored further (Heryadi & Silvana, 2013). Liliweri (2018) further argues that prejudice and cultural stereotypes embedded in Indonesian interethnic relations continue to shape patterns of miscommunication, especially in regions with significant migration histories. However, recent evidence from Yudhawirawan et al. (2024) demonstrates that such cultural contrasts do not necessarily lead to persistent miscommunication; instead, Javanese migrants in multicultural Sumatran urban spaces actively overcome these barriers through linguistic adaptation, cultural assimilation, and situational ethnic identity negotiation, a comprehensive dynamic that closely aligns with the observations in the present study

In the more recent international literature, several studies provide important contributions. First, Neuliep (2020) emphasizes that the divergence between implicit and explicit communication styles, often rooted in high-context and low-context cultural orientations, remains a primary contributor to latent miscommunication in multicultural settings. His recent work highlights how these distinct verbal and nonverbal coding systems can lead to misinterpreted intentions, especially during prolonged social contact between different ethnic groups. However, while Neuliep's research provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing these stylistic barriers, his studies tend to focus on broad national-cultural comparisons or urban settings, leaving a gap in the specific analysis of daily interactions within rural multiethnic village communities. Second, Schiefer & Van der Noll (2017) highlighted that social cohesion in diverse societies relies on shared symbolic values and the adaptive capacity of individuals to navigate cultural differences, although their focus remains on broad social indicators rather than specific nonverbal interactions. Third, Mondada (2019) emphasizes the importance of in-depth multimodal analysis of daily interactions to understand how social identities and power relations are negotiated through the coordination of language, gestures, and body posture within social spaces. Fourth, Wise & Noble (2016) highlight that 'everyday multicultural' is often characterized by a fragile balance between conviviality and hidden tension, where recurring stereotypes continue to shape interactions in ways that are not always visible as open conflict.

Based on this review, there is a significant research gap. First, there is a limited number of studies analyzing verbal and nonverbal communication simultaneously at the micro-level in village interactions. Second, while several studies have examined Javanese communication patterns or Malay-influenced cultures separately, there is a lack of research in this manuscript and in existing literature that specifically compares the verbal and nonverbal communication patterns between the *Lembak* and Javanese ethnic groups. Third, research on latent miscommunication within relatively harmonious communities remains scarce, as most intercultural studies in Indonesia tend to focus on overt ethnic conflicts.

Thus, this study is distinguished by its focus on the analysis of intercultural communication in a peaceful (non-conflictual) context at the local community level, integrating both verbal and nonverbal communication. The study contributes to the literature on intercultural communication in Indonesia, particularly in the underexplored region of Bengkulu. Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine how verbal and nonverbal communication practices occur in interactions between the *Lembak* and Javanese communities in Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu. The study seeks to identify the forms of communication used, the meanings attached to verbal and nonverbal symbols, and the cultural factors that influence miscommunication in daily social interactions between these two ethnic groups.

## B. Methods

This study applies the theory of intercultural communication proposed by Samovar et al. (2012) as its primary analytical foundation. Within this framework, intercultural communication is classified into two main forms: verbal communication, which includes language, words, and dialects; and nonverbal communication, which encompasses body movements, facial expressions, eye contact, and vocal intonation. These classifications serve as analytical instruments for deconstructing and examining how the Javanese and *Lembak* communities construct and interpret messages during their cross-cultural interactions. Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative descriptive approach through field surveys. It is crucial to clarify that the term "survey" in this qualitative context refers to an in-depth scanning of phenomena at the research site through the researcher's direct involvement, rather than through statistical questionnaires. Empirical data were obtained through participatory observation, in which the researcher engaged in social spaces such as village deliberations and communal work activities, and through in-depth interviews with key informants from both ethnic groups to capture the underlying meanings of their communicative behaviors.

The data for this study were gathered from six key informants selected through purposive sampling to represent ethnic diversity and various social roles within Durian Mas Village. The first informant is Mr. Sari Ralamsah, a native of *Lembak* who serves as the Village Secretary of Durian Mas, providing both administrative perspectives and deep insights into local culture. The traditional perspective of the indigenous community is further reinforced by Mr. Ramli, a *Lembak* farmer who understands the dynamics of grassroots citizen interactions. From the migrant community, the study involved Mr. Santoso, a middle-aged Javanese villager who provides a narrative on long-term social adaptation, and Mrs. Sari, a Javanese teacher who offers perspectives on intercultural interaction in formal and educational settings. Finally, daily experiences of linguistic negotiation and communication-bridging strategies are represented in the accounts of Mrs. Tukinem and Mr. Suratno, members of the Javanese community who interact intensively with local residents. Together, these informants provide a rich data foundation for understanding how ethnic identity influences verbal and nonverbal communication practices in everyday life. The profile of informants involved in this study is presented in the following table.

**Table 1. Profile of Research Informants**

No	Informant	Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation/Role	Purpose of Selection
1	Mr. Sari Ralamsah	<i>Lembak</i>	Male	Village Secretary	Administrative and cultural perspective
2	Mr. Ramli	<i>Lembak</i>	Male	Farmer	Grassroots social interaction
3	Mr. Santoso	Javanese	Male	Villager	Long-term migrant adaptation

4	Mrs. Sari	Javanese	Female	Teacher	Educational intercultural interaction
5	Mrs. Tukinem	Javanese	Female	Resident	Daily communication adaptation
6	Mr. Suratno	Javanese	Male	Resident	Linguistic adaptation strategies

The collected data were subsequently processed using the Interactive Analysis Model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected and continuous stages. The first stage is data reduction, in which the researcher selects, simplifies, and transforms raw field notes and interview transcripts to focus on the predetermined verbal and nonverbal categories. The second stage is data display, in which the reduced information is organized into narrative texts and comparative matrices to systematically map communication patterns and points of latent miscommunication between the two ethnic groups. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, in which the researcher identifies relationship patterns and propositions from the findings, then validates them against field data to ensure a thorough and accurate understanding of the intercultural communication dynamics in Rejang Lebong. Through this series of stages, the researcher can systematically process the data, resulting in a deep and comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication dynamics in interactions between the Lembak and Javanese communities.

### C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study regarding the direct communication style of the *Lembak* ethnic group and the indirect communication style of the Javanese are largely consistent with established intercultural theories and prior empirical research. The Javanese emphasis on harmony (*rukun*) and politeness (*unggah-ungguh*), which manifests in soft intonation and indirect verbal cues, resonates with the work of Mulyana and Rakhmat (2006) on the communication characteristics of ethnic groups in Indonesia. Similarly, the observed Javanese tendency to avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect toward elders is consistent with traditional Javanese values of social hierarchy and deference.

On the other hand, the assertive and straightforward communication style observed in the *Lembak* community aligns with the characteristics of "low-context" communication or direct Malay-influenced cultures, as described by Hall (1976) and Samovar et al. (2012). These findings also support the "Anxiety/Uncertainty Management" theory by Gudykunst (2004), as both groups in Durian Mas Village demonstrate effective adaptation strategies such as using Indonesian as a *lingua franca* and engaging in joint language learning to reduce uncertainty during cross-cultural encounters.

Intercultural communication is defined as the process of interaction involving individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, with the primary objective of building mutual understanding while managing differences in values, norms, and beliefs. This process is inherently multidimensional, encompassing cognitive,

behavioral, and affective aspects that collectively play a crucial role in facilitating appropriate interactions and minimizing potential misunderstandings. As an interdisciplinary field of study, intercultural communication integrates perspectives from linguistics, psychology, and sociology to highlight the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity (Gudykunst, 2004). According to Samovar et al. (2012), this phenomenon occurs when the cultural perceptions and symbolic systems of the participants are significant enough to alter the course of the interaction.

In the dimension of verbal communication, language serves as the primary medium for expressing thoughts, feelings, ideas, and facts through spoken or written words. Beyond its informative function, language acts as a framework for understanding social reality, reflecting both cultural relativity and group identity (Chomsky, 2006). The development of this verbal ability is explained through various theoretical lenses, ranging from B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning, which emphasizes the role of environmental stimulus-response, to cognitive theories that view language as an innate biological capacity. Furthermore, sociolinguistic perspectives assert that language reflects social status and group membership, which varies by ethnicity through differences in dialects, registers, and linguistic styles (Skinner, 1957).

Meanwhile, nonverbal communication plays an equally crucial role in social interaction, conveying meaning, emotions, and attitudes without words through facial expressions, body movements, and vocal intonation. The concept of proxemics, developed by Edward T. Hall (1966), explains how the use of space and physical distance regulates the level of formality and comfort in human interactions. Additionally, the kinesics framework introduced by Birdwhistell, (2010) examines how gestures, posture, and overall body movements serve as symbolic forms of communication whose meanings are deeply embedded within specific socio-cultural contexts.

These nonverbal elements often carry profound cultural weight and can be interpreted in contrasting ways across different ethnic groups. For instance, eye contact may be considered a sign of honesty in Western contexts; however, in Javanese culture, avoiding direct eye contact with elders is a fundamental sign of respect and etiquette. This cultural variation in eye contact norms is consistent with findings by Matsumoto and Hwang (2019), who demonstrate that facial and gaze behaviors are among the most culturally variable forms of nonverbal communication, often leading to misinterpretation across cultural boundaries. Similarly, paralanguage or vocal intonation, including pitch, volume, and rhythm adds emotional nuance and emphasis to verbal messages (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Intercultural miscommunication often arises when a tone of voice perceived as assertive and honest in one culture, such as within the *Lembak* community, is instead interpreted as a form of confrontation by another culture that emphasizes gentler intonation (Mulyana & Rakhmat, 2006).

## Verbal Communication Between the *Lembak* and Javanese Communities in Durian Mas Village

Verbal communication is the delivery of messages through words, spoken or written, and it plays a crucial role in the smooth flow of social interactions, whether face-to-face or at a distance via phone or text messages. Verbal communication is essential for creating two-way interaction, but it can be hindered by differences in how messages are interpreted. In Durian Mas Village, the language differences between the *Lembak* and Javanese communities highlight the challenges of intercultural communication. Without awareness and understanding of these differences, communication barriers can easily arise.

The theoretical differences in linguistic structures manifest clearly in the daily interactions of the residents of Durian Mas Village. Before examining the specific nuances of their dialogue, it is essential to understand that verbal interaction in this multicultural setting is not merely about word exchange but a continuous process of linguistic negotiation. The following findings illustrate how these two distinct ethnic groups navigate the complexities of their different mother tongues to achieve social cohesion.

The *Lembak* and Javanese languages in Durian Mas Village differ significantly in structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation, which often becomes an obstacle to effective communication. Residents like Suratno addressed this barrier by learning basic *Lembak* phrases and using Indonesian as a strategic bridge to facilitate understanding. Similarly, informants such as Napsia acknowledged that language and cultural differences could complicate communication, underscoring the vital importance of mutual understanding and active adaptation in cross-cultural interactions.

The linguistic differences between the *Lembak* and Javanese communities can be observed through several commonly used expressions in everyday interactions. These lexical variations often lead to different interpretations and shape the dynamics of intercultural communication, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparison of Everyday Vocabulary Between *Lembak* and Javanese Languages**

Col Language (Lembak)	Javanese Language	Indonesian Translation	Intercultural Interpretation
<i>Jos</i>	<i>Jos</i>	"Kurang ajar" (Lembak) / "Mantap" atau "Hebat" (Jawa)	The same lexical form carries different cultural meanings, potentially creating misunderstandings in intercultural communication
<i>Name</i>	<i>Opo</i>	<i>Apa</i>	Different phonological structure
<i>Dimane</i>	<i>Ning endi</i>	<i>Di mana</i>	Dialect distinction

<i>Ite</i>	<i>Awake dewe</i>	<i>Kita</i>	<i>Identity marker</i>
<i>Ade</i>	<i>Ono</i>	<i>Ada</i>	<i>Daily communication variation</i>

These experiences show that intercultural communication often encounters barriers even when participants use a mutually understood language, such as Bahasa Indonesia. This phenomenon occurs because language is not merely a neutral tool for information exchange; it is deeply embedded with cultural values, nuances, and "high-context" or "low-context" orientations that transcend literal vocabulary.

Even when using the same words, the interpretive framework of the speaker and the listener may differ significantly. This phenomenon is closely related to what Gumperz (1982) calls "contextualization cues," the paralinguistic and prosodic signals that speakers use to indicate how an utterance should be interpreted, which vary profoundly across cultural and linguistic groups. For example, a Javanese speaker might use a common Indonesian word with a soft, indirect intonation to maintain social harmony, while a *Lembak* listener accustomed to more direct and assertive communication might interpret that same "mutually understood" word as a sign of hesitation or a lack of transparency. Therefore, the barrier lies not in the linguistic code itself, but in the cultural decoding process, where nonverbal cues and social expectations override the literal meaning of the words being spoken.

Differences in culture, context, and language can cause misunderstandings. Therefore, it is important to have knowledge of the other person's language and culture and the ability to adapt to varying communication situations. Canale and Swain (1980) remind us that communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass sociolinguistic knowledge, strategic competence, and discourse coherence — all of which are at play in the cross-cultural encounters between *Lembak* and Javanese speakers. Byram and Hu (2013) further add that intercultural communicative competence requires critical cultural awareness, allowing interlocutors to evaluate cultural practices and mediate between different value systems. In an increasingly connected world, openness and efforts to build mutual understanding are key to successful intercultural communication.

The daily language of the *Lembak* people in Durian Mas reflects the richness of their culture and identity, with vocabulary that describes their environment and local activities. Interviews indicate that the *Lembak* language functions as a symbolic system for organizing verbal messages in arbitrary ways, shaped by culture, and serves as the primary tool for social interaction and community identity, consistent with theories of language function.

The *Lembak* vocabulary also reflects cultural richness. For example, the word 'Jos' in the Col language is commonly used as an impolite or offensive expression, whereas in Javanese it carries a positive meaning, such as 'great' or 'excellent.' This difference demonstrates how identical lexical forms may produce contrasting cultural interpretations in intercultural communication. This illustrates linguistic theory, which holds that words are the smallest symbolic units that represent

people, objects, or states. The meaning of a word is not inherent but depends on community consensus. In *Lembak*, "jos" carries a specific meaning understood by the community that conveys certain emotions. This shows that language is a complex communication system in which words convey meaning and emotion according to social and cultural contexts.

The *Lembak* dialect, specifically the *Col* language spoken in Durian Mas, has a distinctive phonological feature: the use of the vowel "e" (schwa) at the end of words. Examples include *name* (what), *dimane* (where), *ite* (us), *dehe* (girl), and *ade* (exists). Within the context of intercultural interaction in the village, this linguistic trait stands in sharp contrast to the Central Javanese dialect used by migrants, which typically ends with different vowel sounds or consonants. This structural divergence is significant because it marks a clear boundary of ethnic identity, often leading to initial confusion or "linguistic shock" for Javanese speakers in early social encounters. From a linguistic perspective, the *Col* dialect represents a geographical variation that not only enriches the local culture but also serves as a primary marker of the *Lembak* people's indigenous identity amidst a multicultural population.

Interviews with Mrs. Tukinem indicate that Javanese is the dominant language spoken by the Javanese people in Durian Mas Village, Rejang Lebong. Beyond daily communication, it serves as a foundation of cultural identity and distinguishes them from other ethnic groups. Linguistic theories explain language acquisition in three ways: B. F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning, where language is learned through stimulus and response; Noam Chomsky's cognitive theory, which posits that humans are biologically equipped with language ability; and Charles Osgood's mediating theory, emphasizing the interaction between external stimuli and internal processes.

The word "jos" in Javanese has rich cultural significance and is used to express something excellent, cool, or extraordinary, often as praise or admiration. This shows that language is not just a tool for communication but also a reflection of cultural understanding and social expression. Linguistic theory regards words as units representing objects, people, events, or states. In Javanese, "jos" functions as a symbol representing positive values, its meaning shaped by cultural context rather than inherent in the word itself.

The Javanese language spoken in Durian Mas is a "kasar," or informal, dialect, with distinctive pronunciation and vocabulary that reflect cultural identity. For example, in the Central Javanese dialect, words like "wong" (person), "sopo" (who), and "ora" (no) are commonly used. Expressions like "ora popo" are casual responses to thanks, while "lor-o" indicates upward direction and "oyo" is used for warnings. Vocabulary like "dolanan" (play), "podo" (same), and "monggo" (please) enrich expression and communication. Linguistic theory explains that dialects reflect geographic influences, and the Central Javanese dialect in Durian Mas highlights the unique cultural and social values of the community.

### **Nonverbal Communication Among *Lembak* and Javanese Communities in Durian Mas Village**

Nonverbal communication, encompassing facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, vocal tone, and even silence, is a fundamental element of

human interaction, allowing individuals to convey emotions, attitudes, and social meaning without relying solely on words. In multicultural communities, such as Durian Mas Village in Rejang Lebong, these nonverbal behaviors are particularly significant, revealing the subtle ways cultural identity, social hierarchy, and community norms shape daily interactions. Among the *Lembak* and Javanese communities, nonverbal cues are not merely complementary to spoken language; they serve as essential instruments of cultural expression, social negotiation, and interpersonal understanding.

Body movements, including gestures and posture, are among the most visible forms of nonverbal communication. They can express deliberate messages or occur unconsciously, often enhancing or clarifying verbal statements. A simple nod or shake of the head, for example, communicates agreement or rejection, while hand gestures may express emotion, indicate direction, or emphasize points during conversation. During interviews in Durian Mas, it became evident that these movements are deeply tied to cultural norms. Mr. Santoso, a Javanese villager in his late forties, explained that hand gestures are used cautiously and deliberately, particularly when addressing elders. "When we greet our elders or speak with someone older, we never gesticulate wildly," he remarked. "Even a simple movement of the hands needs to be calm and respectful. It shows that we honor them." Gestures are also commonly used to convey sympathy, emphasize points in conversation, or signal attentiveness, making them integral to the Javanese repertoire of politeness and social grace.

In contrast, *Lembak* villagers, as described by Mr. Ramli, a middle-aged local farmer, rely less on hand gestures and other body movements. He observed, "We speak directly, using words clearly to express ourselves. We do not need much movement; our hands stay still, but our words carry weight." For the *Lembak*, the meaning of communication is embedded more in verbal clarity and vocal emphasis than in the accompanying physical movements. Despite this contrast, both communities show an awareness and respect for the other's communication style. Mr. Ramli noted that when interacting with Javanese villagers, *Lembak* people make an effort to moderate their directness, observing the subtler, more fluid gestures of their neighbors, while Javanese villagers reciprocate by tolerating the *Lembak*'s more restrained style. This mutual accommodation demonstrates an underlying appreciation for cultural differences, reflecting both flexibility and social cohesion.

Facial expressions are another vital nonverbal channel, providing cues to emotional state, attentiveness, and relational intent. Among the Javanese, smiles are a fundamental component of social interaction. According to Mrs. Sari, a Javanese teacher in her thirties, "A smile is not just a friendly expression; it is a way to show respect, to ease tension, and to make others feel welcome. When speaking with elders or during formal interactions, we combine a gentle smile with attentive eyes; it is a form of social etiquette." Facial expressions also reflect the Javanese emphasis on harmony and indirectness in communication. The subtleties of soft eye contact, combined with a composed expression, signal attentiveness without overstepping social boundaries.

In contrast, *Lembak* villagers prioritize the clarity and emotional weight of their spoken words over facial cues. Mr. Ramli explained, "We show emotion mostly

with our voice, not our face. People can tell if we are serious, angry, or happy from the way we speak. Facial expressions are secondary." While the *Lembak* still value warmth and politeness, they convey emotional and social cues more through vocal tone and verbal assertiveness than through nuanced facial gestures. Nevertheless, both communities use facial expressions to create friendliness and trust in interactions, even as their vocal styles distinguish their cultural identities.

Eye contact further demonstrates the cultural divergence in nonverbal communication. Among the *Lembak*, direct and sustained eye contact signifies honesty, assertiveness, and seriousness. Mr. Ramli shared, "When talking to someone older or respected, I look them straight in the eyes. It shows I am serious and truthful. Avoiding the gaze can seem evasive or insincere." For the *Lembak*, eye contact is a form of social clarity and moral accountability; it communicates intention as much as it does respect. In Javanese culture, however, eye contact is more measured and mediated. Mr. Santoso noted, "With elders or people of higher status, we do not stare. Our eyes glance respectfully. Too much direct gaze could be seen as rude or challenging." Similarly, Mrs. Sari added that interactions with the opposite sex also follow norms of moderated eye contact, reflecting cultural values of modesty and social decorum. These differences illustrate how cultural frameworks shape not only the presence or absence of eye contact but also its moral and social implications.

Vocal intonation, or paralinguistics, adds another layer of nonverbal meaning to communication. Paralinguistics includes pitch, speed, rhythm, volume, and other expressive vocal elements that complement or even override the literal meaning of words. The *Lembak* use strong, firm intonation to signal seriousness and command respect, particularly toward elders or socially prominent individuals. During an interview, Mr. Ramli demonstrated this by reciting a common greeting in a deliberate, firm tone, explaining that the manner of delivery conveys as much about the speaker's sincerity as the words themselves. In contrast, the Javanese employ soft, calm, and measured intonation, even in moments of disagreement or conflict, to maintain harmony and show deference. Mrs. Sari highlighted that "Even if we disagree, we speak gently. Our tone is part of the message; it ensures that respect is maintained while ideas are shared." These divergent uses of vocal intonation underscore how paralinguistic features convey not only emotional states but also social positioning and cultural values.

Silence, a subtler form of nonverbal communication, carries equally important meanings within intercultural dynamics. In Javanese interactions, silence is often a deliberate and positive tool used to maintain social harmony (*rukun*) and avoid open confrontation (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). For the Javanese, remaining silent is not necessarily an indication of agreement or a lack of opinion; rather, it is a form of "speech management" intended to prevent hurting others' feelings or disrupting the collective peace (Mulyana, 2007). This practice reflects the cultural value of *tepo seliro* (tolerance and self-restraint), in which choosing not to speak is considered a sophisticated way to navigate sensitive social situations. It allows others to speak, indicates thoughtfulness, and maintains social harmony. Mrs. Sari described it as "a way to show respect, letting others express themselves fully before responding. It also reflects patience and wisdom." In the *Lembak* community, silence has a different

connotation. Mr. Ramli explained, "When we are silent, it may mean we are holding back anger or thinking carefully. Silence is a way to control our emotions and remain polite, even when we feel frustrated." In both cases, silence is not mere absence of speech; it is a culturally shaped strategy for managing social relationships and emotional expression. Understanding these contextual meanings is essential for cross-cultural comprehension and effective interpersonal communication.

The observations and interviews in Durian Mas reveal that nonverbal communication among *Lembak* and Javanese communities is a rich, culturally encoded system. Javanese nonverbal practices emphasize subtlety, harmony, and social deference, with careful gestures, moderated eye contact, gentle intonation, and strategic silence. *Lembak* practices, by contrast, highlight assertiveness, clarity, and directness through firm vocal expression, strong eye contact, and limited gestural display. Despite these differences, both groups demonstrate remarkable intercultural awareness and adaptability. This adaptive capacity aligns with what Deardorff (2020) describes as the behavioral dimension of intercultural competence, in which individuals consciously adjust their communication behaviors in response to cultural context. Similarly, Kim (2017) emphasizes that successful cross-cultural adaptation requires both cognitive flexibility and openness in communication, elements clearly observable in the interactions between *Lembak* and Javanese residents of Durian Mas Village. By respecting each other's norms and adjusting behaviors accordingly, the communities maintain social cohesion and ensure harmonious interaction.

#### D. Conclusion

This study reveals that interactions between the *Lembak* and Javanese communities in Durian Mas Village are characterized by unique dynamics in both verbal and nonverbal communication. In verbal communication, differences across regional languages create variations in speech, yet Indonesian serves as a lingua franca, enabling mutual understanding and adjustments in language styles. Interviews indicate that the Javanese adapt their vocabulary and intonation when speaking with the *Lembak*, while the *Lembak* actively use Indonesian to bridge linguistic differences.

In nonverbal communication, the Javanese express politeness through soft intonation, limited eye contact, subtle body movements, and silence. In contrast, the *Lembak* emphasize direct eye contact, firm intonation, and minimal body movements to convey seriousness and emotional control. Informants from both groups highlighted the importance of adapting to and respecting each other's communication styles.

These verbal and nonverbal dynamics reflect a process of cultural adaptation, mutual respect, and learning, where communication not only conveys information but also maintains social harmony and preserves cultural identity. Open, tolerant, and empathetic intercultural communication competence is essential to fostering harmonious interactions in multicultural communities such as Durian Mas Village.

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