

# The Communication of Customs Officers in Serving Communities Carrying Imported Goods at the Airport

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the cross-cultural communication of customs officers in providing services to the public carrier of imported goods at Kualanamu International Airport. The paradigm uses constructivism with qualitative methods through in-depth interviews and literature studies of 8 respondents. The results showed that communication took place verbally and nonverbally, effectively, with excellent service to foreign and local passengers carrying imported goods at KNO. Elements such as understanding different cultural awareness, motivation, mindfulness, readiness, having good intentions, empathizing, positive thinking, conducting two-way communication by listening, being patient, explaining with messages that are easily understood, and being able to overcome language-related barriers.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Communication, Customs Officers, Community Services, Imported Goods, Kualanamu.

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a basic human activity because humans cannot be separated from communicating with one another. Communication between two or more people contains the potential for cultural differences because the people who communicate are people of different cultures in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, nation, race, customs and so on. Cross-cultural communication, which consists of people who differ from one another when interacting, cannot be

separated from conflicts and communication barriers. Even though sometimes what is conveyed by the communicator is good, it could be that the communicant's response is not good. Things like this are obstacles to cross-cultural communication.

This is also experienced by customs officers in serving the people carrying imported goods at international airports which affect the quality of services provided. Customs officers are often unconscious when dealing with passengers of different cultural backgrounds, causing anxiety and uncertainty in interactions which leads to failure to communicate. Communication failures that occur are caused by various things including cultural differences, communication styles, and language in providing services to passengers. The reality of communication failure between customs officers and passengers has been found in various media, including television, social media, and documented in magazines.

Customs officers as state apparatus assigned to the Ministry of Finance have a significant role in Indonesia in terms of serving and supervising customs and excise in Indonesia. Therefore, to create a positive image towards the government, customs officers are required to have a good understanding and ability to communicate across cultures because communication is a determining factor and the main key in providing excellent service to passengers.

The Kualanamu Customs Supervision and Service Office (KPPBC TMP B Kualanamu) is one of the government institutions that provides services to work units, both vertical agencies under government ministries / agencies and agencies under the auspices of the North Sumatra Regional Customs Office which have duties and functions in the customs and excise sector in providing services to international arrival passengers at Kualanamu International Airport.

Kualanamu International Airport is one of the airports with the largest flow of foreign passengers in and out of countries such as Bangladesh and China who cannot use Indonesian and English to communicate. In addition, local passengers who come to Kualanamu Airport also come from various tribes so they have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is necessary to have the intercultural communication skills of officers in serving both local passengers and foreign passengers who come to the airport.

Based on the foregoing, the researchers are interested in conducting this research which aims to analyze the cross-cultural communication of customs officials when providing services to the public carrying imported goods, both local passengers and foreign passengers at Kualanamu International Airport.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research was conducted for two months, April-May 2020. The research paradigm used in this research is the constructivism paradigm. The research was conducted using qualitative methods and data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and literature study.

The research informants were 4 (four) customs officers and 4 (four) people who brought imported goods at Kualanamu International Airport (KNO). Informants were selected using purposive sampling technique with inclusion criteria: informants experienced firsthand situations or events related to the research topic, namely

experiencing the process of forming cross-cultural communication between Customs and Excise officers in serving the people carrying imported goods, informants were able to explore and explain their experiences consciously when they interact or communicate across cultures and experiences relevant to the research, informants are willing and have sufficient or sufficient time to be interviewed and provide information and are willing to publish the results of this research.

The research was started by conducting a literature study first related to the research topic. Then the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with informants via telephone and recorded the results of the interviews using a tape recorder. Interviews were conducted via telephone because at the time of the study, there was a global COVID-19 pandemic which limited researchers from communicating with informants due to the government's PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) and WFH (Working from Home) policies.

The data analysis technique used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman's analysis which was carried out in four stages, starting from the stage of providing data, reducing or selecting data, displaying or presenting data, and drawing conclusions. Then the researcher performed a triangulation technique to ensure the relevance and validity of the research data. Source triangulation is carried out to internal parties, namely superiors or leaders of customs officers serving at Kualanamu International Airport as well as external parties, namely quarantine functional officers and journalists on duty at Kualanamu International Airport.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings in the study show that all 8 (eight) informants said that they understand and are aware that they must be able to communicate well, so that the services provided and the communication that occur can be effective. The awareness

of customs officers serving passengers with different cultures can affect the smoothness of communication with the passengers being served.

This situation creates high motivation for customs officers to serve foreign and local passengers well, so that when serving, passengers can feel comfortable and customs officers can provide the best service to passengers. All passengers also said that the officers served well and had the knowledge of communicating to serve passengers well.

According to them, good communication is carried out by officers, it can provide comfort to them when served. Conversely, if the officers are not able to communicate properly, the passengers served will also feel uncomfortable and can cause conflict.

Based on the results of the above research, if it is related to the theory stated by Soelhi (2015: 30) that effective communication is carried out in the realm of cross-cultural communication, it can be said that it is effective if the communicator tries to create awareness of the communicant so that he is willing to renew the relationship between the communicator and the communicant, creating communication management that is effective, the birth of a spirit of friendship and solidarity so that there is a division of roles and a willingness to avoid conflict. Researchers formulate that awareness of communicating to people of different cultures can make communication effective and researchers agree with this that effective communication occurs because of the awareness of communicators in communicating to passengers of different cultures.

Customs officers in serving said that in communicating they were always able to think positively, empathize with, and listen carefully to what passengers said when serving. As stated by the whole officer. Serving passengers is very important to communicate by staying positive, empathizing, and listening to what is conveyed by passengers, so that the services

provided can be felt properly by passengers. This was also felt by all passengers, who said that the officers had served well, remained positive, spoke well, had empathy, listened to what was conveyed by passengers and did not feel empowered as an officer.

In line with the theory expressed by De Vito (Ridwan, 2016: 44) which states that the effectiveness of communication is largely determined by one's attitude, namely; (a) Openness includes: 1) disclosing all personal information to the communicant and receiving all relevant information about communication and from the communicant in the context of interpersonal interaction, 2) the communicator's willingness to react honestly to messages coming from the communicant, and 3) think and feel that what a communicator states is his responsibility to the communicant in certain situations; (b) Feelings of empathy, namely the ability of a communicator to accept and understand others, as he accepts himself. So, he thinks, feels, acts towards others as he thinks, feels, and acts towards himself; (c) Positive feelings, namely the feeling of a communicator that the person, the communicant, and the situations that involve both are very supportive. (d) Providing support, namely a situation in which the communicator and the communicant are free from an atmosphere of threat, not criticized, and challenged; and (e) Maintaining a balance is a fair atmosphere between communicator and communicant in terms of opportunities to think, feel and act.

When serving passengers, informants who are officers said that in communicating they always have good intentions to serve passengers well, are patient in serving passengers, communicate in two directions, explain in easy to understand language and have good knowledge when serving. as conveyed by the entire officer. Serving passengers is very important to communicate with good intentions, be patient, and communicate in

two directions, namely listening to what is conveyed by passengers so that the services provided can provide comfort for passengers. This is also felt by all passengers, who say that the officers serve well, are patient, friendly, courteous, communication is two-way and in language that is easy to understand in accordance with the principles of cross-cultural communication expressed (Soelhi, 2015: 30).

Cross-cultural communication is the process of exchanging thoughts and meanings between people of different cultures. Cross-cultural communication occurs when there is communication between people of different nationalities (international), between ethnic groups, racial groups, or language communities.

Cross-cultural communication can also be interpreted as an exchange of meanings in the form of symbols carried out by two people with different cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural communication occurs when the source of the message is a member of a culture and the recipient of the message is a member of another culture (Soelhi, 2015: 2). Customs officials as a whole are aware that the communication that occurs is in the context of cross-cultural communication.

This is because the communication carried out when serving passengers at the airport are people who come from various cultures, so that when interacting, customs officers understand that there are differences in meaning in communicating. Culture and communication cannot be separated, because culture is the foundation of communication. So that if the culture is diverse, then the communication practices will also vary (Sihabudin, Ahmad: 2013: 20).

Gudykunst and Kim (2003) revealed that a person's communication competence is important in the context of communication with different cultures, namely the existence of motivation, knowledge, and skills. Motivation is defined as the willingness to communicate

appropriately and effectively with others, knowledge is divided into knowledge about group differences, knowledge of personal similarities, and knowledge of alternative interpretations. Skills or skills start from skills to be able to be aware (mindful) in communication across cultures, ability to process anxiety, ability to empathize, ability to adapt behavior, ability to make accurate explanations and predictions (Turistiati, 2019: 47).

The results showed that all officers understand that the knowledge of customs officers when communicating across cultures is very important, because if the officers do not understand communicating well to passengers of different cultures, it can cause obstacles in communicating when serving passengers, such as inability to use foreign languages.

In its use and function, verbal communication uses language. Language is a core human interaction. Through language, someone learns cultural values and cultural behavior. Language is an important aspect of cross-cultural communication (Samovar, 2010: 265).

Hammer (1987) in Soelhi (2015: 31) defines three central themes that can support the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, namely: communication skills, ability to adapt to intercultural pressures, and the ability to build intercultural relations.

This ability does not present itself in a person but through the learning process, the process of realizing that communication is in touch with other people from different cultures. If this awareness does not grow in him, he will have difficulty communicating with people of different cultures. Soelhi (2015: 5) says that basically communication carried out by everyone expects the same goal, or it can be said that the communication carried out can create effective communication, namely communication that has similarities in the meaning of messages that occur during communication.

Based on the research results found and based on information obtained from the triangulation of section heads, sub-officers, quarantine officials, journalists, all informants know that in the cross-cultural communication process, customs officers serving passengers already have knowledge, motivation, intention, empathy, listening, positive thinking, readiness to serve, and awareness in communicating across cultures to be able to provide good service. If this is related to the theory stated by Gudykunst and Kim in Turistiati (2019: 47), one's communication competence becomes important in the context of communication with different cultures, namely the existence of motivation, knowledge, and skills, mindfulness in communication with different cultures, abilities to cultivate anxiety, ability to empathize, ability to adapt behavior, ability to make accurate explanations and predictions. So researchers agree that this is needed in providing excellent service (service excellence) to foreign and local passengers at Kualanamu International Airport.

Verbal communication style (language) of customs officers based on research results in serving foreign passengers can be done well. Officers are able to communicate using foreign languages, such as English. If this is related to theory, researchers agree with what Byram expressed in (Turistiati, 2019: 7) that communication competence is a person's ability to communicate using a foreign language, where mastery of foreign languages and cultural understanding of individuals who use foreign languages are things that to be paramount in successful communication.

Researchers formulate that customs officers in carrying out cross-cultural communication need to realize that the verbal communication style (language) is important. Researchers agree with what Ridwan (2016: 154) expressed that without language, humans cannot communicate. Language plays an important role directly as

a form of statement and exchange of thoughts or views about others.

Researchers also found that all customs officials realized the importance of a good verbal and nonverbal communication style to serve local and foreign people who brought imported goods at Kualanamu International Airport. Officers understand good knowledge in communicating verbally and nonverbally to passengers of different cultures, in order to provide the best service when serving passengers.

This is as expressed by the officer, that when communicating to serve passengers they communicate with a good communication style by greeting good morning / afternoon / evening / evening, father or mother, able to speak foreign English, use polite words by asking permission to passengers to check their luggage, say thank you, apologize and with a smiley gesture, use their hands to invite or direct the way out when serving passengers, have a neat appearance, and the communication distance is not too close. All passengers also feel that the officers' verbal and nonverbal communication styles have been carried out well.

Communication style is the way we talk; including the words we choose, the fluency, speed, and intonation of our voice, which will affect the symbols we use, namely verbal or non-verbal symbols depending on the context of the ongoing communication. (Lubis, 2018: 127). Communication style is the way each individual sends and receives messages to other individuals. Communication style describes how we behave when we send and receive messages (Liliweri, 2017: 254).

It is in line with other theories which state that verbal and nonverbal communication are different in many ways, but the two forms of communication often work together or in other words, nonverbal communication has a specific function in verbal communication. The main function of nonverbal communication is as a repeater of what is said verbally, as a complement to verbal messages, as a substitute for

representing verbal communication, emphasizing certain words (Ridwan, 2016: 154).

Based on data found from all informants, and based on information obtained from triangulation of section heads, sub-section heads, quarantine officials, journalists, it is said that customs officers when serving passengers already have good verbal and nonverbal communication styles. Their knowledge when communicating serves passengers with a good communication style such as saying hello to good morning / afternoon / evening / evening, father or mother, able to speak foreign English, use polite words by asking permission from passengers to check their luggage, saying thank you love, apologize, smile, use hand gestures to invite or direct the way out when serving passengers, dress neatly, and the communication distance is not too close.

In the end, if this is related to the theory that Lubis (2018: 127) said that the style of communication is the way we speak, our appearance, including the words we choose, our fluency, speed, and intonation of our voice, which will affect the symbols that we use, namely verbal or non-verbal symbols, the researcher formulates that the ability of officers to use verbal and nonverbal communication styles properly is something that is needed related to the effectiveness of the cross-cultural communication process of customs officers in serving people who carry imported goods.

Researchers agree that this is necessary and must be in the process of cross-cultural communication of customs officers when serving passengers, so that they can provide excellent service to foreign and local passengers at Kualaamu International Airport. The officer's communication style, which is not only verbal but also nonverbal, can create effective communication when serving passengers.

The communication style in this study is at least almost the same as the

research conducted by Eka Perwitasari Fauzi and Reza Ari Setiawan (2019) that the symbols or cues used in the cross-cultural communication process are symbols that indicate happiness with movements or expressions of a smiling face (Affect Displays). The interaction process that occurs is using the channels through which they are either verbal or nonverbal.

Not only the research conducted by Eka Perwitasari which is almost the same as this research, but also the research conducted by Made Arya Astina and Ketut Muliadisa (2016). The results of his research show that in cross-cultural communication also uses communication with non-verbal language such as hand waves, handshakes, smiles and eye gaze. And also use verbal language, namely by using English sentences. However, what distinguishes this research is that when the cross-cultural communication process occurs between customs officials and foreign passengers who do not understand international languages such as English, the communication is carried out not only using verbal and non-verbal, but also by utilizing communication technology, namely the Google application translate to be able to communicate to foreign passengers who can only use their native language as revealed by a customs officer informant.

The research findings show that customs officials often experience obstacles when communicating with foreign passengers of different languages. All officers in serving passengers feel anxious and uncertain if the passengers being served cannot use international or English, where the passengers being served are only able to use their original language, namely Mandarin. This is appropriate if it is associated with the theory expressed by (Shoelhi, 2015: 17) that language as a means of communication is often the main obstacle in communication when communication participants do not have the same language. LittleJohn (2016: 44) also revealed that when individuals meet strangers or people from different cultures,

they often experience anxiety and uncertainty.

When a language barrier occurs with foreign passengers who do not understand universal language or English, the clerk, consciously (mindfulness), searches for information using the Google translate application smartphone in order to communicate with passengers, asks directly to passengers, pays attention to cultural background and characteristics passengers served, and using verbal and nonverbal. So this makes them more confident and competent in dealing with passengers and can increase the communication interaction capacity for foreign passengers who can only use their native language or Mandarin.

Officers overcoming obstacles show a mindful attitude so that they can minimize cultural misunderstandings by reducing any negative perceptions, utilizing verbal and nonverbal communication, google translate, for the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication with foreign passengers regarding goods inspection services. This is appropriate if it is related to the theory stated by (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003: 39) that in managing anxiety and uncertainty, we must have full attention (mindfulness) to the communication we do.

Language skills and understanding of the language of customs officers are very important in serving multicultural passengers, so that the increase in foreign language skills of customs officers in serving passengers is needed, so that language as a means of communication is no longer an obstacle in communication when customs officials communicate with passengers who are not have a common language. Researchers agree that it is associated with the theory expressed by Ridwan (2016: 154) that language is an important aspect of cross-cultural communication. Language is used daily by humans all over the world, without language, humans cannot communicate. Language plays an important role directly as a form of statement and exchange of thoughts or views about others.

Based on the research results, it can be formulated that awareness of different cultures, language proficiency, motivation, skills, knowledge in communication, readiness of officers, good intentions, empathy, positive thinking, two-way communication by listening, being patient and understanding import regulations goods carried by passengers are something that is needed. The ability of officers to use verbal and nonverbal communication styles properly is also something that is needed in relation to the effectiveness of the cross-cultural communication process of customs officers in serving people carrying imported goods. Researchers agree that these elements must be present, to obtain effective communication in the communication process. cross-cultural customs officers when serving people carrying imported goods. Communication success is effective communication between communicators and communicants.

## CONCLUSION

Basically, the cross-cultural communication of customs officers in serving the people carrying imported goods has been done well. Elements such as understanding awareness of different cultures, communicating well verbally and nonverbally, having motivation, skills, readiness, having good intentions, empathy, thinking positively, doing two-way communication by listening, being patient, and explaining with easy messages understandably already owned by the officer. So that this can create effective communication in the process of cross-cultural communication and can provide excellent service to foreign and local passengers carrying imported goods at Kualanamu International Airport.

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