



"So, suppose that in this world everyone is deaf:" A Co-Cultural Approach on Deaf People Communicative Practices

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Abstract

This study explores how deaf people, as a marginalized group, navigate their communication practices with the broader community. Therefore, co-cultural theory is used to see the complexity and nuanced communication applied by deaf people. To provide a phenomenological illustration, we conducted in-depth interviews with four deaf Indonesians to discover their lived experiences related to their communicative practices. We found that none of the participants applied aggressive approaches, but they chose communication practices within the spectrum of nonassertive assimilation, assertive accommodation, and nonassertive separation. In addition, this research also shows a shift in the preferred outcome of communication from assimilation to accommodation with age. In order to better understand the dynamics of deaf people's communication practices, we also offer suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Co-Cultural Theory; Deaf; Sign language; Disability

Introduction

Approximately 20% of the world's population, or over 1.5 billion people, have hearing loss, of which 430 million have severe enough to be incapacitating. It is projected that more than 700 million people worldwide will have deafness by 2050 (World Health Organization, 2023). Furthermore, it is estimated that over 80 percent of deaf people reside in developing nations. Deaf people are accustomed to communicating both among themselves and with hearing people by using sign language. According to the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), over 200 sign languages are used worldwide (Manning et al., 2022). Indeed, sign language is acknowledged by the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, emphasizing that sign languages are part of the deaf linguistic identity and have the same status as spoken languages (United Nations, 2023).

In many parts of the world, however, discrimination against people with disabilities, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, persists. Human Rights Watch's 2020 World Report states that significant barriers prevent people with disabilities from exercising their rights in the same ways as others (Collins, 2020). People with hearing disabilities face difficulties and barriers in social situations, just like other disabled individuals. They face difficulties and barriers in accessing essential services like health, education, and access to the workforce. Furthermore, Humphries (in Eckert & Rowley, 2013) shows the problem of "audism"

in society, namely the audiocentric viewpoint holding that those who can hear well are superior to those who cannot. Audism sees speaking as a more advanced form of communication than nonverbal cues or sign language utilized by people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

To better understand the phenomenon of discrimination against deaf people and how they communicate with the dominant structure, we need to look into the perceptions and experiences of those individuals directly. Therefore, the current study uses co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998a, 1998b) as an analytical framework to comprehend the communicative experiences of members of underrepresented groups in their interactions with the broader society. Co-cultural theory has been widely used to investigate the communication strategies of marginalized groups (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Blair & Liu, 2020; Herakova, 2012; IseOlorunkanmi & Singh, 2020; Ofina et al., 2018; Sanford et al., 2019; Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019). There have been several previous studies using the co-cultural theory to investigate and analyze the complexities of communication among disabled people (e.g., Cohen & Avanzino, 2010; Congdon, 2014; Makkawy & Long, 2021), but such research in the context of deaf people is still limited. Therefore, to provide insight into the communication dynamics of deaf people in general and contribute to applying co-cultural theory to more diverse social contexts, this research looks at how deaf Indonesians strategize their communication within their wider community.

Literature Review

Co-Cultural Communication Theory

Co-cultural theory was formulated by Orbe (1998b, 1998a) to explain communication practices by people traditionally marginalized in the dominant social structure. Indeed, in a society, there are always groups that are marginalized based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability (including deaf people), and sexual orientation. The term co-cultural refers to this marginalized group of people, and this term was chosen because it has a neutral nuance and does not carry a negative connotation like more commonly used terms such as minority, subculture, subordinate, inferior, intracultural, or non-dominant. In other words, co-cultural theory recognizes the existence of a diversity of social groups that simultaneously exist in a society. Therefore, co-cultural theory highlights the complexity and diversity of co-cultural group communication practices, both when communicating with other, more dominant groups and communication within and between members of the co-cultural group (Orbe, 1998b, 1998a, 2017).

The formulation of co-cultural theory is steered by two communication theories used primarily by earlier feminist scholars (Orbe, 1998b, 1998a, 2017). The first is muted group theory, especially the study conducted by Kramarae (Kramarae, 1981), which shows that in every society, there is a social hierarchy that gives special privileges in the context of communication to those groups at the top of that hierarchy. This upper group creates communication standards that make the lower group in the social hierarchy unable to communicate appropriately or even forced to mute. The second is standpoint theory, which stands for individual co-cultural groups' unique experiences and social positions, which serve as their starting point in interacting with society and the world around them. The standpoint for the individual experiences of co-cultural groups is assumed to be more correct and reflective of situations of communicative injustice than the experiences of the dominant group. Because it emphasizes the personal communicative lived experience

of co-cultural groups, the phenomenological approach is also the main characteristic of co-cultural theory (Griffin et al., 2019; Orbe, 1998b, 1998a, 2017).

Furthermore, Orbe (1998b, 1998a, 2017) identified three preferred outcomes that co-cultural groups might achieve in communicating with the dominant group, namely (1) assimilation, (2) accommodation, and (3) separation. If assimilation is expected to occur, the co-cultural group tries to erase its cultural differences and communicate as best it can to conform with the dominant group. Meanwhile, accommodation is when cultural differences are maintained and mutually respected. Therefore, the goal of accommodation is to encourage the dominant group better to understand the needs and experiences of co-cultural groups. Finally, the third outcome option is separation, namely encouraging the existence of a separate social space where co-cultural groups can maintain their own identity and culture.

To achieve these preferred outcomes, Orbe (1998b, 1998a, 2017) shows that co-cultural groups can use three communication approaches, namely (1) nonassertive, (2) assertive, and (3) aggressive. In the nonassertive approach, co-cultural group members take a non-confrontational attitude and even place the needs of other people or the dominant group over their own. They even seem to be siding with the dominant group in nonassertive behavior. Conversely, in aggressive communication behavior, the co-cultural group imposes its wishes and expectations on other parties. This is done through communication that is, for example, hurtfully expressive, self-assertive, and wanting to be in control. Meanwhile, assertive communication behavior is in the middle between nonassertive and aggressive, in which co-cultural groups express their rights, needs, and desires without violating the rights of the dominant group or other groups. Combining the framework of the three preferred outcomes with the three communication approaches, a 3x3 matrix shows nine co-cultural group communication orientations. The nine communication orientations are: (1) nonassertive assimilation, (2) nonassertive accommodation, (3) nonassertive separation, (4) assertive assimilation, (5) assertive accommodation, (6) assertive separation, (7) aggressive assimilation, (8) aggressive accommodation, and (9) aggressive separation. Following the standpoint theory approach, the choice of communication orientations is formulated through the point of view of co-cultural groups. Due to the complexity of the communication situation, it is not impossible that the dominant group perceives certain approaches chosen by co-cultural groups differently. For example, the co-cultural group considers their communicative actions to be assertive accommodation, but the dominant group considers them aggressive separation or another orientation.

From previous studies, Orbe (Orbe, 1998a, 1998b, 2017; Orbe & Roberts, 2012) has identified 26 co-cultural practices used by marginalized groups. These cocultural practices can be placed in one of the nine communication orientations. For example, "averting controversy" and "self-censoring" co-cultural practices are manifestations of nonassertive assimilation communication orientations, while "dissociating" and "self-ridiculing" co-cultural practices are expressions of aggressive assimilation communication orientations. Another example: assertive accommodation communication orientation manifests in the co-cultural practice of "intragroup networking" and "educating others," while aggressive accommodation is realized in the practice of "confronting" or "gaining an advantage." The last example is that co-cultural practices of "embracing stereotypes" and "exemplifying strength" are manifestations of an assertive separation orientation, and "attacking" or "sabotaging others" are manifestations of an aggressive separation orientation. Table 1 shows the position of each of the 26 co-cultural practices for each communication orientation. By demonstrating the diversity of communication orientations and practices, Orbe intends to

emphasize the complexity and diversity of co-cultural communication in negotiating its identity in the broader society.

Table 1. Co-Cultural Communication Orientations

Nonassertive Assimilation	Assertive Assimilation	Aggressive Assimilation
Averting controversy	Extensive preparation	Dissociating
Emphasizing commonalities	Overcompensating	Mirroring
Developing positive face	Manipulating stereotypes	Strategic distancing
Censoring self	Bargaining	Ridiculing self
*Interrogating self	*****Rationalization	***Showing appreciation
***Checking yourself		
***Remaining silent		
***Journaling		
Nonassertive Accommodation	Assertive Accommodation	Aggressive Accommodation
Increasing visibility	Communicating self	Confronting
Dispelling stereotypes	Intragroup networking	Gaining advantage
	Utilising liaison	***Speaking out
	Educating others	****Regulating interactions
	**Reporting incidents to authorities	
	*****Strategic alliance building	
Nonassertive Separation	Assertive Separation	Aggressive Separation
Avoiding	Exemplifying strength	Attacking
Maintaining barriers	Embracing stereotypes	Sabotaging others
Leaving the situation		*Intimidation
***Isolation		

Sources: Communication orientations without asterisk are original proposals by Orbe (Orbe, 1998b, 1998a). The extension of the orientations are suggested by: *(Camara, 2002), *(Camara & Orbe, 2010), *(Gates, 2003), **** (Herakova, 2012), ***** (Castle Bell et al., 2015), ***** (Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019).

Co-cultural theory has been widely used to analyze the communication complexities of marginalized or underrepresented groups. The co-cultural groups that have been researched are also very diverse, and generally a group of people in particular settings: for example black female pilot (Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019), Chinese gay men in China (Bie & Tang, 2016), Chinese-American adoptees in the US (Blair & Liu, 2020), Asian-American in the US during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jun et al., 2021), Hispanic students (Sanford et al., 2019), lesbians in China (Ju, 2017), multicultural families in South Korea (Han & Price, 2018), male

nurses (Herakova, 2012), marginalized clans in Nigeria (IseOlorunkanmi & Singh, 2020), urban poor people in Jakarta, Indonesia (Widiastuti, 2019), refugees from Afghanistan and other countries in Indonesia (Mas'udah & Syafii, 2022), domestic workers in the Philippines (Ofina et al., 2018). Meanwhile, in research on people with disabilities, the co-cultural theory framework is used to analyze the complexities of communication and negotiating the identity of people with physical disabilities in a professional workplace setting (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010), visual impairment in a virtual workplace environment (Makkawy & Long, 2021), and sufferers of Tourette syndrome (Congdon, 2014).

Almost all of the research mentioned above consistently uses the initial framework of orientation and communication practices formulated by Orbe (Orbe & Roberts, 2012). Recently, several researchers have identified and expanded communication practices that have not been listed before. Indeed, Orbe also emphasized that the initial typology of 26 co-cultural practices was not definitive, and, therefore, subsequent intercultural communication researchers could add to the practices they identified through their research. Table 1 also shows some co-cultural practices proposed by several later researchers (marked with an asterisk). Camara (2002), when examining how racist interaction identifies the practice of co-cultural nonassertive assimilation of "interrogating self" from marginalized groups. Meanwhile, Herakova (2012) proposes "regulating interaction" co-cultural practices as an aggressive accommodation communication orientation for male nurses in a work situation dominated by female nurses. Another co-cultural practice, namely "strategic alliance building," is identified by Zirulnik and Orbe (2019) in their research on black female pilot communication strategies.

Being Deaf in Indonesia

According to official Indonesian government statistics, around 23.3 million people, or 9 percent less of the total population, have disabilities (Saraswati, 2021; Siyaranamual & Larasati, 2022). Meanwhile, the number of people with disabilities in hearings of various gradations in Indonesia has reached around 3 million people (Cameron & Suarez, 2017). Like other people with disabilities, people with hearing disabilities experience challenges and obstacles in social life. Not only are they concerned about the inclusiveness of people with disabilities in the world of work and the labor market, but they also face challenges and obstacles even in terms of essential services such as education and health. Even though Indonesia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2011 and passed a special law to deal with disabilities (Disability Law) in 2016, there are only a few policies and practical steps to guarantee the rights of disabled people (Dibley & Tsaputra, 2019; Saraswati, 2021; Siyaranamual & Larasati, 2022).

In general, people with hearing impairment in Indonesia face the challenge of what Humphries (in Eckert & Rowley, 2013) calls audism in society. Audism is an attitude and prejudice that undermines people who have limitations and impairments in hearing ability. Audism is an audio centric view that considers people with hearing abilities superior to those with hearing difficulties. Because of that, audism can lead to alienation and discrimination to the deaf and hard of hearing. Furthermore, audism also indicates that the ability to speak is considered superior in communication compared to the non-verbal or sign language used by deaf people.

Based on several previous studies, audism can be divided into four types (Eckert & Rowley, 2013). The first is individual audism, a prejudice against deaf people's ability to control their own lives and shape systems

and organizations. This individual audism becomes audio-centric assumptions and attitudes used to rationalize differences, supremacy, and hegemonic privileges of those who can hear (Bauman, 2004). The second is institutional audism, which focuses on structural forms of oppression and formal institutions, such as education and the medical industry. Institutional audism is an exploitative structural system that perpetuates the subordination of the deaf community in social institutions. The third form is Bauman's (2004) metaphysical audism, a prejudice that links identity and language skills. Due to their limited ability to communicate using sound, the deaf are considered socially and culturally inferior. In other words, the sign language the deaf uses to communicate is of a lower degree than verbal language. The fourth form is laissez-faire audism, in which the existence of deaf people as human beings is acknowledged, but their autonomy is denied and demeaned. Laissez-faire audism is the same as conditional recognition of the existence of deaf people as human beings only to release the dominant hearers from feelings of guilt (Eckert & Rowley, 2013).

In this context, sign language is essential for realizing the rights of deaf people. Sign language is not only a fulfillment of the language rights of deaf people (Palfreyman, 2015) but also a bridge in efforts to fulfill other fundamental rights of persons with disabilities, such as equal citizens or human rights (Malik et al., 2021). In Indonesia, sign language variations were naturally developed by the deaf people themselves in several regions. However, in its development, two sign languages are more commonly used (Palfreyman, 2019). The first sign language is BISINDO (from *Bahasa Isyarat Indonesia*, literally Indonesian Sign Language), which is promoted by Gerkatin (*Gerakan untuk Kesejahteraan Tuna Rungu Indonesia*, the Indonesian Association for the Welfare of the Deaf). The second is SIBI (*Sistem Isyarat Bahasa Indonesia*, or literally Indonesian Signed System), promoted by Indonesian government policy and used in education for deaf children in Indonesia. If BISINDO is more rooted in culture and social interaction in the regions and is promoted by deaf people, then SIBI is more formal and based on Indonesian grammar (Gumelar et al., 2018; Olivia & Mulyadi, 2022; Palfreyman, 2019).

Methodology

Participants

Purposive sampling is used to recruit participants for this study. We recruited four participants: two each of prelingual and postlingual deafness participants. The ability of a deaf person to understand and use language is greatly influenced when deafness occurs. Deafness before language acquisition is known as prelingual deafness, while deafness that occurs during or after language acquisition is known as postlingual deafness. If deafness occurs from birth, a child will not have experience recognizing sounds, impacting the difficulties experienced in understanding and producing an utterance. Meanwhile, deafness after language acquisition (postlingual deafness) allows a child to understand and understand grammatical concepts (Kirk et al., 2014). We acquired consent to mention their real name to be mentioned in this study. The four participants are:

1. Siti Rhodiyah is a female, 28 years old, prelingual deaf. She is a barista at Cafe Sunyi, a café managed by the deaf community in Jakarta. She is also a television interpreter and teacher at Pusbisindo (Indonesian Sign Language Center). She serves as the youth department chairwoman of the Movement for the Welfare of the Deaf Indonesia (Gerkatin).

2. Stefan Sinar Firdaus is a male, 33 years old, prelingual deaf. He works at the Pusbisindo and is also a member of Gerkatin. His name became popular at the commemoration of International Disability Day, December 3, 2021. At that time, he protested the Indonesian Minister of Social Affairs, Tri Rismaharini, for forcing a deaf teenager who could communicate with the Indonesian sign language to speak orally (Nilawaty, 2021).

3. Michelle Layanto is a female, 29 years old, postlingual deaf. Michelle can speak orally very fluently and clearly. She is a human resource department staff of a multinational company in Indonesia.

4. Hafidh Mahendra, male, 24 years old, postlingual deaf. He is an employee of a state-owned bank in Jakarta.

Data Collection

Due to the pandemic that limited physical meetings and the difficulty in scheduling, the semi-structured interviews were conducted online using the Zoom application. Since we do not speak sign language, we were assisted by a sign language interpreter during the interviews. However, one of the participants, Michelle Layanto, chose not to use sign language and was more comfortable answering directly using spoken language. While interviewing Michelle, we typed our questions in the Zoom chat column. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually for about two hours, and open cameras were used so that participants, interviewers, and interpreters could see each other.

Along with the development of communication technology and the increasing Internet penetration, video conference applications have become an alternative to qualitative data collection. Researchers have widely used online interviews even before the COVID-19 pandemic due to several considerations, including cost, logistics, and anonymity of participants (Oates et al., 2022). Researchers' discussions and reflections on online interviews have made this method more robust in qualitative research. For example, Oates et al. (2022) point out that there is little evidence that online interviews produce different data and interview experiences than non-face-to-face collection such as telephone, email, instant messaging, and surveys. Gray et al. (2020) and Archibald et al. (2019) showed the participants' positive experiences in a study using Zoom for online interviews. The benefits are that it is easy and convenient to use, increases the opportunity to convey more personalized matters, is easily accessible using various devices, is cheap, and saves time. Oliffe et al. (2021) found more or less the same thing while emphasizing the importance of interviewers' skills to compensate for the nuances of in-person interviews that are lost in online interviews. Meanwhile, based on his research, Lindsay (2022) suggested that Zoom interviews should be conducted with the camera on, as the quality of data generated is better than when the camera is off. However, researchers should give participants the freedom to choose their preferred method.

Furthermore, Hyde and Rouse (2022) assert that online interviews are, in many ways, superior to in-person encounters. One example is that online interviews encourage both parties to focus and look at the other person's face more intensely, eyes meeting eyes - something that face-to-face meetings are uncomfortable doing. Online video interviews extend and enrich the interaction in ways that face-to-face meetings cannot. Therefore, according to them, online interviews are "...a valuable research tool for phenomenological study..." (p. 7). They argue that it is advisable to conduct online interviews, even when there are no obstacles or difficulties in conducting face-to-face interviews, for both methods will complement each other (Hyde & Rouse, 2022).

Another challenge in data collection in this study was using sign language interpreters to conduct the interviews. Therefore, in the interview, the interpreter becomes a bridge of meaning for understanding and grasping the fundamental meanings of the words of the two languages—consequently, a three-way co-construction of data results from a research interview that includes an interpreter. Previous studies (Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013; Williamson et al., 2011) have shown that interpreters who are well-versed in the research process and involved in interview preparation build these bridges of meaning. That is why we include this process in our research phase.

Data Analysis

The first stage of data analysis was to transcribe all the interviews. We read through the transcripts several times, took notes, and deductively identified the communication practices formulated in the original version by Orbe (1998a) and the extensions proposed by later researchers (Orbe & Roberts, 2012). This systematic process thematically organizes the information simultaneously, eliminating the nonessential elements of the phenomenological inquiry (Orbe, 2000). After reviewing the identification several times, we checked if any possible communication practices could not be included in the existing communication practices. By undertaking this process, we wanted to see if we could propose new communication practices that emerged from our research and extend the existing Co-Cultural theory (Orbe & Roberts, 2012).

After identifying the communication practices in the data, the final step in the phenomenological analysis was to write about them in detail. This process allowed the researchers to discover new meanings that were not immediately obvious at the previous stage. These narratives were then re-examined to answer the research questions posed in this study. Creating these detailed narratives made it possible to understand the lived communication experiences of the participants within important social and cultural contexts. By applying these stages and revisiting the original data when needed, we conducted the hermeneutic spiral of understanding process that is inherent to phenomenological inquiry (Orbe, 2000; Zirulnik & Orbe, 2019).

Results And Discussion

The current study found that deaf Indonesians used three of the nine co-cultural communication orientations to discuss their actual communicative experiences in their daily lives: nonassertive assimilation, assertive accommodation, and nonassertive separation.

Nonassertive Assimilation Co-cultural Practices

Co-cultural members discreetly integrate into the dominant group in society to satisfy their own needs as best they can. Some could interpret this communication strategy as considerate or sensible. Others perceive it as meek or flattering to the dominant group to benefit or gain favor from them.

Regardless of how the practice is perceived, its usual purpose is to uphold the dominance of the dominant group and undermine the self-worth of the co-cultural member (Orbe, 1998a, 2017).

We found that our participants employ three out of four practices in this nonassertive assimilation co-cultural communication orientation, i.e., emphasizing commonality, self-censoring, and developing a positive face.

Emphasizing Commonalities

This practice focuses on the similarities and ignores the differences that exist between themselves and broader society (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). Although they cannot hear, they can make sounds from their mouths, similar to hearing people communicate. This practice was mainly adopted when the participants were young and hopeful and saw the possibility of practicing speaking like most people. Stefan and Hafidh went to a special school and had speech therapy there, of which Stefan said, "It was only then that I was able to make a little bit of noise." Although Michele could speak orally before she became deaf at six years old, she still needed to take articulation courses in junior high school to improve her verbal language. To further highlight communicative equity and equality, deaf people also learn lip reading skills. Despite its limitations, they acknowledge that lip reading skills are useful for communicating with hearing people. However, Siti and Stefan mentioned difficulty if someone speaks too fast. In such conditions, they would communicate in writing with the interlocutor. Hafidh even went so far as to claim to understand the discriminatory treatment by the dominant group by presenting the opposite hypothetical situation. He said, "So suppose that in this world, everyone is deaf. Then, when a hearing person's child is born, the child will also feel discrimination. So it's like that when the situation is reversed. It's the same thing."

Self-censoring practices

The experience of being discriminated against makes them choose to remain silent when they receive comments from dominant group members that are inappropriate or directly insulting (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). As a result—as mentioned by Stefan, Siti, and Hafidh—they feel embarrassed to use sign language and choose to avoid communicating. Stefan's comment "... when the incident [the ridicule] is repeated, what else can we do? We can only be patient at this time" illustrates self-censoring practice. Siti also self-censored using sign language, "I once felt embarrassed to use sign language in public. I always used to hide using sign language, but over time, it exhausted me too." As for Hafidh, he will concentrate on what he has to do because "... for example, my purpose at the cafe is to work on [the class] assignments, so then I focus on that, not chatting with other people."

Developing Positive Face

In this practice, the co-cultural members adopt a gracious communicator posture that involves being more mindful, courteous and focused on members of the dominant group (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). This practice aims to assist members of co-cultural groups in successfully navigating the dominant culture and to help them accomplish their objectives by building beneficial relationships with members of the dominant culture. Hafidh exemplifies this practice by describing how he approaches his communication with a hearing person step by step, "I will first communicate verbally. If it is still not clear, I can use writing or gestures. If there is still miscommunication, I use text on my cell phone. If the text on the phone is still unclear, I use my voice again to make it clearer for the interlocutor."

Assertive Accommodation Co-Cultural Practices

The assertive accommodation co-cultural orientation seeks a balance between attending to the needs of oneself and the more dominant others as they seek to change societal structures (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). Co-cultural members who want accommodation try to change the rules to consider their own life experiences

instead of adhering to the rules of the dominant group. In assertive accommodation orientation, co-cultural individuals are valued for their abilities and interpersonal skills and collaborate within the dominant culture. They openly and actively support the needs of individuals in both cultures.

Therefore, assertive accommodation orientation is seen when they try to accommodate their voices as deaf people to promote their rights, needs, and desires without threatening the rights of hearing people. Concerning sign language, not only do deaf people consider it the most effective communication tool, but it also represents their cultural identity. Organizations such as Gerkatin try to change the communication structure of the dominant group to adapt to their group as part of Co-Cultural. They want to create collaboration between cultural differences so they are not silenced as an underrepresented group. In this study, we found that our participants employ all four practices in the assertive communication orientation, i.e., communicating self, intergroup networking, using liaisons, and educating others.

Communicating Self Practice

This practice is used by those who have a strong self-concept. In this practice, members of co-cultural groups with strong self-concepts genuinely and openly interact with members of the dominant group (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). Realizing that sign language is part of their selves and cultural identity, deaf people are very passionate about it. One of the most straightforward illustrations was when Stefan confidently dared to publicly correct the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Tri Rismaharini. The Minister forced a deaf teenager to speak orally on stage during, ironically, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) commemoration, even though the teenager could speak sign language. Stefan said, "I told the Minister that Sign language is important to us. Sign language is like words to us. I could feel that the boy felt scared and cornered." Hafidh also showed his dislike for interlocutors if he was forced to speak verbally, "I feel disrespected. It's discriminatory and bullying. I usually respond immediately and reprimand them using text: Sorry, I don't like being asked like that."

Intragroup Networking Practices

Co-cultural members identify and work together by sharing the same philosophies, beliefs, and goals in this communication practice (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). The four participants consider organizations such as Gerkatin, which already has branches in many cities in Indonesia, essential for forming networks between them to communicate with dominant groups. Hafidh explained, "Members of this organization help each other. So this is also a very good opportunity to introduce sign language to the wider society." Siti added that joining the organization strengthened her network with like-minded people, "This organization helps deaf friends deal with their problems. Before joining the organization, I had many problems, but I didn't know who to tell."

Educating Others

Co-cultural members take on the role of teachers in interacting or communicating with hearing people. They aspire to enlighten dominant group members on the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of deaf people (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). Our participants insisted that discrimination against deaf people can be reduced by educating the dominant group as well as the government. Other than strengthening intragroup networking, organizations can also be a tool to educate the public and pressure the government to create policies that

appreciate disability rights. Siti stated, "The organization advocates and voices the right to use sign language to communicate for the deaf community. It is very important to fulfill the rights of access and facilities so that they can live like any other people."

Nonassertive Separation Orientation

Co-cultural members could utilize a nonassertive communication orientation to maintain separation in their interactions with the dominant group (Orbe, 1998a, 2017). Those who adopt this orientation will physically avoid the dominant culture. We identified two nonassertive separation communication practices among our participants: avoiding and maintaining personal barriers.

Avoiding Practice

Co-cultural members keep their distance from members of the dominant group, refraining from activities and locations where interaction might occur. This practice is most evident in Stefan's experience, who used to work in a hearing-dominated environment before working as a staff member of Pusbisindo. He explains, "I was a reclusive person in my old office. I rarely communicated [with coworkers] because it forced me to use verbal language. After working at Pusbisindo, I feel very comfortable because the working environment is good."

Shifting Approaches of Co-Cultural Practices

Our four participants in this study—two for prelingual and postlingual deaf—grew up in non-deaf families. They all stated that they had experienced unfair treatment, such as discrimination and bullying, whether at school, work, places of worship, public places, or society in general. This field of experience shapes the orientation and preferred outcome of their communication as members of the co-cultural group. Assimilation—the process of integration by the co-cultural group by reducing as much as possible the differentiating features, both verbal and non-verbal, with the dominant culture—was the communication outcome that the participants aimed for, especially when they were younger. When it became apparent that the assimilation process was not happening entirely due to high barriers with the dominant group, the expected outcome shifted to mainly accommodation and, less often, separation. The shift in expected outcomes based on the stage of life was also identified by Blair and Liu (2020) in their research on Chinese adoptees by White parents in the USA. When members of the co-cultural group have a stronger self-concept and realize their distinctive cultural identity, they use their life experiences to seek to encourage changes in the norms and rules of the dominant culture. This is also consistent with Orbe's (1998a, 2017) idea that assimilation practices can produce feelings of exhaustion and distress in the long run because they have to denigrate or avoid their true selves. In some circumstances, accommodation practices may not be successful, so some of our participants engage in the process of separation, where they create and maintain a different identity from the dominant group and, therefore, psychologically, verbally, and non-verbally, embrace in-group solidarity.

However, we found that none of the participants used an aggressive approach to seek their communication-preferred outcome, assimilation, accommodation, or separation. Aggressive communication encompasses controlling, self-serving, and hurtful expressive behaviors; in other words, behaviors prioritize meeting one's own needs at the expense of others. An aggressive communication orientation is generally less concerned

about how members of the dominant group perceive them and is more focused on changing the culture that marginalizes them in the dominant structure of society (Orbe, 1998a, 2017).

We also identified that the choice of communication practices of co-cultural group members is complicated because it also depends on the members' situational context and ability. Even the same context can provoke different communication practices from co-cultural group members with different abilities. This was seen when Stefan publicly protested Minister Tri Rismaharini for her treatment that forced a deaf teenager to speak. The distressed situation triggered Stefan's chosen communication practice, but his ability and knowledge enabled him to express his protest. Furthermore, based on the context of the situation and his field of experience, Stefan considers the positive and negative effects (perceived rewards and costs) of his chosen cultural communication practices. Because he is dealing with a Minister who is a formal symbol of the dominant group and state, Stefan enacts assertive communication practices.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the nuanced communication experiences of deaf individuals. It underscores the dynamic interplay between personal, cultural, and societal factors in shaping communication approaches. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the complexity of deaf people's strategies beyond simplistic labels such as "assimilation" or "separation." The study highlights the context-dependent nature of communication choice. The choice of communication practices depends on the individual's experiences, self-concept, and desired outcomes, as well as on situational context and individual abilities.

The study found that deaf people employ a spectrum of communication practices across three main orientations: nonassertive assimilation, assertive accommodation, and nonassertive separation. However, none of the participants used an aggressive approach in seeking their preferred communication outcome. Nonassertive assimilation orientations are marked by emphasizing commonalities, self-censoring, and developing a positive face towards the dominant hearing group. This orientation, while appearing obliging, can reinforce the dominance of the hearing culture and undermine the self-worth of deaf individuals. Meanwhile, the assertive accommodation orientation seeks a balance between personal needs and societal change. The participants actively promoted their rights and needs through advocating for sign language, building networks within the deaf community, and educating the hearing public. Lastly, the nonassertive separation involves avoiding interactions with the dominant group practice, as evident in one participant's experience of isolation while working in a hearing environment. It is also noticeable that the participants primarily aimed for assimilation in their younger years but shifted towards accommodation with growing self-awareness and realization of societal barriers.

Although our research provides some new and important insights into the communication strategies of co-cultural groups of deaf people in dominant groups in Indonesia, we do not intend to overgeneralize them. In addition to the small sample size, the participants of this study are educated, urban, and middle-class deaf Indonesians, which, of course, do not fully represent deaf people in Indonesia as a whole. They also grew up in middle class families, which gives them greater access to society and a different field of experience. Therefore, future research can explore the communication strategies of deaf Indonesians more broadly. Such studies, however, involve a larger number of samples, so a quantitative approach research can be done by applying the Co-Cultural Theory Scales (C-CTS) instrument developed by Lapinski & Orbe

(Lapinski & Orbe, 2007). Future research can also use the dominant group theory framework developed by Orbe and his colleague (Razzante et al., 2021; Razzante & Orbe, 2018). In contrast to co-cultural theory, dominant group theory explains the communication strategies of dominant groups towards underrepresented groups. In everyday life, co-cultural theory and dominant group theory can be likened to two sides of the same coin, so research on both sides will provide a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of communication between underrepresented and dominant groups.

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