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Cohesiveness, Sense of Ethnicity, and Stereotyping in the Group Communication of Batak Students in Bengkulu University

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of how group communication among Punguan Raja Sonang members, namely the association of students with Batak ethnic backgrounds from the clans of Gultom, Samosir, Sitinjak, Pakpahan and Harianja at the University of Bengkulu. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach with data collection methods by observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, the results show that the members of Punguan Raja Sonang need the closest people that can help them get to know their fellow Bataks in a clan. The same background, area of origin, belief, and language make the members of Punguan Raja Sonang at the University of Bengkulu have cohesiveness or strength to remain in the clan group. In addition, their sense of Batakness is nurtured through group communication, although there are indications that some group members are colonized by certain Batak character stereotypes, which makes them participate in prejudging other group members who have anomalous characters. Above all, a close togetherness among them can create a high sense of solidarity both with older members and with young peers.

Keywords

Group communication, Punguan Raja Sonang, Batak ethnic, Prejudice, solidarity

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social beings who are always in touch with other human beings so that there is communication in it because of the limitations in him that must be covered by the presence of others. Interactions performed by inter-human

beings in achieving life objectives inseparable from the active role of a group. Communication in groups is a very important component of the group process.

The development of increasingly sophisticated technology makes people easily communicate with other people of different cultures anywhere and anytime. For example, transmigration carried out by some people from one area to another by using transportation makes it easier for them to move from place to place. Students who move from their home area

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to the destined area to further their education also included in this migration.

Culture is the identity of each region. In almost every corner of the region, we can encounter different cultures, unique, and has its peculiar characteristics. By understanding the culture of each nation, race and ethnicity will greatly influence the success or failure of communication (Andriani, 2012, p. 3).

There are several ethnic groups in Bengkulu, such as the ethnic groups indigenous to Bengkulu itself, namely Rejang and Serawai. However, along with times, many immigrants' ethnic groups joined the city of Bengkulu, such as Minangkabau, Sundanese, Javanese, Bugis, Batak, and other ethnicities, including ethnicities in the University of Bengkulu.

The University of Bengkulu is the largest in the city of Bengkulu, and there are several students groups or society in association with ethnic backgrounds, such as *Ikatan Keluarga Rejang* (IKR), *Ikatan Keluarga Minangkabau* (IKAMAMI), *Riungan Mahasiswa Sunda* (RUMASA), Punguan-Punguan of Batak, and so forth.

Batak is one of the ethnic groups originating from Medan, North Sumatera. Batak ethnicity is known for its many *marga* (clans). The *marga* became a symbol for the Batak family. The Batak students immigrating from Medan and Batak students in Bengkulu are incorporated and form several associations of the Batak clan, which are often known as Punguan, one of which is *Punguan Raja Sonang*.

Punguan Raja Sonang is an association of several Batak *clans*, namely Gultom, Samosir, Sitinjak, Pakpahan, and Harianja. The Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University also often referred to as "*University of Bengkulu Naposo Raja Sonang*." The Batak students at the University of Bengkulu are well-known for generations as those who always gathered among fellow Batak ethnicity alone. So, students of other ethnicities at the University of Bengkulu have the impression that Batak ethnic bonds are stronger than other ethnicities.

Group communication conducted between fellow Batak ethnic students at Bengkulu University, including members of the Punguan Raja Sonang, is interesting when it is associated with the group forming theory, which is the theory of attitude similarity. Therefore, this article discusses how group communication conducted by the Batak students of the Punguan Raja Sonang group at the University of Bengkulu.

METHOD

The study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive case study method. The researcher chooses to use the qualitative approach because they wanted to explain various phenomena in social reality. A descriptive method seeks to see how the group behaves with other members, where in-depth and detailed information obtained from those observed.

The informants determined by using a purposive technique that is the sampling technique chosen based on certain considerations with several predetermined criteria. The main informant criteria as the benchmark are as follows: 1) Students of Batak ethnicity at the University of Bengkulu from clans such as Gultom, Samosir, Sitinjak, Pakpahan, and Harianja, 2) members of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University in the semester II until semester XII. Meanwhile, the supporting informants were the founder of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University.

Data collected using the method of observation, in-depth interviews, as well as the method of documentation. The researcher also analyzed the data using the method of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

Data validity tested through the triangulation technique that is source triangulation. The researchers collect and test the data that has been obtained directly to active members, former first-generation leaders, and

founder of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University.

Contexts of the Research

The Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University is an association of several Batak *marga*, namely Gultom, Samosir, Sijinjak, Pakpahan, and Harianja, in the University of Bengkulu. The association formed in 2012 initiated by two class of 2010 Batak students of Pakpahan clan who were studying at the Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Bengkulu, and especially intended for Batak young students who originated from other regions.

The number of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University members always increased from year to year, supported by the factors of new students that have high enthusiasm and loyalty to be able to gather and care about the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University. Routine activities carried out by the members to date are worship activities that usually held at the boarding houses (*kos-kosan*) of members based on mutual consent. Also, they usually hold an agenda of familiarity, traveling, or just get together among members to keep the cohesiveness in the group.

Informants

The informant or subject in this study amounted to nine people consisting of 6 main subjects/informants and 3 supporting informants. The main informant in this study was:

Table 1. Main subjects/ informants

No	Intials and Clans	Sex	Faculty	Class
1	A. Gultom	Male	Social-Politics	2013
2	A. K. Samosir	Male	Agro	2012
3	R. M. Samosir	Female	Agro	2012
4	M. Sijinjak	Female	Economy-Business	2014
5	S. A. Pakpahan	Female	Social-Politics	2013
6	E. Hasiolan Harianja	Male	Agro	2015

Table 2. Supporting informants

No	Intials and Clans	Activities	Sex
1	R. Samosir Pakpahan	Employee in private sector	Male
2	P. O. Pakpahan	Employee at BRI Bank Kota Siantar Medan	Female
3	W. R. Gultom	Student at Bengkulu University	Male

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Group Cohesiveness

According to Rogers (2003), communication is “a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding” (p. 5), resulting in a change of attitudes and behavior (Cangara, 2002).

Meanwhile, groups are part of human life. Burgoon, Hunsaker, and Dawson (1994) defines group communications as a face-to-face interaction between three or more persons, with known objectives, such as information sharing, safeguarding, problem-solving, in which every member can appropriately identify the personal characteristic of each other members.

Members of the group with a high collective spirit, close interpersonal relationships, solidarity, and deep feelings, can then be called to be "cohesiveness." The cohesiveness of the group is every factor that becomes the background in which the group members feel they have an attachment to the group and make them stay within the group.

As an advantage, by utilizing the group cohesiveness where members may have a sense of ownership of the group so that it can bring great motivation to be able to obtain maximum results for the job entrusted to them. A group also will not be removed from the problem of solidarity that intertwined in daily life.

One of the theories used in this research is the similar attitude theory by Feldman, which assumes that one would be interested in others and join when there is a similarity of attitude between them (Zulkarnain, 2013, p. 17). The similarity in attitude makes people feel attached

to one another, and they tend to develop a common behavior, so they will be easier to interact and unify opinions with each other (Rakhmat, 2005).

The members of Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University inseparable from the communication done by them in order to achieve common objectives in conducting group communication. On average, members of Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University are Batak people who come to Bengkulu city. It does not immediately make them close and can do social interaction with other fellow Members in the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University. They are accustomed to communicating using Batak language with other Batak students, even though Indonesian is also predominantly used in their daily lives.

Batak students who first attended the University of Bengkulu gathered new students with Batak ethnic backgrounds, especially from other regions, to strengthen their respective clans through their clan's Pungan so as not to feel lonely as a newcomer in the area and join the Pungan members.

While maintaining cohesiveness or strength to remain within the groups of their Batak clan, members of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University, both older and younger members, emphasize the existence of nicknames that are familiar with fellow Bataks so that the kinship between them is better maintained.

The members of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University as much as possible maintain good relations with other members of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University or with other Batak people at the University of Bengkulu so that the togetherness and solidarity between them remain well maintained as members in the Batak clan associations at the University of Bengkulu.

Sense of Batakness and Group Solidarity

Portrait of group communication of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University is a form of

intra-cultural communication that occurs between students group of Batak ethnic background who's coming from outside of Bengkulu city and Batak students born and raised in the city of Bengkulu, ranging from Gultom, Samosir, Sitingjak, Pakpahan and Harianja clan at the University of Bengkulu.

In the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University, each member has the same goal to congregate and find a new family of the same clan with them at the University of Bengkulu. This group is the same as other groups, which are a group of strangers who did not know each other from other regions.

The Pungan Raja Sonang also has a unique habit when among Batak ethnics met one another, and they will ask each other's clan or commonly called "*Martutur*." *Martutur* activities performed by Batak people wherever they are, of course, will positively impact their lives.

The process of group communication conducted by members of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University in interacting socially with other fellow members did not immediately take place. When they first came to Bengkulu, they knew only a few people with ethnic Batak backgrounds, especially those from the same clan and the same hometown.

However, with the help of those closest Batak people, they were able to introduce their clans to each other and blend in with fellow Batak students at the University of Bengkulu. So they will easily find their families or new foster parents wherever they live, especially as migrant students at the University of Bengkulu.

The members of Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University have the greatest appeal to be unified with their fellow ethnic groups when they already know the origin of the collocutor. They will be closer and more open in establishing relationships and ongoing communication in the future because of a sense of solidarity and togetherness that they have cultivated for a long time. They establish a sense of solidarity from the beginning of the arrival of

new students who were welcomed by Batak students at Bengkulu University.

It seems closely related when paired with a similar attitude theory. Members will feel comfortable and able to interact continuously with others when they have similarities that support the group communication process among them, such as cultural background, beliefs embraced, spoken language, and else.

Members of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University encouraged to preserve the traditions and maintain a kinship of existing clans from previously included at the University of Bengkulu. The habits of the members of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University to not to call members' names but directly to the nickname that is familiar in the Batak ethnicity also explains that the clans in the Punguan Raja Sonang University of Bengkulu are prioritizing to strengthen the kinship between them.

The kinship attitude similarity amongst Batak ethnic people can be seen when each other reinforce their identity as Batak wherever and whenever they are together to embrace and protect as one, especially while away from their hometowns.

The Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University maintains a well-established relationship with other Batak puguans at the University of Bengkulu. They will reciprocally participate in each other's events. These Punguan will maintain the existence of each clan group with a variety of ways to accentuate the group as the best amongst others.

The situation certainly affects the harmony between ethnic groups in the University of Bengkulu so that it can cause differences, discrepancies, and misunderstandings among its members. Also, the group behavior of Batak ethnic students that passed-down both within the campus and off-campus environment can make them not to know the full diversity of local cultures.

Every individual in the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University cannot be prevented from a problem between themselves,

whether it is big or small. Everything that happens in the group, they will try to complement each other by maintaining good communication with one another to avoid conflicts or problems.

Over time the members of Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University will provide cohesiveness or strength to remain in the group so that other members can become a close social group. They will enjoy the interaction between themselves, stay together, and survive in a long time, similarly with the other Batak ethnic associations in every region of Indonesia.

In living their social life, members of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University faced with a difference between them, one of which was differences in beliefs or religions, because the majority of members of the pungan themselves tended to adhere to Christian beliefs. It is similar in the Chinese community that is perceived as a Christian community (Kunu, 2018).

The awareness of the Punguan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University members about the importance of tolerance in religious life by honoring and respecting each member's beliefs and religion in order to create a harmonious relationship between Muslim believers and Christian believers.

The mutual understanding and desire to encourage each other by reducing selfishness among members, according to the concept of the attitude similarity theory (similar attitude theory) by Feldman, is strongly related to the same cultural background of every individual anywhere to gather in achieving the desired goals.

Stereotyping and the Problem of 'Less Batak'

In contrast to essentialist thinking which holds that people have a core character or inner essence that determines a person's identity (Jensen, 2004), postmodern thoughts that are plural and fragmented in many dimensions, often form contradictory identities, which make themselves incoherent (Jensen, 2004). Thus,

identity is considered a social construction (Burr, 1995).

Jenkins (2006) argues that identity is a product of human social interaction and is redefined throughout life. Therefore, the term 'identification' is preferred over 'identity' because it rejects the idea that identity is a fixed variable, 'something' (Jenkins, 2006). Correspondingly, Carbaugh (1996) emphasizes that identity is something someone does, not someone. The identity is formed, applied, and implemented in certain social narrative designs (Carbaugh, 1996).

Likewise in the social-constructivist perspective, ethnic identity is not a permanent entity because it is considered a product of social interaction (Jenkins, 1997). Ethnic identity is also often associated with national differences (Jenkins, 2006). Thus, different nationalities can be called ethnic differences. However, the ethnicity of the people in a nation is not always uniform or monocultural, as is the case in Indonesia. Therefore, besides relating to nationality, ethnic groups can be defined based on various other ethnic markers. Eriksen (2002) emphasizes aspects of language, skin color, religion, and dialect as differentiators or markers of ethnicity.

In addition, functionalist schools believe that specific values can be ascribed to different cultures. Based on a survey conducted in a multinational company in more than fifty countries, Hofstede developed a four-dimensional model that involved aspects of culture that could be measured against other cultures, including power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and avoidance uncertainty (Hofstede, G., Hofstede G. J. and Minkov, 2010). Hofstede explained his findings, for example, that among many other cultures, Danish culture was individualistic and feminine while Mexican culture was collectivistic and masculine.

Ting-Toomey (1993; 2005) argues that values such as collectivism and individualism are characteristic of certain ethnic groups. For Ting-

Toomey, Americans of Asian descent, Native Americans, and Latin Americans are collectivistic while European Americans are individualistic. Ting-Toomey's conception of ethnic identity focuses on heterogeneity in various ethnic groups.

Ting-Toomey (1993; 2005) believes that the values of ethnic identity (or content) are interconnected with the importance of ethnic identity, which is subjective loyalty, that is, the loyalty held by people towards the groups they are in. Thus, individuals from collectivistic ethnic groups who have strong ethnic identity salience tend to act in accordance with collectivistic values.

However, if the importance of their ethnic identity is weak, the values of the ethnic identity they hold can be individualistic (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). This was expressed explicitly by Ting-Toomey (2005) who underlined that only Asians, Natives, and Latin Americans who strongly identified their traditional ethnic values and tended to be group-oriented.

It is interesting that the Ting-Toomey concept which refers to the American context is slightly different if it is brought to the context of Indonesia as a communal nation that is rooted in plural but one in a collectivistic character. Between Batak, Javanese, Buginese, Papuan, Dayak, Minang, Sundanese, and other ethnic groups in Indonesia have their own characteristics, although it cannot be denied that almost all ethnic groups in Indonesia are collectivistic in nature, so the relations formed are communal and group-oriented.

In this era of very complex social life, the changing of characteristics of identity is very possible so that observing the individual identity is becoming crucial. According to Roosens (1989), in certain contexts, a person will identify himself as a person with a certain nationality, then a certain ethnicity, a certain profession, a certain religion, and so on. The order in which a person's identity is arranged depends on time and context.

Although not as deterministic as Roosens in describing the sequences of identity, Bernard Lahire, a French sociologist, said that the diverse social determinations and socialization of the past, as well as the activeness and autonomy of individuals to form or determine their own identity, make an individual a plural actor (Wijaya 2019). In Wijaya's dissertation (2019) on the disposition of individual which uses the Lahire analysis knife, it is mentioned that the diversity of social actions and individual characteristics are an indicator of the eclecticism and creativity of individuals in shaping and determining what kind of identity and how to represent that identity in the social field they enter. Not infrequently, this situation brings up anomalous characters.

This is experienced by M. Sitinjak, an informant who has a different character from other Batak people. Sitinjak tends to be softer and smoother in speaking so that people often doubt her Batakness. This becomes problematic because it seems that the people in the group are trapped in stereotyping Batak ethnic who are considered rude, loud, and speak in a to-the-point style, without further ado and manners.

Ethnicity is indeed not sterile from stereotyping from the community. People still generalize the character and identity of other groups based on 'simplifying' ideas about cultural features called stereotypes.

This idea tends to lead to generalizations about all group members based on characteristics that people believe to be the cultural substance of the group (Jost & Hamilton, 2005). Stereotyping is generally used in communication and interaction with strangers (Gudykunst, 2005). When people make categories against other people, they tend to give positive or negative evaluations for that category.

However, a group is often evaluated and identified differently. Positive for one group, but negative for another group (Turner, 1982). This is consistently and continuously recognized as a biased/ethnocentric attitude or prejudice

(Brown, 1995). Tajfel (1978) provides the view that negative evaluation can create problems in social interaction and communication because people generally need a positive self-image.

Ethnocentrism tends to have a place in society, as a form of the normativity of the wholeness. This makes individuals who are different from the dominant group in a society subject to prejudice and discrimination more often than the majority.

CONCLUSION

The members of Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University in social interaction within their group need a process to get along with other members. The similar attitude theory by Feldman, which on the base of the similarity of beliefs, place of origin, or language used, makes them loyal to the congregation of Batak ethnic background in the University of Bengkulu as time goes.

However, the harmony seen in the group may be raising the attention of the student groups of other ethnic backgrounds because of the lack of socialization that transpires with them.

The members of the Pungan Raja Sonang of Bengkulu University must retain the strength to remain within the group whenever and wherever regardless of the difference between Muslim believers or non-Muslim believer's members in living a tolerance of life between diverse people.

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