

Communication Accommodation in Interethnic Social Relations between Makassar and Gorontalo

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ABSTRACT

Abstrak: Interaksi sosial antaretnis di Indonesia seringkali dihadapkan pada tantangan komunikasi yang dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan bahasa, budaya, dan norma sosial. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana akomodasi komunikasi dan konvergensi nilai budaya terjadi dalam interaksi sosial antara komunitas etnis Makassar dan Gorontalo di Kota Gorontalo. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, menggabungkan wawancara mendalam dan pengamatan partisipatif untuk mengumpulkan data dari individu yang aktif dalam interaksi antaretnis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terdapat perbedaan bahasa dan praktik budaya, proses akomodasi komunikasi terjadi secara dinamis melalui konvergensi gaya bahasa dan penghormatan terhadap norma lokal, sehingga memungkinkan terciptanya hubungan sosial yang harmonis dan inklusif. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi signifikan terhadap pemahaman teori Akomodasi Komunikasi dan mengonfirmasi peran strategi komunikasi adaptif dalam membangun kohesi sosial di komunitas multietnis. Manfaat penelitian ini terletak pada rekomendasi praktisnya untuk meningkatkan efektivitas komunikasi antarbudaya di wilayah yang beragam etnis.

Abstract: Interethnic social interactions in Indonesia often face communication challenges influenced by differences in language, culture, and social norms. This study aims to examine how communication accommodation and cultural value convergence occur in social interactions between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities in Gorontalo City. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study design, combining in-depth interviews and participatory observation to collect data from individuals actively involved in cross-ethnic interactions. The findings reveal that despite language and cultural differences, the process of communication adaptation occurs dynamically through the convergence of language styles and respect for local norms, enabling the creation of harmonious and inclusive social relationships. These findings contribute significantly to the understanding of Communication Accommodation Theory and affirm the role of adaptive communication strategies in fostering social cohesion in multiethnic communities. The practical benefits of this research lie in its recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of intercultural communication in regions with ethnic diversity.

Keywords:

Communication Accommodation;
Cultural Convergence;
Makassar-Gorontalo Ethnicity

I. Introduction

Interethnic interactions in Indonesia, as a country with high cultural diversity (Andini et al., 2023; Saputra, 2019; Varanida, 2018), often present challenges in intercultural communication (Juditha, 2015; Riyanto, 2024; Saputra, 2019; Turistiati & Andhita, 2021). The Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups, two groups with different cultural values and languages (Syaf, 2017; Une, 2021), are an interesting example of this phenomenon, particularly in the context of Gorontalo City, which is a place of social interaction between the two groups. Although there are differences

in language, norms, and communication styles, the relationship between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities is characterised by a process of adaptation and mutual accommodation in social interactions. One important factor influencing this relationship is the acceptance of cultural differences and cross-cultural communication that occurs in various social contexts (Hasibuan & Muda, 2018; Rosalyn & Kuncoroyakti, 2019), such as work, education, and religious activities. However, despite adaptation efforts, conflicts and confusion still often arise due to differences in values, norms, and ethics between these two ethnic groups, which can affect the smoothness of their social interactions (Alfarabi et al., 2022; Liliweri, 2018).

This study aims to understand how communication accommodation and cultural value convergence occur in social relations between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups. A number of previous studies have discussed the concept of intercultural communication in the context of inter-ethnic relations, such as those conducted by (Sari & Rahardjo, 2019) in studying the interaction between the Javanese and Minang ethnic groups in Semarang, and (Muhammad & Aggasi, 2020) which examined communication accommodation between the former East Timorese and Sumbawa communities. These studies show the phenomena of convergence, divergence, and excessive accommodation in intercultural communication. In this context, ethnic groups that adapt to the host culture demonstrate the ability to harmonise their behaviour and language, even though communication barriers such as language and stereotypes remain a challenge. However, although these studies provide insights into communication accommodation in inter-ethnic interactions, not many specifically examine the relationship between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups, particularly in the context of Gorontalo City, which has unique social characteristics.

Most previous studies have focused on interactions between ethnic groups with striking cultural differences, such as the Chinese and Sundanese (A. Pratiwi et al., 2021) or the Manggarai and their hosts in Kupang (Andung et al., 2019). The gap lies in the geographical context, social characteristics, and more peaceful and harmonious intercultural relations in Gorontalo City, which indicate a very strong alignment of cultural values. This study will fill this gap by exploring how the process of intercultural communication in Gorontalo City, which involves the adaptation of cultural values and language between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups, can contribute to the success of more inclusive and peaceful social relations.

This research is novel in its focus on the phenomenon of intercultural communication in more harmonious social relations, as well as its emphasis on the dynamics of mutually accommodating cultural values in ethnic relations in Indonesia. This research also integrates the theories of Accommodation Communication and Cultural Value Convergence, which are more specifically applied to the Makassar and Gorontalo communities. The main objective of this study is to explore how the process of communication accommodation and cultural value convergence influences social interactions between the two ethnic groups in Gorontalo City, as well as to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in their intercultural communication. By examining this phenomenon, this study is expected to provide new insights into effective communication strategies in culturally diverse inter-ethnic relationships and support the creation of social harmony.

The main argument of this study is that despite differences in language, norms, and culture, a good communication accommodation process can create more inclusive and peaceful social relations between ethnic groups. With mutual accommodation efforts from both the Makassar and Gorontalo communities, these inter-ethnic interactions will not only run more smoothly but also strengthen social solidarity between diverse groups. This research will make an important contribution to the study of intercultural communication in Indonesia and offer a communication model that can be applied in a broader social context.

II. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Njie & Asimiran, 2014) that focuses on social interactions between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups in Gorontalo City. This approach was chosen to understand the complex phenomenon of intercultural communication, which involves different values, norms, and lifestyles between the

two ethnic groups. Case studies allow researchers to analyse in depth how the process of intercultural communication occurs in the context of everyday social life, as well as the factors that influence the success or obstacles in communication between the two ethnic groups.

Table 1. Key Informant Interview Data

Informant	Age	Occupation and Ethnicity	Ethnicity
Mirnawati	24	Pharmacist	Makassar ethnicity
Risnawati	25 years old	Nurse	Makassar ethnicity
Anto Ruchban	28 years old	Nurse	Makassar ethnicity
Zulfikar Arifin	24 years old	Nurse	Makassar Ethnicity
Iwan Syafrudin	29 years old	Midwife	Makassar ethnicity
Ahmad Kalana	28 years old	Nurse	Makassar ethnicity
Ulfayati	24 years old	Nurse	Makassar ethnicity
Rahmatia	33 years old	Nurse	Makassar Ethnicity

^a. Source: Data processed by the author, 2025

The unit of analysis in this study is individuals from the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities who are involved in daily social interactions in Gorontalo City. Informants involved in this study were selected based on criteria such as age, occupation, and active involvement in social interactions between the two ethnic groups. In-depth interviews were used as the main data collection technique to explore the perceptions, experiences, and communication practices of individuals in intercultural interactions. In addition, participatory observation was also conducted to directly understand the dynamics of communication that occur in various social contexts, such as religious, economic, and social gatherings involving these two ethnic groups.

The data collected from in-depth interviews and participatory observation will be analysed using thematic analysis and narrative analysis (Braun et al., 2019; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Pavlenko, 2008). Thematic analysis is used to identify the main themes in intercultural communication, such as language adaptation, cultural value convergence, and communication barriers. Interview data and observation notes will be analysed to find patterns that describe how inter-ethnic communication takes place, as well as the strategies used to overcome communication barriers. Meanwhile, narrative analysis will be used to explore the informants' personal experiences in the process of cultural adaptation, as well as to understand how they describe and interpret their experiences related to social interaction. Through this comprehensive data analysis, this study aims to provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of intercultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities and its contribution to harmonious and inclusive social relations in Indonesia.

III. Data Presentation and Analysis

A. *Forms of Cultural Communication Between the Makassar and Gorontalo Ethnic Communities in Social Interaction*

The findings of this study indicate that intercultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities in Gorontalo City is influenced by significant differences in language, dialect, and communication norms. Nevertheless, the process of communication adaptation and accommodation occurs dynamically, especially in the context of daily social interactions, such as at work and other social activities. Makassar people who are new to Gorontalo often experience confusion regarding differences in dialect and word usage, especially in understanding the word "kita" (we). However, over time, they begin to adapt to the local language and dialect. In addition, respect for local culture is also evident in the use of Gorontalo-specific terms of address, which demonstrates an effort to recognise and respect local cultural values. These findings illustrate that despite communication challenges, both ethnic groups are able to adjust their communication styles, which ultimately strengthens harmonious and inclusive social relationships. The following table summarises the main findings obtained from interviews with informants.

Table 2. Tabulation of Key Informant Interview Data

Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Rahmatia	"Apart from the language, the Gorontalo accent is also quite different from ours in Makassar, so newcomers who have just moved here sometimes find it confusing."	Language and accent differences, Newcomers' confusion
Risnawati	"When Gorontalo people say 'we', they mean 'I', which is different from Makassar people who say 'we' to mean 'you'."	Differences in understanding the word 'kita', Confusion among newcomers
Iwan Syafrudin	"At work, we usually greet each other in Gorontalo language in the morning, like someone saying 'wololo habari?' and the response is 'piyopiyohu.' Since I've been living here for a long time, talking to native Gorontalo people isn't too difficult for me. I already know the meaning of many words here."	Language adaptation, Use of local languages, Communication adaptation process
Hamida	"We usually greet each other in Gorontalo language at work in the morning, like someone saying 'wololo habari?' and then someone else replies 'piyopiyohu.'"	Social interaction using the Gorontalo language, Communication adaptation at work
Diliyanti	"At work, we hear the local language and its distinctive dialect almost all the time. So, over time, we do get used to it."	Communication adaptation at work, Familiarisation with the Gorontalo language
Zulfikar Arifin	"Usually, as outsiders, we try to understand what Gorontalo people are saying by guessing first, because we hear it often, so over time we can figure it out. At work, we often meet native Gorontalo people who still strongly use their native language. We try to understand and respect this, such as calling female patients nou or male patients uti."	Adaptation efforts, Respect for local culture, Gorontalo-specific terms of address (nou, uti)

^b Source: Researcher's Data Analysis, 2025

This research reveals several key findings regarding the forms of cultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups in their social interactions in Gorontalo City. The first important finding is the difference in language and dialect between the two ethnic groups, which often causes confusion, especially for newcomers to Gorontalo. As stated by Rahmatia, the Gorontalo accent is different from Makassar, which can confuse newcomers. Risnawati also revealed that there is a difference in the understanding of the word "kita", which in Gorontalo means "I", while in Makassar it means "you". This difference shows that misunderstandings can occur when individuals are not familiar with the local language and accent.

Despite the language differences, the adaptation process went well over time. A number of informants, such as Saharudin and Diliyanti, stated that they became more accustomed to using the Gorontalo language after living there for a long time. This shows the importance of experience in cross-cultural communication adaptation. Saharudin, who has lived in Gorontalo for a long time, emphasised that he has mastered most of the Gorontalo vocabulary and dialect, which facilitates social interaction at work. Diliyanti also noted that the use of regional languages is common in the workplace, and she is becoming more accustomed to the Gorontalo language and dialect.

In addition to language adaptation, respect for local culture is also evident in the use of Gorontalo-specific terms of address, as described by Zulfikar Arifin. He revealed that the people of Makassar often try to guess the meaning of conversations in the Gorontalo language in order to understand what is being said, which shows their efforts to respect the local culture. Furthermore, he also noted that the use of terms such as "nou" for female patients and "uti" for male patients is a form of respect for the local cultural values of Gorontalo. This shows that despite differences in language and culture, the people of Makassar still try to adapt to local norms, thereby creating more harmonious social relationships. These findings show that intercultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups in Gorontalo City takes place through a process of continuous adaptation. The communities of these two ethnic groups are able to adapt to each other's languages and accents, and use mutually accommodating communication strategies to create more inclusive social relationships. This process involves efforts to understand the local language and culture, as well as adapting to the existing social context, which ultimately reduces the potential for conflict and strengthens the relationship between these two ethnic groups.

B. Supporting and Hindering Factors in Communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo Ethnic Communities

This study identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors in social communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities in Gorontalo City. The findings show that the main supporting factor in these social interactions is the Gorontalo community's attitude of mutual respect and openness towards newcomers, which enables the creation of harmonious social relations. Newcomers, especially those of Makassar ethnicity, demonstrate good cultural adaptation, blending in with the local atmosphere and forming social bonds. However, obstacles also arise due to cultural differences that are often incompatible with local Gorontalo norms, which can lead to misunderstandings in interactions. These findings provide important insights into how intercultural communication can take place effectively with understanding and adaptation to local cultural norms.

Table 3. Tabulation of Key Informant Interview Data

Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Ahmad Kalana	"During my time here, thankfully, I have never encountered any problems that have damaged my social relationships with the people here. Perhaps this is because the people here are accustomed to outsiders, so they understand very well how to respect newcomers."	Mutual respect for newcomers, Habit of mutual understanding
Ulfayati	"Almost all the Gorontalo people I know here are friendly, as if we have been close friends for a long time."	Friendly nature, Social acculturation
Mirawati	"We newcomers who live and struggle here should be smart in adapting to the situation and conditions here. Visitors who come to my place are usually more enthusiastic about sharing stories, so I get carried away by the atmosphere until we become close."	Cultural adaptation, social acculturation
Anto Ruchban	"Once, when I was still new to working here, a patient reprimanded me for a mistake that I did not intentionally make. Perhaps it was because a habit I brought with me from my village did not fit in with the culture here."	Cultural Habit Barriers, Cultural Mistakes in Interaction

^c. Source: Researcher Data Analysis Results, 2025

The results of the interviews in Table 2 show that there are several main supporting factors in communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups that facilitate social interaction in Gorontalo. One of these is the attitude of mutual respect and openness shown by the Gorontalo community towards newcomers. Ahmad Kalana stated that there had never been any problems that damaged social relations because the Gorontalo people were accustomed to the presence of newcomers and understood how to respect them. This is in line with Ulfayati's findings, which revealed that almost all Gorontalo people she knew were friendly, creating a sense of familiarity between newcomers and the local community. In addition, cultural adaptation is also an important supporting factor in these social interactions. Mirawati added that migrants, especially those from Makassar, need to be smart in adapting to the local situation and culture. This adaptation process can be seen from the enthusiasm of visitors who come and interact with the Gorontalo community, which ultimately creates social closeness and positive cultural acculturation.

However, despite the many supporting factors, there are also obstacles that arise in the interaction between these two ethnic groups. Diliyanti, one of the informants, described her personal experience when she first started working in Gorontalo, where she was reprimanded by a patient for an unintentional mistake. The mistake occurred because of cultural habits brought from her hometown that were not in line with the local culture of Gorontalo. This shows that there are cultural barriers that arise due to differences in norms and customs between the two ethnic groups. Diliyanti's experience illustrates the importance of a deeper understanding of local social norms, which are often not in line with the customs brought by migrants from other regions. These cultural mistakes become obstacles in the process of communication and social interaction, as they can cause misunderstandings and tension, even though both parties have good intentions to adapt.

From these findings, it can be concluded that the main supporting factors in social interaction between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups are mutual respect, openness to cultural differences, and cultural adaptation efforts made by both parties. The friendly Gorontalo

community, accustomed to newcomers, creates a social space conducive to ethnic integration. However, the main obstacle that arises is differences in customs and cultural values, which often become a source of conflict in communication, especially at the beginning of interactions. This study highlights the importance of understanding and adapting to local norms in facilitating intercultural communication. Harmonious and open social interactions show that despite cultural differences, both ethnic groups can adapt well as long as there is an effort to respect and understand one another. These findings contribute significantly to the study of intercultural communication, especially in the context of Indonesia's multi-ethnic society.

The results show that intercultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups in Gorontalo City takes place through a dynamic process of adaptation, particularly in the use of language and cultural values. Immigrants from the Makassar ethnic group try to adapt to the Gorontalo language and dialect, even though there are fundamental differences that sometimes cause confusion, such as the different meanings of the word "kita" (we). This adaptation occurs through daily interactions, especially in the workplace and other social spaces, which enable the mastery of the local language and the formation of social closeness. In addition, respect for Gorontalo cultural norms and values, such as the use of distinctive terms of address like "nou" and "uti", demonstrates active efforts to honour and accommodate local culture in order to maintain social harmony. The obstacles encountered are mainly related to cultural differences that have not yet been fully reconciled, requiring a deeper understanding to prevent misunderstandings from escalating into conflict.

Social interaction between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups reflects convergent communication accommodation, in which both parties adjust their communication behaviour to strengthen social relations. The Gorontalo community's attitude of mutual respect and openness also facilitates the cultural adaptation process of newcomers. However, obstacles in the form of differences in norms and customs remain and must be managed continuously so that communication can run effectively and harmoniously. These findings emphasise the importance of joint efforts in accommodating differences to build inclusive and sustainable social relations in multi-ethnic communities such as Gorontalo.

Within the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed by Howard Giles (Yun Kim, 1994; Zhang & Imamura, 2017), these findings show that individuals in intercultural interactions adjust their communication behaviour, both verbally and non-verbally, to build harmonious social relationships. This adjustment process takes the form of convergence, which is adjusting one's speech and language style to be more similar to that of the interlocutor in order to create closeness and social acceptance. This adjustment occurs not only in the use of language and dialect, but also in respecting local cultural norms, such as the use of Gorontalo-specific terms of address by the Makassar community. However, there is also the potential for divergence, namely the affirmation of cultural identity through differences in language and customs, which can emerge as a barrier to communication, especially in the early stages of social interaction. This is in line with the CAT assumption that communication adjustment can vary depending on social goals and the context of interaction.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the relevance of CAT theory by demonstrating how communication accommodation can be an effective strategy in managing cultural diversity and building positive social relationships in a multi-ethnic society. The convergence process found in interactions between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic groups is very much in line with previous studies, such as those conducted by (Andini et al., 2023) on communication accommodation between the Javanese and Betawi ethnic groups, which found convergence strategies to be an effort to overcome cultural differences in the work environment. The study by Muhammad & Aggasi(2020) also reinforces this finding with a study on communication accommodation between the former East Timorese community and the Sumbawa community, which succeeded through convergent communication strategy adjustments without exaggeration. Meanwhile, this finding complements the study by Pranata & Hartati(2017) on social interaction between the Sundanese and Javanese tribes, which shows acculturation and accommodation as the main factors in creating

harmonious social relations. The similarity of these results indicates that communication accommodation strategies are a key mechanism in intercultural interactions in various Indonesian social contexts.

The practical implications of this research emphasise the importance of intercultural communication training and learning that emphasises adaptation and respect for local norms, especially in a multi-ethnic context in a foreign region. A deep understanding of communication accommodation theory can help migrants and local communities to manage cultural differences constructively and prevent potential conflicts. The weakness of this study lies in its limited focus on one geographical area and a relatively small sample, so the results may not be representative of the broader context. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the dynamics of intercultural communication using mixed methods and larger samples in various multi-ethnic areas to produce stronger and more in-depth generalisations.

IV. Conclusion

This study examines the issue of intercultural communication between the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities, with a particular focus on how communication accommodation and cultural value convergence influence their social interactions in Gorontalo City. Through a qualitative approach and case studies, this study successfully describes in depth the dynamics of communication between the two ethnic groups, which, despite their differences in language, dialect, and cultural norms, are still able to establish harmonious social relationships. The main findings of the study confirm that the communication adaptation process is convergent, whereby individuals from both ethnic groups adjust their speech style, language use, and communication behaviour to approach their interlocutors, thereby creating an inclusive and mutually respectful atmosphere of interaction. This convergence also includes respect for local cultural norms and values, such as the use of distinctive forms of address and adaptation to social customs, which contribute greatly to building mutual trust and solidarity between ethnic groups.

The significance of these findings lies in the reinforcement of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as a highly relevant theoretical framework for understanding how individuals and groups in multi-ethnic societies adapt and interact effectively. CAT explains that individuals change their speech style and communicative behaviour in an effort to build good relationships, gain social acceptance, or assert their identity. In the context of the Makassar and Gorontalo ethnic communities, this theory has proven capable of explaining the convergence phenomenon that occurs in their interactions, while also describing the communication barriers that arise due to divergence, such as differences in language and cultural norms, which remain a challenge, especially in the early stages of social encounters. Thus, this study not only enriches the literature on intercultural communication but also provides an empirical overview that is applicable to the management of cultural diversity in areas with a multi-ethnic population.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the geographical scope is limited to Gorontalo City, meaning that the findings cannot be fully generalised to other contexts that may have different socio-cultural characteristics. Therefore, further research is strongly recommended to expand the scope of the study to include various multi-ethnic regions in Indonesia, which will help identify variations and similarities in the communication accommodation strategies used in different social contexts. Future research should also explore the dimensions of nonverbal communication and the influence of social structures, such as power, status, and social identity, in the process of interethnic communication accommodation. Thus, a more holistic and applicable understanding can be obtained, which is not only beneficial for academics but also for social practitioners, policymakers, and the wider community in managing cultural diversity effectively and harmoniously.

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