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Cultural Variations in Physical Appearance, Paralanguage, and Olfactics During Eid al-Fitr: An Intercultural Communication Perspective

Sekar Swasti Rahayu Ningtyas[1*], Erna Iftanti[2]
[1-2]English Language Education Department, State Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia

Corresponding Author*Email: lovelysekar949@gmail.com

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Abstract
Nonverbal communication is an essential part of human interaction because it conveys meaning beyond spoken language. However, the interpretation of nonverbal messages is closely influenced by cultural values, traditions, and social norms. This study aims to analyze the cultural variations of three aspects of nonverbal communication, physical appearance and dress, paralanguage, and olfactics, during the Eid al-Fitr celebration in East Java from an intercultural communication perspective. This research employed a qualitative approach using the library research method. Data were collected from books, scholarly jour nals, and other academic sources related to nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, and Indonesian cultural practices. The findings indicate that nonverbal communication during Eid al-Fitr reflects local cultural traditions in East Java. These variations can be observed through clothing choices, tone of voice during greetings and family interactions, the use of perfume, the aroma of traditional Eid foods, and cultural practices that are still maintained by some families, such as using incense to honor deceased relatives. These differences demonstrate that nonverbal communication is closely connected to local cultural values and traditions. Therefore, understanding cultural variations in nonverbal communication can help minimize misunderstandings and promote more effective intercultural communication.

Keywords: *Nonverbal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Physical Appearance And Dress, Par-Alanguage, Olfactics, Eid Al-Fitr*.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human life because it enables people to exchange information, express emotions, and establish social relationships. in everyday interactions, communication is not lim ited to spoken or written language but also involves various forms of nonverbal communication. Facial expressions, gestures, physical appearance, tone of voice, and even scents can convey messages that complement or reinforce verbal communication. In many situations, nonverbal communication provides additional meaning that helps people

interpret messages more accurately and understand the intentions of others (Burgoon et al., 2022).

Nonverbal communication is closely connected to culture because its meaning is shaped by the values, beliefs, and social norms of a particular community. The same nonverbal behavior may be interpreted differently depending on the cultural background of those involved in the interaction. For example, ways of dressing, vocal expressions, and personal appearance may symbolize respect in one culture but have different interpretations in another. Therefore, understanding cultural differences in nonverbal commu nication is an essential part of intercultural communication, particularly in societies with diverse cultural traditions (Samovar et al., 2025).

Intercultural communication has become increasingly important in today's multicultural society. The ability to understand differences in communication styles helps individuals build harmonious relationships and reduce the possibility of misunderstanding. Recent studies have shown that effective intercultural commu-nication involves not only language proficiency but also the ability to recognize and interpret nonverbal cues that are influenced by cultural backgrounds. Consequently, nonverbal communication should be viewed as an integral component of successful intercultural interaction rather than merely as a complement to verbal communication.

One cultural event that demonstrates the significance of nonverbal communication is Eid al-Fitr. Besides marking the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr is also a cultural celebration that strengthens social relationships among family members, relatives, neighbors, and the wider community. During this celebration, people communicate through various nonverbal behaviors that reflect togetherness, respect, gratitude, and for-giveness. These forms of communication become meaningful because they are practiced within specific cultural contexts and are influenced by traditions that have developed over generations (Patterson et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, Eid al-Fitr is not only understood as a religious celebration but also as an important cultural event that brings together religious values and local traditions (Ridwan & Zain, 2021). In East Java, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr is accompanied by various local traditions that contribute to the diversity of nonverbal communication, Although the religious meaning of Eid al-Fitr remains the same, cultural practices may differ from one community to another. These differences demonstrate that culture influences how individuals express and interpret nonverbal messages during social interactions. Such cultural diversity makes Eid al-Fitr an interesting context for examining nonverbal communication from an intercultural communication perspective (Dewi & Arifuddin, 2021).

Previous studies have explored nonverbal communication and intercultural communication in various contexts, including education, business, and social interaction. Other studies have discussed specific aspects of nonverbal communication, such as physical appearance, paralanguage, and olfactics, as important elements in conveying meaning during interpersonal commu nication (Abduazizova, 2022), However, research that specifically examines these three aspects within the context of Eid al-Fitr celebrations in East Java remains limited. Most existing studies discuss nonverbal communication from a broader perspective without focusing on how local cultural traditions shape the use and interpretation of nonverbal communication during this religious celebration (Weda et al., 2021).

Based on this research gap, the present study focuses on three aspects of nonverbal communication: physical appearance and dress, paralanguage, and offactics during Eid al-Fitr celebrations in East java. These aspects were selected because they represent visual, vocal, and

sensory forms of nonverbal communication that are closely associated with cultural practices during the celebration. By examining these aspects from an intercultural communication perspective, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how local culture influences the meaning and practice of nonverbal communication. It is expected that the findings will enrich the discussion of intercultural communication while encouraging greater appreciation of cultural diversity in everyday social interactions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using the library research method to examine nonver bal communication during Eid al-Fitr from an intercultural communication perspective. The study focused on three aspects of nonverbal communication: physical appearance and dress, paralanguage, and offactics within the cultural context of East Java. Data were collected from various academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and other relevant scholarly publications discussing nonverbal communication, intercultural communication, and Indonesian cultural traditions.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The researcher identified, catego-rized, and interpreted information related to the three aspects of nonverbal communication by comparing findings from previous studies with cultural practices observed in the celebration of Eid al-Fitr in East Java. The analysis aimed to explain how local cultural traditions influence the meaning and use of nonverbal communication during the celebration. Through this approach, the study provides a comprehensive un derstanding of the relationship between culture and nonverbal communication based on existing academic terature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Physical Appearance and Dress

Physical appearance and dress are important aspects of nonverbal communication because they commu nicate identity, respect, and social values without the use of spoken language. The way people present themselves through clothing, grooming, and overall appearance often reflects cultural norms and expec tations. During religious and cultural celebrations, physical appearance becomes a meaningful form of communication that expresses respect for the occasion and for the people taking part in it (Burgoon et al., 2021).

During Eid al-Fitr in East Java, wearing clean and modest clothing is a common tradition practiced by many Muslim familles. Although purchasing new clothes is not a religious obligation, many people choose to wear their best attire to celebrate the occasion. This practice symbolizes gratitude after completing the month of Ramadan and demonstrates respect toward family members, relatives, and guests. In many families, parents also encourage their children to dress neatly before attending the Eid prayer and participating in family gatherings, reinforcing values of discipline and respect through appearance.

Another common practice is wearing coordinated or similar outfits among family members. Some families intentionally choose matching colors or clothing styles when celebrating Eid al-Fitr or taking family pho tographs. Although this practice is relatively modern, it has become a visual expression of togetherness and family unity. Without saying anything, coordinated clothing communicates a sense of belonging and strengthens the emotional bond among family members.

Besides wearing coordinated outfits, many families also prepare their clothes several days before Eid al-Fitr. This preparation reflects the excitement of welcoming one of the most important celebrations for Muslims. In my hometown, parents often remind their children to prepare their clothes, shoes, and other personal belongings before the Eid prayer. Although this may seem like a simple activity, it teaches responsibility and respect for the occasion. These habits demonstrate that physical appearance is not only related to fashion but also reflects family values and the desire to create a positive impression during social interactions (Marta et al., 2022).

Physical appearance also becomes meaningful during the tradition of sungkeman, which is still widely practiced by many families in East Java. During this tradition, younger family members greet their parents and elders while asking for forgiveness as a sign of respect and humility. Although the practice may vary among families, the values conveyed through physical appearance and body language remain similar. In addition to these respectful behaviors, physical appearance also plays an important role during Eid al-Fitr celebrations. Wearing neat and appropriate clothing complements this interaction because appearance functions as a nonverbal expression of sincerity and appreciation toward older family members. In this context, clothing does not merely serve an aesthetic purpose but also supports the cultural meaning conveyed through the interaction.

From an intercultural communication perspective, these practices demonstrate that the meaning of phys-Ical appearance is influenced by local cultural values rather than religious teachings alone. While Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr throughout Indonesia and in many other countries, the ways people express respect through clothing may differ according to regional traditions and community customs. Therefore, physical appearance and dress during Eid al-Fitr should be understood not only as personal choices but also as forms of nonverbal communication that reflect cultural identity, social relationships, and shared values within the community (Carrard, 2021).

Paralanguage

Paralanguage refers to vocal elements that accompany spoken language, including tone of voice, pitch, volume, speech rate, and intonation. These vocal characteristics influence how messages are interpreted and often communicate emotions and attitudes that cannot be expressed through words alone. In intercultural communication, understanding paralanguage is important because the same words may convey different meanings depending on how they are spoken (Abduazizova, 2022). During Eid al-Fitr in East Java, paralanguage plays a significant rolle in expressing respect, sincerity, and emotional closeness. When exchanging greetings such as "Minal aidin wal faizin, mohon maaf lahir dan batin, people generally use a softer and calmer tone of voice. The gentle intonation reflects humility and a genuine intention to ask for and offer forgiveness. As a result, the emotional meaning of the greeting is conveyed not only through the words themselves but also through the way they are spoken. Paralanguage is also evident during family gatherings, particularly when younger family members commu-nicate with parents, grandparents, and other elders. In many Javanese families, conversations during Eid al-Fitr are delivered with a respectful tone and slower pace of speech. Some families also use Javanese Krama, a more polite level of the Javanese language, when speaking to older relatives. The combination of respectful language and appropriate vocal expression strengthens the message of politeness and reinforces cultural values that emphasize respect for elders. Besides wearing coordinated outfits, many families also prepare their clothes several days before Eid al-Fitr. This preparation reflects the excitement of welcoming one of the most important celebrations for Muslims. in my hometown, parents often remind their children to prepare their clothes, shoes,

and other personal belongings before the Eid prayer. Although this may seem like a simple activity, it teaches responsibility and respect for the occasion. These habits demonstrate that physical appearance is not only related to fashion but also reflects family values and the desire to create a positive impression during social interactions.

Another example of paralanguage can be observed during the Eid prayer and the chanting of takbir Differences in rhythm, volume, and vocal expression create a solemn yet joyful atmosphere that marks the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. Although the words of the takbir are the same, the way they are recited contributes to the emotional experience of the community and reinforces a shared sense of gratitude and togetherness. During these interactions, people usually greet each other with warm smiles, cheerful tones, and enthusiastic expressions after the Eid prayer. These nonverbal behaviors help convey sincerity, happiness, and respect when meeting family members, relatives, and neighbors. Although these expressions may appear simple, they play an important role in creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere during Eid al-Fitr celebrations (Manokara et al., 2021).

From an intercultural communication perspective, these examples demonstrate that paralanguage is shaped not only by language but also by local cultural traditions. Vocal expressions used during Eid al-Fitr In East Java reflect social norms regarding politeness, respect, and family relationships. Therefore, under-standing paralanguage helps explain how nonverbal communication supports interpersonal interactions and preserves cultural values during one of the most important religious celebrations in the region.

Olfactics

Scent in terms of non-verbal communication is referred to as olactics. Even though it is often less considered compared to other types of non-verbal communication, the smell is able to affect feelings, memories, and social interactions. There are certain smells that are closely related to cultural traditions and are capable of creating unique experiences through means of non-verbal communication, in terms of intercultural communication. perception of odors depends on cultural practices and individual experience of a certain group (Damon et al., 2021).

Smell becomes a significant part of the festival during the time of Eid al-Fitr in East java. People prefer wearing perfume before going to the Eid prayers or visiting their families. Pleasant smell does not only Improve one's appearance but also represents the ideas of deanness, respect to oneself, and respect to others. Even though it is quite popular to wear perfume during the mentioned holiday, different fragrances might be preferred depending on individual tastes and traditions (Majid, 2021).

Another factor that influences the atmosphere at the time of Eid al-Fitr is the scent of the traditional foods that people prepare for the occasion in order to have a feast with their relatives. The smells of ketupat, opor ayam, chicken rendang, traditional cookies such as nastar and kastengel, and many other homemade dishes, create an inviting atmosphere to welcome visiting relatives and guests. The smell of the food is associated with emotions of happiness, comfort, and unity, as these smells are connected to one's childhood memories of yearly celebrations of family feasts. Therefore, one more non-verbal symbol used for communication between relatives is scent.

In some communities in East java, for example, in my neighborhood, there are families that maintain a custom of burning incense in order to remember their deceased family members during Eid al-Fitr, Usually, this tradition is complemented with a family custom when food is placed next to the burning Incense. The tradition is observed not by all Muslims but only by

certain families, as it is not an obligatory ritual for Eid al-Fitr. Therefore, the scent of incense acquires additional meaning of the remembrance and respect for loved ones. For many people, certain scents experienced during Eid al-Fitr often become lasting memories associated with the celebration. The familiar aroma of traditional dishes, perfume, or incense can remind individuals of previous family gatherings and create a strong emotional connection with the occasion.

These results show that olfactics for Eid al-Fitr goes far beyond the experience of fragrant smells. Specific smells convey cultural meanings, build social ties, and help maintain cultural traditions that are still followed today in local communities. Thus, olfactics show that nonverbal communication can be conveyed not only visually and orally but also through the sense of smell, reflecting the culture of a particular community.

Cultural Variations of Eid al-Fitr Tradision in East Java

Although Eid al-Fitr is celebrated with the same religious purpose by Muslims, local traditions influence how the celebration is carried out in different communities. These cultural variations demonstrate that nonverbal communication is shaped not only by religious values but also by customs that have been preserved within families and local societies. As a result, similar celebrations may be expressed through different cultural practices while maintaining the same underlying meaning (Puppel & Rozpendowska, 2021).

Another example of such variety can be seen in the tradition of distributing berkat, which still exists in several parts of East Java. One example of this variation is the tradition of distributing berkat, which is still practiced in several areas of East Java. Local traditions are often maintained through everyday interactions between family members and the surrounding community. These practices continue to be preserved because they are considered part of cultural identity and are passed down from one generation to another (Masduki et al., 2021). This situation is also reflected in my hometown, where the berkat tradition is generally distributed after the Eid prayer as a way of expressing gratitude and sharing blessings with relatives and neighbors.

However, in another area of East Java where the author's grandmother lives, the same tradition is carried out one day before the Eid prayer. Although the timing differs, both practices share the same purpose of strengthening social relationships and encouraging togetherness within the community. Besides the differences in the distribution of berkat, each family may preserve other local traditions that have been passed down from previous generations. Some families spend more time visiting relatives on the first day of Eid, while others prioritize gathering with neighbors before visiting extended family. These differences show that cultural practices continue to develop according to the traditions maintained within each family. Although the forms of celebration may vary, they all reflect the same values of togeth erness, gratitude, and maintaining good relationships with others.

These differences illustrate that cultural practices can vary even within the same province. From an inter-cultural communication perspective, understanding these local variations helps people appreciate cultural diversity without assuming that one tradition is more appropriate than another. Instead, such differences represent the richness of East Java's cultural heritage and demonstrate that nonverbal communication is closely connected to local customs that continue to evolve across generations (Dewi & Arifuddin, 2021).

Intercultural Communication Perspective

The findings of this study indicate that physical appearance and dress, paralanguage, and olfactics are closely influenced by the cultural traditions surrounding Eid al-Fitr in East java. These forms of nonverbal communication function not only as complements to verbal messages but also

as symbols that express respect, gratitude, togetherness, and cultural identity. Their meanings are understood through shared cultural experiences that have been maintained within families and local communities, From an intercultural communication perspective, recognizing cultural differences in nonverbal communcation is essential for developing mutual understanding and avoiding misinterpretation. Even within the same province, communities may celebrate Eid al-Fitr through different local traditions while preserving the same religious values. This finding suggests that cultural diversity should be understood as a source of social richness rather than as a barrier to communication. Previous studies suggest that local traditions function as cultural symbols that help people understand shared meanings during social interactions (Menggo et al., 2021).

Therefore, understanding these traditions can reduce misunderstandings when people from different cultural backgrounds celebrate Eid al-Fitr together. It also encourages people to become more open to cultural differences and appreciate the unique ways in which communities express respect, gratitude, and togetherness. Based on the findings of this study, nonverbal communication is closely influenced by local customs and family traditions that continue to be practiced across generations. Although the forms of these traditions may vary from one family to another, they share the same purpose of strengthening family relationships, preserving cultural values, and creating meaningful social interactions during the celebration. By recognizing these similarities and differences, individuals can communicate more effectively while respecting the cultural identity of others.

Overall, this study demonstrates that nonverbal communication during Lid al-Fitr connot be separated from the cultural context in which it occurs. By understanding how local traditions influence physical appearance, vocal expression, and sensory experiences, individuals can develop greater cultural awareness and build more respectful interactions within culturally diverse communities. This also highlights the importance of integrating local cultural perspectives into the study of intercultural communication.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that nonverbal communication plays an important role in the celebration of Eid al-Fitr in East Java. The findings show that physical appearance and dress, paralanguage, and offactics are closely connected to local cultural traditions and serve as meaningful ways of expressing respect, gratitude. togetherness, and cultural identity.

Although the religious meaning of Eid al-Fitr remains the same, the ways in which these nonverbal messages are expressed may vary across communities due to differences in local customs and traditions. Under-standing cultural variations in nonverbal communication is essential for promoting effective intercultural communication. Recognizing and respecting local traditions can help minimize misunderstandings while encouraging greater appreciation of cultural diversity. Future studies are encouraged to explore other aspects of nonverbal communication or compare Eid al-Fitr traditions in different regions of Indonesia to provide a broader understanding of cultural practices in intercultural communication.

The findings also indicate that local Eid traditions continue to evolve while maintaining their essential values of gratitude, togetherness, and mutual respect within the community (Ramadhani & Suyato, 2025). Although every family may celebrate Eid al-

Fitr in different ways, these differences should be appreciated as part of Indonesia's rich cultural diversity. Based on my observations, the traditions practiced in East Java demonstrate that nonverbal communication is closely connected to local customs and everyday. social interactions. Understanding these differences can help people communicate more respectfully and strengthen relationships within society. Overall, this study shows that cultural differences in nonverbal communication during Eid al-Fitr should be understood and respected, as they enrich social interactions and reflect the unique identity of each community.

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