



A Journal of Culture, English Language, Teaching & Literature

ISSN 1414-3320 (Print), ISSN 2502-4914 (Online)

Vol. 18 No.2; December 2018

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**An Investigation of Proxemic Behavior among Acehnese
in Public Places**

**¹Rusma Setiyana, ²Nyak Mutia Ismail, ³Endah Annisa Rahma, and
⁴Faizatul Husna**

¹Economic Management Department, Faculty of Economy, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia; ²English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia; ³Aquatic Resource Management Department, Faculty of Marine and Fisheries, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia; ⁴Sociology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

email: ¹rusmasetiyana@gmail.com; ²nyakmutiaismail2010@gmail.com;
³endahdarussalam89@gmail.com; ⁴faizatulhusna88@gmail.com

Received: 01-07-2018

Accepted: 08-09-2018

Published: 20-12-2018

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¹Rusma Setiyana, ²Nyak Mutia Ismail, ³Endah Annisa Rahma, and ⁴Faizatul Husna

¹rusmasetiyana@gmail.com; ²nyakmutiaismail2010@gmail.com; ³endahdarussalam89@gmail.com; ⁴faizatulhusna88@gmail.com

¹Economic Management Department, Faculty of Economy, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

²English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

³Aquatic Resource Management Department, Faculty of Marine and Fisheries, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

⁴Sociology Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

Abstract: It is assumed that Acehnese do not make use of personal space during interactions. This study aims to investigate the proximity levels used by Acehnese people when communicating with other people. The observation approach was used to collect data with people who were in natural interaction in public places as the participant. The data were pictured and kept anonymous in regards of ethical codes maintained in research. The results show that there are three conditions obtained from this study. First, mostly, Acehnese people use intimate level of proximity, which is less than 0.46 meter eventhough when they are interacting with strangers. However, this condition only applies if the interactions taking place is male-male interactions or female-female interactions. Second, in a condition where the stranger interaction is male-female, the proximity employed by the people is in the level of personal—which is 1.2 meter. Lastly, men maintained farther distance compared to women. In conclusion, the farthest proximity level that Acehnese applied was social level (1.2 m to 3.7 m); yet, the main influencing factor is genders.

Key words: proxemic behavior, level of proximity, gender interaction, non-verbal interactions, proxemic investigation.

Abstrak: Dipercaya bahwa masyarakat Aceh tidak menggunakan jarak personal disaat berinteraksi dengan orang lain. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi level proksemik yang digunakan oleh masyarakat Aceh. Observasi digunakan sebagai cara untuk mengumpulkan data. Observasi dilakukan dengan orang-orang yang berinteraksi secara natural di tempat umum. Data yang didapat dijaga agar tetap anonim mengingat etika yang harus dijaga dalam riset ini. Hasil riset ini menunjukkan tiga kondisi. Pertama, kebanyakan orang Aceh menggunakan level intim, yakni kurang dari 0.46 meter walaupun mereka berinteraksi dengan orang asing. Walaupun begitu, kondisi ini hanya berlaku ketika interaksi terjadi antara laki-laki atau antara perempuan. Kedua, dalam kondisi interaksi antara orang asing laki-laki dan perempuan, mereka menggunakan level personal, yakni 1.2 meter. Yang terakhir, laki-laki menggunakan jarak yang lebih jauh dibandingkan wanita. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa jarak yang paling jauh yang digunakan oleh masyarakat Aceh adalah level sosial (1.2 m to 3.7 m); tapi gender selalu mempengaruhi jarak ini.

Kata kunci: sikap proksemik, level proksemik, interaksi antar gender, interaksi non-verbal, investigasi proksemik.

INTRODUCTION

Aceh, one of the provinces in Indonesia, is famous for its warm citizens. This statement is true since Acehnese do not hesitate to smile and say greetings to the strangers particularly tourists who visit Aceh. Also, Acehnese are generally helpful, for instance to show the right direction for those who get lost on their way. This condition gives an advantage for Acehnese people inasmuch as they are able to learn the tourists' languages, especially English, easily. Nevertheless, probably the people from western countries assume that Acehnese is offensive as they invite to have a talk at wrong and unexpected moments. This is because the Western and Asian culture are different as asserted by Hall (1990) that western culture tends to choose spacious area when talking, while Asian tends to get intimate. This spacious area when interacting (verbally or silently) is called *proxemic* as firstly introduced by Edward T. Hall in 1966.

This study considered purposeful since it investigated the levels of proximity used by Acehnese when they are interacting each other because the difference between culture apparently give huge influence—not only in the target language learning but also in other life aspects, just to mention (Ismail, 2017). There are four proximity levels as lined out by Hall (1990), namely intimate, personal, social, and public. Hence, this study is considered important since more people are coming to Aceh, whether for work or tourism purposes. This study is expected to help the visitors to engage effective communication with indigenous people, As well as to provide information that different approach is basically needed when dedicating others with their hospitality. Based on the explanation above, a research question being sought in this study is as formulated in the following: What proximity level is generally used by Acehnese people during interactions? Are there any other influencing factors?

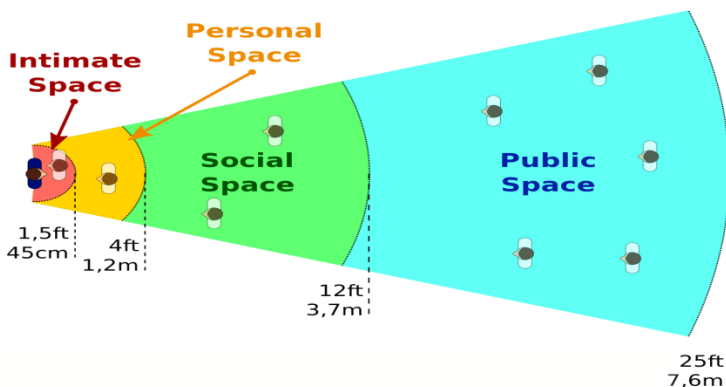
LITERATURE REVIEW

Different cultures might hold various concepts of personal space as the interaction takes place. Therefore, each culture determines its own way in representing intimacy level between two speakers. This notion is in line with Hall (1991, p. 60) as he argues that “space speaks to us just as loudly as words”. He further introduced the term proxemics to refer to different space level used in different culture during interaction. According to Agnus (2012), there are three areas in proxemics field, they are distance, space, and modes of behavior and perception. However, this study only focused on the use of distance during interaction. Since there are four levels of territory brought in by Hall (1963), below is provided the illustration of the territory radius of each individual.

Figure 1 shows the four areas of territory. The first one is intimate level which is up to 0.46 meter; personal level is between 0.46 meter to 1.2 meter; social level is between 1.2 meter to 3.7 meter; and public level is over 3.7 meter. Hall (1963) proposes that intimate space includes some characteristics such as touching, whispering, and embracing. People in this zone are categorized as certain people who hold special relationship such as children and spouse. Then, personal space, usually among friends or relatives, is usually marked by talking with normal voice. Social space is marked by talking with normal to rather loud voice. It is usually used during the interactions with acquaintances and unfamiliar people. Lastly, public space is marked with the

use of certainly loud voice, sometimes a special device such as microphone and loudspeakers are also put in use. This space is generally attempted in seminars, public lectures, presentations, etc.

Figure 1:
Proxemic Distance (Hall, 1963)



Some examples are also provided by Hall (1990) as in the following. The first example is territory in American culture. In public, Americans employ two or three persons in conversations and there is also a distance between one group to another. The way they keep from intruding others is by controlling their voice to be not too loud. However, if they speak loud enough, other people would only pretend they do not hear. Next, in Germany, they consider visual and sound intrusions to their private sphere. This means that if we look at them for no reason in public—or talk loudly—they will likely to get angry. Despite sometimes they are misunderstood to be similar, in fact English and American have a great disparity. If American classifies people by space they use, Englishmen employ social status as a way of classifying people's status—especially those who were brought up in middle- and upper-class social status.

Another different perception has also been found in Japan, an Asian country. There is, indeed, no word “privacy” in Japanese. Japanese sees the contrary side of American culture where they have special space for work, family, bedroom, etc. It is not a problem for the Japanese to sleep close to each other on the floor. However, the concept of privacy does exist in Japan; they prefer to give meaning in arranging objects. Contrastingly, the Arabs are considered to have the most intrusive ways in defining privacy. It is the characteristics of the Middle Eastern culture to push and shove people, even to pinch and to touch others, in public place. Thus, no wonder that most westerners are commonly shocked when visiting Arabs, as the Middle

easterners are, too. However, Iranians keep their distance even among themselves when they are in public places (Gharaei & Rafieian, 2013). This shows that even among the Arabs themselves, which is in the similar culture, can reveal differences (Sameer, 2017).

In Indonesia, which is also an Asian country, similar perceptions as the Japanese are adopted. In her study, Ningrum (1998) found that intimate and social distance in Indonesia is closer than that settled by Hall (1990). Besides, she also mentioned that there are other factors that influence the distance, they are gender and types of relationship. Furthermore, Prawitasari (2009) adds that the room safety also determines the personal distance of Indonesian people. In addition, Ballendat, et.al (2010) also mention that other factors such as position, identity, movement, and orientation play roles in determining the spatial distance among people around us.

From the reviews above, it is resumed that people with different culture, expect other people to act like, or at least, respect the way they behave in their culture. As Eresha, et.al (2013) also support that German and Arab people even want robots to react like their own culture when interacting with them, including in maintaining territorial space in communication.

METHODOLOGY

The method used was a qualitative research with observation of participants' personal identities. The participants' identities were kept anonymously. They were observed approximately for 30-45 minutes to determine the relationship between the participants if they were family membes, friends or strangers. The ethical practice in disguised-observation which implies that the confidentiality and anonimity of research data obtained from the participants must not be exposed for any explicit or implicit pledge, and proper method and secure manner should also be implemented (Clark, 2006). The sudy was conducted in small town, Meulaboh, Aceh Barat, Aceh in eight public places; a park, a playground, a market, a hospital, a mosque, a restaurant, a sports field, and a beach. The reason why these public places chosen was to observe participants' spacial distance. The data were captured without recording any conversiation and participants' awareness since it might have broken the secure manner and could have cause anti-observed behaviour from the participants. After obtaining the data, they were analyzed by data reduction, data display, and data verification (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013).

RESULTS

The result of this study was in form of pictures to identify the relationship among the participants. After observing for more or less an hour, the results are shown in the following pictures:

Figure 2:
Proximity between male-female non strangers



The picture above shows a family sitting in a hospital bench. The relationship among the participants is male-female non strangers. It can be seen that those people who were waiting are the family members. They are sitting near with one another without rigidity and look comfortable. The woman is sitting at the edge of the bench, separated from her husband (wearing black shirt) by a little boy. She is not sitting directly next to her husband. Meanwhile, the husband is sitting directly next to man in white shirt.

From the situation, it can be concluded that the main consideration of their seating is gender. Commonly, if there is still extra space, most men do not sit directly close to women. Yet, intimate distance which is less than 0.46 m was still applied. Another data observed is provided below where people are waiting in a bank. After studying figure 3, it can be stated that the woman and man in the left circle are not family members and acquaintances. They are male-female strangers. Their space was approximately 0.46 cm yet still in personal distance category which is 1.2m. Moreover, both women in the right circle are friends and it can be seen from their proximity by sitting closely in the level of intimate less than 0.46 cm. The main point of sitting in public place from the picture is also gender. Whenever male-female interaction occurs, strangers and non strangers, they keep distance of their seating in public places.

Figure 3:
Proximity between male-female strangers



Situations observed from figure 1 and figure 2 are in compliance with Ningrum's statement (1998), saying that Indonesian people do apply closer levels of proximity but genders and types of relationship always prevail as the influencing factors. It is line with Acehnese cultural norm which is men and women keep distance when interacting each other. As stated by Par and Leo (2011), cultural norm is one of influencing factors in determining the interaction distance.

Figure 4:
Proximity between female-female non strangers



Figure 4 shows two nurses holding hands while interacting. The distance level of their physical contact was less than 0.46 cm. This shows that the females are comfortable to have physical contact near each other. The nurses are coworkers who know each other in the hospital. The situation is similar to Turkish cultural behaviour as stated by Chelik (2005) about speaking and standing too far one another make the speakers not comfortable.

By comparison, there is another picture of female-female stranger proximity, which is shown in figure 5 below:

Figure 5:
Proximity between female-female strangers



The picture illustrates women sitting next to each other yet they kept distance which was approximately 1.2 m. They are not talking with one another and are just sitting in the police station. To differentiate between female-female non stranger and female-female stranger, it can be proven from the data above (figure 3 and figure 4) that female-female non stranger easily made physical contact due to their intimate relationship. However, it is difficult for female-female strangers to get physical contact and start conversations since they do not know each other although they are sitting in the closer level of proximity.

The proximity level of male-male strangers is shown in figure 6 and 7. In figure 6, the picture shows that there are two men sitting in a bench of a hospital. They are sitting farther distance approximately with 1.2 m of level proximity. While the other circle shows the level distance between male-female non strangers.

They are married couple but they kept distance within 1.2 m. It is line with Iranian culture norm which stated by Gharaei & Rafieian (2013), that Iranians are understandable where people are most likely to keep their distance in public.

Figure 6:
Proximity between male-male strangers



Subsequently, two non-stranger males as showed in Figure 7 are talking to each other within 1.2 m (personal level). In other words, they do not keep intimate level of proximity. In this case, probably it caused by the room safety as stated by Prawitasari (2009) that even though they know each other, it does not mean that they have to sit well in a face-to-face condition.

Figure 7:
Proximity between male-male non-strangers



They are female-female non-strangers who are having lunch in a canteen. It can be seen that the proxemic distance used in the picture above is intimate level is less than 0.46 m. It means that they are standing and talking comfortably within much closer distance than male-male non-strangers did as shown in figure 8.

Figure 8:
Proximity between female-female non-strangers



By comparison, figure 9 shows another proxemic distance applied by male-male non-strangers. They are also college friends who are sitting for lunch in a canteen, but not sitting next to each other even though there is an empty space next to his friend. In this position, they used personal level of proxemic, namely 1.2 m.

Figure 9:
Proximity between male-male non-strangers



Table 1 is provided to illustrate the proxemic distance used by participants.

Table 1:
Acehnese proxemic distance

No	Gender	Relationship	Proxemic distance
1	Male-male	Stranger	Social level (3.7 m)
2	Male-male	Non-stranger	Personal (1.2 m)
3	Female-female	Stranger	Personal (1.2 m)
4	Female-female	Non-stranger	Intimate level (≤ 0.46 m)

The table shows that there is a significantly different between male-male non-strangers and female-female non-strangers in proxemic distance. Personal level is used by male-male non-strangers and intimate level used by female-female non-strangers. In short, men keep more distance than women. Furthermore, the farthest distance is used by male-male stranger within social level (3.7 m), whereas the closest distance is used by female-female non-strangers in distance less than 0.46 m. In addition, as seen in the figure 4, female-female non-stranger interaction also applies physical contact that is hand-holding. As Suprihadi & Rokhayani (2016) and Pasaribu & Kadarisman (2016) add that there is a difference in male and female in learning as well as in interacting socially—verbally and non-verbally.

CONCLUSION

Three conclusions can be drawn from the results and discussion above. First, most Acehnese use intimate to personal level of proximity when interacting to each other verbally and non verbally. Yet, this definitely depends on gender (Parkel & Leo, 2012; Ningrum, 1998). Second, there is a significant difference between-gender interactions namely male-male strangers, male-male non-strangers, female-female strangers, female-female nonstrangers, male-female strangers, and male-female nonstrangers. Furthermore, the implication of this study shows that the result can be useful for outsiders who come to Aceh in managing their level of distance among Acehnese people, which profoundly depends on gender, as also suggested by Ningrum (1998).

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