



# Analysis of Social Penetration of Bajo and Bugis Ethnic Marriage Couples (Interpersonal Communication Study)

Nini Kasmini<sup>1</sup>, Tuti Bahfiarti<sup>1</sup>, and Jeanny Maria Fatimah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia  
nini kasmini06@gmail.com

**Abstract.** This research explains the process of interpersonal communication among marriage partners from the Bajo and Bugis ethnic groups and the factors that hinder interpersonal communication between Bajo and Bugis married couples. The study was conducted in the Bajoe subdistrict of Bone Regency in South Sulawesi. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The study participants were selected using purposive sampling, chosen based on specific criteria indicating their competence to answer the researcher's questions. Primary data was obtained through observations and in-depth interviews with the participants, while secondary data was collected through a review of relevant literature such as books, journals, and other sources related to the research topic. The results of this research indicate that interpersonal communication between the Bajo and Bugis ethnic groups is generally effective. They easily blend with each other due to their shared religion, and they do not perceive issues with their respective cultures, as their cultures are not significantly different. Additionally, they continue to introduce their own cultures and languages to their children. However, there are factors that hinder their interpersonal communication, which include their own ethnocentrism.

**Keywords:** Social Penetration, Interpersonal Communication, Bajo Ethnic.

## 1 Introduction

Communication, which is an essential aspect of human life, serves as a fundamental prerequisite for social activities. When two or more individuals meet, communication occurs through the exchange of messages, facts, ideas, opinions, or feelings from one person to another [1]. By engaging in communication, humans can adapt and establish positive relationships with others, as no individual lives without needing assistance from others. Consequently, through communication, individuals can seek assistance from others belonging to different groups, ethnicities, races, or cultures. Therefore, it is not uncommon for people to interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The process of interaction within cultural diversity allows for intercultural communication to become a daily phenomenon [2].

Intercultural communication is the communication that takes place among individuals with different cultural backgrounds, which can encompass differences in ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, or perhaps a combination of all these distinctions. According Andrea L. Rich and Dennis M. Ogawa [3] state that intercultural communication is the communication between people of differing cultures, such as between ethnicities, races, ethnic groups, and social classes.

One clear form of intercultural communication activity is evident in cross-cultural marriages because through communication, we can fulfill our emotional needs and enhance our mental well-being. We learn the meanings of love, affection, intimacy, sympathy, respect, pride, and even envy, as well as hatred. Through communication, we can experience these various emotional qualities and compare them with one another. Therefore, it is impossible for us to understand love without also knowing hatred [4].

In Indonesia, cross-cultural and cross-ethnic marriages are not a new phenomenon and have been happening for a long time. This is exemplified in one village in Bajoe, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, where such marriages have occurred. These marriages were prompted by the coexistence of two distinct ethnic groups in the village, namely the Bajo and Bugis.

The Bajo ethnic group, often referred to as the sea nomads or sea gypsies, is well-known for their unique way of life living primarily on boats and being considered nomadic [5]. Throughout their history, the Bajo people found it challenging to integrate with mainland communities. For most of their lives, they rarely interacted with land-dwelling populations because their activities were predominantly at sea [6]. Their boats served as their homes and were highly valued. On these boats, they conducted all activities, including eating, sleeping, religious rituals, playing for children, and sometimes even childbirth. They only settled near the coast during specific seasons when the waters were calm to repair their boats and fishing equipment, engage in social activities like weddings, circumcisions, burials, and other ceremonies. However, as time has passed, the Bajo people have gradually settled in coastal and sea areas. One such settlement is in Baoje Village, Bone Regency, where they have been residing since around the 1950s.

In addition to the Bajo ethnic group, there are Bugis people living in the Tese-but Village. The presence of the Bugis ethnic group in the area is mainly due to their being the majority ethnic group in Bone Regency. This factor has contributed to the occurrence of marriages between these two ethnic groups. Despite the different cultural backgrounds of these two ethnic groups, the Bajo and Bugis marriages in the village have been successful and enduring. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand the process of interpersonal communication among Bajo and Bugis couples in cross-cultural marriages.

## 2 Research Method

This research is designed using a qualitative descriptive approach. Informant selection is determined through purposive sampling, where the researcher predefines the characteristics of informants before going into the field. In this study, informant selection

is based on pre-established criteria, which are as follows: Married couples, with the husband being of Bajo ethnicity and the wife being of Bugis ethnicity, who are in cross-ethnic marriages. The data collection method used is observation, selecting two couples or four informants for in-depth interviews on each research subject with the aim of obtaining relevant information. Data analysis in this research follows the model developed by Miles and Huberman [7] which includes four steps: Data Collection, Data Reduction, and Drawing Conclusions.

### 3 Result and Discussion

Interpersonal communication is highly essential in marriages between these two ethnicities, as exemplified by a married couple with initials K and MU. They have been blessed with a son and a daughter and reside in Kelurahan Bajoe. K belongs to the Bajo ethnic group, while MU, his wife, is of Bugis ethnicity. Additionally, there is another couple with initials AA, who is of Bugis ethnicity, and MA, who is of Bajo ethnicity. Given their different ethnic backgrounds, there have been certain processes that they have gone through, from the initial stages of getting to know each other to eventually deciding to get married.

According to social penetration theory, relationships progress from the shallowest levels, which are non-intimate, towards the deepest, more personal levels. It all starts with an introduction, during the initial stages when both couples of different ethnicities, the Bajo and Bugis, used the Indonesian language with the Bone dialect as their means of communication. However, it doesn't mean that the Bajo ethnicity didn't understand the Bugis language; in fact, they did and could use it, given that the Bajo language consists of 12 dialects. So, the Bajo ethnicity has the capability to understand multiple languages. They chose to use the Indonesian language with the Bone dialect because it was considered more neutral.

The communication between these couples drew them closer, leading them to start using the Bugis language as they considered themselves to be closer. The communication was mainly interpersonal, involving shallow conversations as well as sharing personal details and confiding in each other. As a result, their communication was highly effective, whether through media or face-to-face interactions, involving instantaneous feedback, as Joseph A. Devito [8] describes interpersonal communication as a process of sending messages between two people or a small group of people with some effects and immediate feedback.

As they communicated more frequently, they became eager to enter a deeper stage, which is marriage. During the wedding planning process, discussions took place between two families from different backgrounds, involving matters like determining the dowry, "uang pana'i," auspicious wedding dates, and more. In this aspect, they engaged in negotiations, especially given their different ethnic backgrounds. However, some couples did not find this to be problematic due to the similarities in their customs and cultures, allowing them to maintain their respective traditions.

When they officially became husband and wife, they started to understand each other's personalities through verbal and non-verbal communication. They primarily used the Bugis language for their communication, as the Bajo ethnicity had the capa-

bility to use it. However, the Bugis, even though they had been living with their Bugis spouses for several years, were not proficient in using the Bajo language. They could understand only a few words or phrases. Their children predominantly used the Bugis language due to their surroundings and the common use of the Bugis language, except when they entered the coastal area within Bajoe Village, inhabited by the Bajo ethnicity. In that area, the children were taught the Bajo language by one of the couples, with the intention of preserving the Bajo language and preventing it from disappearing due to the numerous cross-ethnic marriages, particularly between the Bajo and other ethnic groups, including the Bugis.

Behind the successful interpersonal communication in these couples with different backgrounds, there are likely factors that hinder their interpersonal communication, including their ethnocentrism. According to Liliweri [9] ethnocentrism is the belief that one's culture or ethnic group is superior to others. The ethnocentric attitudes displayed by these couples occur because they tend to prioritize or yield to the customs and norms of their respective ethnic backgrounds. This is particularly evident in matters that are considered taboo (pamali) and traditions. For instance, in the Bugis culture, it is prohibited to make purchases on Friday nights, while this restriction does not exist in the Bajo culture. Additionally, there are various ethics and taboos related to sea voyages that are more prevalent in the Bajo culture because the Bajo are known as sea nomads. The Bajo culture also includes certain symbols that must be present at important events like a child's circumcision ceremony. However, these ethnocentric tendencies are balanced by the couples' tolerance and their willingness to compromise for the sake of their marital harmony and family life.

## 4 Conclusion

The process of interpersonal communication between Bajo and Bugis ethnic married couples, particularly in the Bajoe Village of Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, is very good and harmonious through aspects of religion, culture, and language. In terms of religion, there is a similarity in the religion of both couples, which is Islam. In terms of culture, there are only minor differences between the two ethnic groups, which do not hinder the communication between the couples. Regarding language, their languages are different, but Bajo individuals are capable of understanding and using the Bugis ethnic language. However, one obstacle to interpersonal communication for Bajo and Bugis ethnic married couples is ethnocentrism. Nevertheless, they can overcome this by being tolerant and respecting each other's partners.

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