

Communication Accommodation Strategies in Service Businesses for Multicultural Customers in Building Customer Comfort: A Case Study of Terthecut Barbershop Yogyakarta

I Made Boby Yudhiarta¹, Aaron Reghanada Prasetyawibowo², Irwansyah³

^{1,2,3} Departement of Communication, Universitas Indonesia

¹i.made511@ui.ac.id, ²aaron.reghanada@ui.ac.id, ³dr.irwansyah.ma@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze communication accommodation strategies employed by barbers in fostering customer comfort within a multicultural service context. While Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) has been widely applied in formal communication settings, its application in interpersonal service interactions involving direct contact and cultural diversity remains underexplored. This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews, literature review, and documentation. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, involving barbers from three branches of Terthecut Barbershop Yogyakarta (Demangan, Palagan, and Condong Catur) as well as customers from outside the region. The findings reveal that barbers employ accommodation strategies situationally through convergence, divergence, and particularly maintenance, based on a process of quick screening of customers' characteristics, communication preferences, and emotional states. Maintenance strategies, such as the consistent use of Indonesian as a standard greeting and standardized service gestures, play a crucial role in maintaining interactional stability and professionalism in multicultural encounters. These findings suggest that communication accommodation in service settings operates as a dynamic and adaptive process, extending beyond identity alignment toward the management of interpersonal dynamics. This study contributes to the extension of CAT within service contexts and highlights the role of communication in shaping customers' affective comfort.

Keywords: *Communication accommodation theory, Multicultural customer, Customer comfort, Business services.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi akomodasi komunikasi yang digunakan oleh barber dalam membangun kenyamanan pelanggan dalam konteks layanan multikultural. Meskipun Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) telah banyak diterapkan dalam konteks komunikasi formal, penerapannya dalam interaksi layanan interpersonal yang melibatkan kontak langsung dan keberagaman budaya masih relatif kurang dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam, studi literatur, dan dokumentasi. Informan dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling, yang melibatkan barber dari tiga cabang Terthecut Barbershop Yogyakarta (Demangan, Palagan, dan Condong Catur), serta pelanggan yang berasal dari luar daerah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa barber menerapkan strategi akomodasi secara situasional melalui konvergensi, divergensi, dan terutama strategi pemeliharaan (maintenance), yang didasarkan pada proses penyaringan cepat terhadap karakteristik pelanggan, preferensi komunikasi, serta kondisi emosional mereka. Strategi maintenance, seperti penggunaan bahasa Indonesia secara konsisten sebagai sapaan standar dan penerapan gestur layanan yang terstandarisasi, berperan penting dalam menjaga stabilitas interaksi dan profesionalisme dalam pertemuan multikultural. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa akomodasi komunikasi dalam konteks layanan merupakan proses yang dinamis dan adaptif, tidak hanya berfokus pada penyesuaian identitas, tetapi juga pada pengelolaan dinamika interpersonal. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan CAT dalam konteks layanan serta menegaskan peran penting komunikasi dalam membentuk kenyamanan afektif pelanggan.

Kata kunci: teori akomodasi komunikasi; pelanggan multikultural; kenyamanan pelanggan; layanan bisnis.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries with a high level of multicultural diversity (Arifin et al., 2015; Na'im & Syaputra, 2011). The 2010 Population Census recorded the existence of 1,128 ethnic groups inhabiting various regions of the Indonesian archipelago (Na'im & Syaputra, 2011). The census data also show that dozens of local languages are used as daily languages by the population (Na'im & Syaputra, 2011), indicating the high level of linguistic diversity in Indonesia. In addition, Indonesia has become one of the international tourism destinations (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025), attracting many domestic and international visitors. Yogyakarta, as one of the centers of both international and domestic tourism destinations, generates a multicultural society composed of both temporary and long-term residents. In December 2024, there were 7,167 recorded visits from international tourists to the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Meanwhile, from January to December 2024, there were 38,030,739 domestic tourist trips to the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Arifin et al. (2015) also note that the level of diversity varies across regions, with some areas in the provinces of Central Java, Yogyakarta, and East Java showing relatively low levels of ethnic fractionalization.

The rapid increase in population and migration to Yogyakarta has also stimulated the emergence of new business actors in the city, particularly in the service sector. Prayogo et al. (2025) show that population size, labor force, and education are among the factors that positively and significantly influence economic growth in the Province of Yogyakarta between 2014 and 2023. These findings demonstrate that population growth contributes to regional economic expansion in the Province of Yogyakarta. Voorhees et al. (2017)

found that service-based businesses require more intensive interaction with customers compared to retail businesses that sell finished goods. Their research on "service encounters" emphasizes that the quality of service experiences strongly depends on direct interaction between staff and customers, something that is more prominent in service industries than in transactional product sales (Voorhees et al., 2017). Barbershops, or hair-cutting establishments, have become one of the growing service businesses in Yogyakarta and involve a high intensity of interaction with customers (Lukmana & Maghfirah, 2024). With the multicultural characteristics of Yogyakarta society, service businesses such as barbershops are required to consider strategies regarding how their services can communicate effectively in order to maintain customer comfort and achieve customer satisfaction (Voorhees et al., 2017). Within the context of service interactions, Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991) explains that communication accommodation, through both convergence and divergence strategies, plays an important role in building positive social relationships between service providers and customers (Giles et al., 1991). When a barber is able to adjust their speaking style, language choice, and interaction patterns to align with the customer's cultural background, the service process becomes more personalized, leading customers to feel valued and more satisfied. This indicates that the ability to perform communication accommodation (Giles et al., 1991) has become a crucial component for barbershops operating within multicultural societies.

Talib and Mubarak (2025) integrate Feminist Stylistics with CAT to analyze the rhetoric of female leaders. They find that leaders strategically use stylistic devices (phonological, semantic, and syntactic) to manipulate social distance through a

balance of convergence and divergence: convergence builds empathy, while divergence reinforces identity and challenges patriarchy. These findings indicate that language functions as an active mechanism of empowerment rather than merely a reflection of gender.

On the other hand, Van Mulken and Siemes (2025) challenge the assumption that convergence is always positive. In escalating conflicts, divergence is found to be more effective in reducing tension. They demonstrate that the use of modality markers (words indicating possibility rather than certainty) significantly reduces the anger of aggressive actors. De-escalation in digital spaces is achieved through deliberate differentiation in communication style rather than through empathic alignment.

Rachmawati and Rusfian (2021) examine cross-cultural communication between government bureaucracy and the private sector (government employees interning in manufacturing industries) through CAT and Anxiety Uncertainty Management. They find that adaptation is not linear but involves mixed strategies: convergence to align with industrial work rhythms, and divergence to maintain professional identity. The primary barriers are not only linguistic differences but also anxiety and uncertainty arising from differences in work culture, making the management of psychological factors critical to successful cross-organizational interaction.

There is also research by Dong et al. (2025), which examines clinical communication dynamics in China, focusing on sentence-final particles as linguistic structures in accommodation. Doctors employ convergence (to enhance comprehensibility and empathy) to improve patient comfort, while also using divergence to maintain medical authority when facing resistance. These findings indicate that doctor–patient interactions involve complex negotiations, where micro-level linguistic choices

significantly affect patient compliance and therapeutic relationships.

Elhami et al. (2024) apply CAT to analyze Spanish language teaching practices and find that learning effectiveness depends on the management of socio-psychological distance through language, rather than solely on curriculum content. Teachers who apply convergence (emotional support and linguistic adjustment) create a safe learning environment. Positive accommodation correlates with increased student participation, whereas divergence or excessive control triggers anxiety and hinders language acquisition.

Previous studies have successfully explored communication accommodation in formal contexts. Talib and Mubarak (2025) analyze public speeches of female leaders within structured temporal frameworks. Dong et al. (2025) examine clinical interactions guided by communication protocols. Rachmawati and Rusfian (2021) investigate adaptation within governmental and private settings characterized by strong identity relations. However, the literature has rarely explored how CAT is applied in service contexts oriented toward customer comfort.

Previous research tends to assume accommodation as a linear process: convergence to build relationships or divergence to maintain identity (Giles et al., 1991). In contrast, this study explores multicultural interpersonal dynamics within a service context through a case study of Terthecut Barbershop Yogyakarta, a business with high customer occupancy and cultural diversity. This study identifies several research gaps, namely how barbers conduct *quick screening* of customers' cultural backgrounds to determine accommodation strategies directly without prior conflict, and how the interaction of convergence, maintenance, and divergence creates dynamic identity negotiation in building affective comfort. However, this practice

of quick screening involves the use of stereotypes, defined as cognitive representations that influence how individuals process information (Hiswanti, 2020). Although stereotypes simplify the prediction of customer behavior, they risk producing premature and inaccurate judgments. The primary challenge for barbers lies in balancing response speed with interpretive accuracy in a culturally sensitive manner, so as not to hinder the goal of building affective comfort. This need for balance positions communication strategies as a central aspect in creating a comfortable service experience.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), proposed by Giles et al. (1991), is a development of the earlier theory, namely Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1987). CAT originates from observations and curiosity regarding how and why individuals often modify their dialects or switch languages when interacting with others who are different (Zhang, Y.B., & Giles, H., 2018). This phenomenon represents one of the strategies used to adjust to the communication patterns of others through the process of convergence (Giles et al., 1991). Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) argue that in interpersonal interactions, individuals tend to adjust their ways of speaking and language use to resemble others, either by making their speech styles more similar or by differentiating them in order to create social distance.

There are several main principles within Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), namely convergence, divergence (Giles et al., 1991), and maintenance (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Convergence can be understood as a strategy in which individuals adjust their communication styles to align with their interlocutors, encompassing various linguistic elements, intonation, and nonverbal cues such as speech rate, pauses, sentence length, pronunciation, facial expressions (such as smiling), and gaze direction

(Giles et al., 1991). In contrast, divergence reflects the tendency to emphasize differences between oneself and others (Gallois et al., 2005). The concept of divergence is related to notions of distinctiveness, identity, and relational positioning in communication interactions (Gallois et al., 2005). Meanwhile, maintenance represents a form of non-accommodation, in which individuals retain their original communication styles without adjusting to their interlocutors (Gallois et al., 2005). Customer comfort or satisfaction, as defined by Voorhees et al. (2017), refers to a positive psychological state that emerges when customers feel safe, valued, and accepted during the service process. In the context of service encounters that require interpersonal interaction, such as barbershops, comfort encompasses several dimensions, including emotional comfort (feeling respected and not judged), social comfort (warm and friendly relationships), and interactional comfort (clear, polite, and preference-appropriate communication) (Voorhees et al., 2017). Research in the service sector indicates that customer comfort is a key variable influencing satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived service quality (Voorhees et al., 2017). When service interactions are direct and relatively brief, as in barbershop services, interpersonal comfort becomes particularly crucial, as the verbal and nonverbal responses of service providers can directly shape the customer experience (Voorhees et al., 2017).

In multicultural societies, service businesses such as barbershops are required to design flexible communication strategies to ensure customer comfort and enhance service satisfaction (Voorhees et al., 2017). Within the context of service interactions, Communication Accommodation Theory explains that communication accommodation, through both convergence and divergence strategies, plays an important role in

building positive social relationships between service providers and customers (Giles et al., 1991). When a barber is able to adjust tone of voice, language choice, and interaction style to align with the customer's cultural background, the service process becomes more personalized, leading customers to feel valued and more satisfied. This indicates that the ability to perform communication accommodation has become a crucial component (Giles et al., 1991) for barbershops operating within diverse or multicultural societies. Yogyakarta, as one of the major international and domestic tourism destinations, generates a highly multicultural population, both temporary and long-term. In December 2024, there were 7,167 international tourist arrivals recorded in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). The rapid growth in Yogyakarta's population has stimulated the emergence of new businesses in the city, particularly within the service sector (Prayogo et al., 2025). Service-oriented businesses require more intensive interaction with customers compared to retail businesses that focus on selling finished goods (Voorhees et al., 2017).

barbershops are required to consider strategies regarding how their services can communicate effectively in order to maintain customer comfort and achieve customer satisfaction (Voorhees et al., 2017). Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991) is employed in this study to examine how communication accommodation strategies are implemented by Terthecut Barbershop in building customer comfort, and how multicultural customer comfort is formed through communication interactions between customers and barbers

METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study consist of capsters at the Terthecut barbershop and barbershop customers. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling method, resulting in four informants as the primary data sources. The selection of informants was based on several considerations, particularly the geographic location of the branches where the capsters work. The three branches represented in this study are among the top three out of eleven Terthecut branches that frequently receive customers from outside the Yogyakarta region. The capsters selected as informants are branch heads who represent their respective branches. In addition, other informants in this study include customers who originate from outside the Yogyakarta region.

This study was conducted in Yogyakarta in October 2025. The data collection techniques used in this research include in-depth interviews, literature review, and documentation to explore the communication practices employed, the accommodation decisions made, and the impacts experienced by both capsters and customers.

This study descriptively explores the phenomenon and examines how capsters and customers reach mutually comfortable service

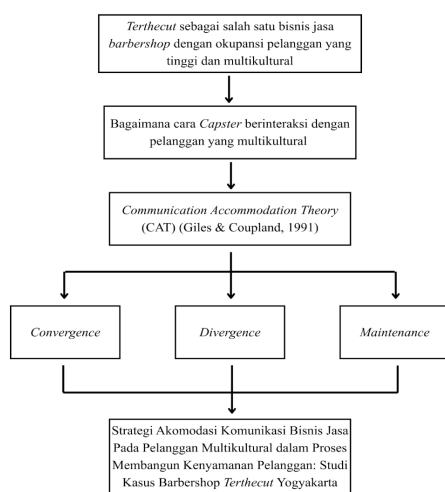


Image 1.1 Conceptual Framework

With the multicultural characteristics of Yogyakarta society, service businesses such as

agreements through their interactions, as well as their perceptions of service quality.

The first informant, Alwi, is the branch head of the Demangan branch. He comes from Magelang, Central Java, and has been working at Terthecut for two years. During this time, he has encountered many customers with diverse personalities and cultural backgrounds. The second informant, Riko, is the branch head of the Palagan branch. He has a cultural background from Sumatra and has extensive experience working as a capster. The third informant, Anan, is a capster at the Condong Catur branch. He has a strong urban cultural background and originates from Jakarta Province. The fourth informant, Agus, is a customer at the Palagan branch. He is a tourist who visited Yogyakarta to participate in the Borobudur Marathon and to spend several days on vacation. His domicile in East Kalimantan makes him an appropriate informant, as he represents the perspective of customers from different cultural backgrounds interacting with capsters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Communication Interaction Between Capsters and Multicultural Customers

The communication activities carried out by barbers across three different branches of Terthecut Barbershop reveal that the accommodation process in these branches constitutes a dynamic negotiation of identity through the use of *quick screening* toward customers. The findings from the analysis identify that there are three main patterns of accommodation strategies that consistently emerge in the interactions between barbers and multicultural customers at Terthecut. These patterns do not operate independently, but rather form an accommodation network that is responsive to the

diverse characteristics of customers.

The first pattern is convergence-dominant, in which this pattern is applied by barbers when interacting with customers who demonstrate high levels of engagement and interest in communication. In this pattern, barbers actively adjust their mood, conversation topics, and communication styles to align with the communicative characteristics of the customers based on observational assessment (Gasiorek et al., 2015). This finding is consistent with the study by Putra et al. (2018), which suggests that the interlocutor's mood can become a significant barrier in communication.

"Look at the situation, bro. If the customer looks tired or quiet (not initiating conversation topics), I also stay quiet. But if they bring up a topic and it feels comfortable, I start chatting so it doesn't feel awkward." (Alwi- Demangan Branch, Interview, October 2025)

This approach results in interactions that feel personal and warm, as customers perceive that barbers genuinely listen to and understand their needs. This is also supported by statements from informants in other branches

"It depends on the customer. If they are comfortable chatting, I also engage in conversation and give feedback. But if the customer just stays silent or uses their phone, I focus on cutting the hair." (Riko – Palagan Branch, Interview, October 2025)

The second pattern is maintenance-dominant, which is applied when barbers interact with customers who exhibit low or neutral levels of engagement, or with new customers who have not previously established interaction with the barber. In this pattern, it can be observed in the interaction process when a new customer arrives and the barber greets them using standardized greetings to maintain the customer's emotional state.

"Usually when a customer enters, even if we are already serving other customers, we are used to greeting them. So when a customer comes in, they are always welcomed with 'Please come in.' If

someone is waiting, we also offer them coffee or tea.” (Anan Condong Catur Branch, Interview, October 2025)

This maintenance pattern produces interactions that are professional and comfortable, even though emotionally it represents a standardized approach applied to all customers. This is reflected in behaviors such as offering coffee or tea to waiting customers, which represent standardized service gestures maintained in everyday barbershop practices. These actions are not merely expressions of politeness, but constitute repeated service routines that create predictability, allowing customers to feel safe and secure, particularly when they are in an unfamiliar environment. In other words, although this approach does not necessarily build emotionally warm relationships, it ensures that every customer receives a consistent and professional service experience by maintaining uniform verbal and nonverbal communication practices across all customers.

The third pattern is divergence, in which barbers intentionally maintain communicative distance while remaining responsive when customers display signals of disinterest in interaction. Anan explains the situations in which he chooses not to continue a conversation

“Not really, bro. Usually when the topic runs out, I stop. I’m afraid that if I continue the conversation, the customer might feel uncomfortable.” (Anan Condong Catur Branch, Interview, October 2025)

Within this pattern, barbers do not force social interaction but remain responsive to customer needs, for instance by being ready to answer questions regarding haircut styles or provide professional recommendations. This approach results in interactions that respect customer privacy and preferences, creating a sense of comfort in which customers not feel compelled to engage in small talk.

2. Factor Shaping Communication Accommodation Orientation

Communication can be understood as the exchange of referential meanings and the negotiation of personal and social identities. Dragojevic et al. (2016) describe accommodation, as a process, refers to the ways in which interaction participants adjust their communicative behaviors in order to reduce or increase social and communicative differences. The nature of accommodation is determined by initial orientations that operate along two identity dimensions: personal identity and social identity. While individual orientations are primarily based on the salience of personal identity, intergroup orientations are mainly driven by the salience of social identity (Zhang & Giles, 2017). In this context, accommodation is understood to be shaped by various interrelated factors. Based on the findings of this study, these factors are categorized into three, namely individual factors, contextual factors, and relational factors. These three factors determine how barbers manage convergence, maintenance, and divergence strategies in multicultural interactions.

Differences in experience and personal characteristics among barbers indicate that the first influencing factor lies within the individual barber. Barbers with longer experience tend to demonstrate a more structured orientation in managing interactions. In addition, soft skills also influence the accommodation attitudes of barbers.

In cases involving customers from foreign countries, several barbers encounter communication barriers due to language differences. In such situations, barbers employ convergence strategies to achieve effective communication.

“When there are customers from abroad, since I also don’t really speak their language, we just talk a little bit and sometimes rely on Google Translate.” (Alwi-Demangan Branch, Interview,

October 2025)

One of barber in a particular branch was observed making significant efforts to perform convergence by attempting to follow the language used by foreign customers. Meanwhile, another barber in a different branch applied convergence more fluently by using the language of the interlocutor. The success of communication highly depends on the communicator's ability to adapt to the situation and condition of the communicant while respecting cultural differences (Putra et al., 2018). Findings from Putra et al. (2018) indicate that sharing different experiences enables individuals to learn from one another and adapt in order to maintain effective communication.

"If a foreign customer comes, I usually just talk with English." (Anan - Condong Catur Branch, Interview October 2025)

This variation indicates that accommodation orientation is influenced not only by theoretical understanding but also by practical learning and the development of soft skills. In this regard, each barber develops a distinct accommodation style.

The second factor is contextual, in which the barbershop operates as a face-to-face service business characterized by close physical proximity and relatively limited interaction duration. In this context, barbers are required to build comfort quickly while maintaining the continuity of interaction.

This is reflected in how barbers greet customers using standardized greetings to maintain customers' emotional states.

"Usually when a customer enters, even if we are already serving other customers, we are used to greeting them. So when a customer comes in, they are always welcomed with 'Please come in.' If someone is waiting, we also offer them coffee or tea." (Anan Condong Catur Branch, Interview, October 2025)

In interactions between barbers and multicultural customers, a form of maintenance can be observed

when barbers use Indonesian as a standard greeting, such as "Please come in," for every customer who enters. The consistent use of language indicates that barbers maintain the same communication pattern without making specific adjustments based on customers' cultural backgrounds. This strategy reflects a tendency to preserve communication stability, ensuring that both new and returning customers receive a uniform and easily understandable initial experience.

The third factor is relational, in which customers become the dominant factor in determining the accommodation orientation used by barbers. The findings indicate that barbers actively conduct a process of *quick screening* toward customers based on observed background, as well as verbal and nonverbal cues. However, interestingly, barbers tend to be cautious about customers who become overly familiar with them.

"Following the customer's accent does make things feel closer. However, I am concerned that sometimes customers may start to underestimate us. That is something that needs to be managed (maintaining communication distance). There have been many cases like that, where customers make their own promises and then cancel repeatedly. For example, they say, 'Book with me,' but then suddenly cancel at the last minute, which feels very dismissive. So we need to maintain boundaries so that customers do not feel overly close to the barber and end up taking things lightly. We also have rules in our work; we must remain professional and cannot behave that way." (Alwi-Demangan Branch, Interview, October 2025)

Customers who demonstrate openness in interaction tend to be responded to with convergence strategies, whereas customers who are more passive or reserved are approached with maintenance or light divergence strategies. Furthermore, in the context of multicultural customers, such as foreign customers, barbers adjust their language as a form of convergence to reduce communication barriers. Thus, accommodation orientation is situational and is

strongly influenced by the dynamics of interpersonal relationships between barbers and customers.

3. Shaping the Multicultural Customer Comfort

Consumer comfort or satisfaction, according to Voorhees et al. (2017), refers to a positive psychological condition that emerges when consumers feel safe, respected, and accepted during the service process. In service contexts that require interpersonal interaction, such as barbershops, comfort encompasses several dimensions, including emotional comfort (feeling valued and not judged), social comfort (warm and friendly relationships), and interactive comfort (clear, polite communication that aligns with customer preferences) (Voorhees et al., 2017).

“What matters most is that the barber is communicative with me. I usually need suggestions. If the person is passive, I feel a bit hesitant. But if they are active and proactive in conversation, especially when I ask for suggestions about hairstyles, what style suits me best, I actually like that. I’m the type of person who prefers to talk.” (Agus, Interview, October, 2025)

The statement above indicates that active, responsive, and interactive communication is an important factor in creating comfort during service encounters. Customers emphasize the need for capsters who are communicative, proactive in providing suggestions, and capable of building relevant conversations regarding their hairstyle preferences. In a multicultural context, customer satisfaction emerges when service providers are able to understand differences in communication preferences, including expectations for warmer and more consultative interactions. This finding aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991), where capsters who perform convergence by adjusting their speaking style, level

of engagement, and communication patterns to match customer preferences are able to create more positive interactions and enhance social acceptance. Capsters who are more active and flexible in offering recommendations enable customers to feel involved and receive personal attention.

“Especially when the capster gives me suggestions, like what my hair type is, what my head shape looks like, and what hairstyle would suit me. That’s what I want. But if I also give directions and he adds suggestions, then there can be new ideas. Like, ‘With your head shape, this hairstyle might suit you better.’” (Agus, Interview October 2025)

This statement indicates that the level of comfort in Terthecut barbershop services is strongly influenced by the capster’s ability to provide relevant and personalized recommendations regarding head shape, hair type, and suitable hairstyles. In multicultural societies, this need becomes even more significant because each customer possesses different communication preferences, interaction styles, and service expectations shaped by their cultural backgrounds. In a recent interview, a customer emphasized that he prefers barbers who not only follow instructions but also demonstrate initiative and broader knowledge.

“For me, I prefer to be greeted right away. Like, ‘Hello bro, what hairstyle do you want today?’ The barber should respond from the beginning. A barber or capster shouldn’t just stay completely silent. We also need suggestions. That’s what I prefer. Of course, some people like a quiet haircut, start quiet, finish quiet. But people are different; some are introverted, some extroverted. Personally, I prefer that kind of interaction whenever I go to a barbershop.” (Agus, Interview October 2025)

From this statement, it can be seen that customer comfort in barbershop services is strongly influenced by the initial response and greeting from the capster, which signal attentiveness and readiness to serve. In multicultural societies, the form of greeting and communication style expected may vary depending on the customer’s cultural

background and personality. Therefore, capsters must be able to read customers' characteristics and moods before determining the appropriate communication approach. This perspective is reflected in the following statement from another informant.

“Sometimes when people enter the barbershop, some are in a good mood and some are not. That can make us unsure about how we should behave. We also need to be careful not to offend customers. But when they are in a good mood, maybe joking around or speaking with their regional accent, then the interaction can continue more naturally.” (Alwi Demangan Branch, Interview, October 2025)

Communication preferences becomes an essential part of the service process. Capsters must adjust the level of warmth, intensity of conversation, and language style situationally, ensuring that the interaction remains both professional and comfortable for customers.

The interview result show that customers prefer capsters who actively greet them, ask questions, and confirm their needs at the beginning of the service. Initial interaction becomes a crucial factor in building a sense of safety and comfort. This perspective is consistent with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1991), in which capsters adjust both verbal and nonverbal communication styles to accommodate customer preferences, including levels of engagement, greeting styles, and conversational intensity. Customers also recognize that individuals possess unique communication styles, such as introversion and extroversion. Therefore, capsters who are able to read and adapt to these differences can create a more comfortable and enjoyable service experience. Communication accommodation thus helps reduce social distance between capsters and customers and becomes an important strategy in providing inclusive services for culturally diverse communities.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles et al., 1991) in the service industry more specifically within the lifestyle service sector, particularly at the Terthecut barbershop in Yogyakarta exhibits unique characteristics that distinguish it from more formal contexts. Unlike the findings of Dong et al. (2025), which associate divergence strategies with the assertion of medical authority, or Rachmawati and Rusfian (2021), who interpret accommodation as an effort of bureaucratic adaptation, this study reveals that in the barbershop context, communication accommodation primarily functions as a strategic instrument for building affective comfort and customer trust. These findings align with the perspective of Hiswanti (2020), which suggests that situational conditions such as comfort and harmony are produced through interpersonal interactions.

The communication accommodation strategies implemented by capsters at the Terthecut barbershop in Yogyakarta represent active efforts to minimize various communication barriers that naturally arise in intercultural interactions. In the service business context, Voorhees et al. (2017) emphasize that the quality of service experiences largely depends on direct interaction between staff and customers, where customer comfort emerges as a positive psychological condition when individuals feel emotionally valued and interactively acknowledged. The findings of this study confirm the classification of communication barriers proposed by Putra et al. (2018), particularly those related to linguistic barriers and emotional barriers. From a theoretical perspective, the actions taken by capsters reflect the accommodation process described by Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles (2016), in which interactants adjust their communicative behaviors to either reduce or

emphasize social and communicative differences depending on their identity orientations.

In linguistic terms, capsters at Terthecut employ convergence strategies by using Indonesian or English to ensure that messages are effectively conveyed, particularly in response to the fact that differences in regional languages remain a primary communication barrier. However, the choice of strategy is not always limited to code alignment. In contrast to clinical interactions in the study by Dong, Hong, and Chen (2025), where divergence strategies are often used by doctors to maintain medical authority, capsters at Terthecut more frequently employ maintenance strategies, or even silence, in order to preserve customers' affective comfort. This approach aligns with the argument of van Mulken and Siemes (2025), who suggest that communication accommodation does not always need to take the form of convergence to be effective; in certain situations, deliberate separation of communication styles or maintaining one's original style may be more effective in managing the tone of interaction and reducing potential tension.

Furthermore, the use of standard Indonesian greetings such as "*Mari silakan*" ("Please come in") can be understood through the lens of perceptual barriers. In the study conducted by Putra et al. (2018) in Surabaya, a strong perception was identified that Javanese culture tends to emphasize politeness and subtlety in speech. By maintaining a consistent and polite communication style (maintenance), capsters are in fact negotiating both their personal and social identities to build trust with customers. The success of interactions in this barbershop reinforces the argument that effective intercultural communication largely depends on the communicator's ability to dynamically adapt to situational contexts and respect cultural differences in order to foster positive social relationships.

The findings of this study also indicate that customers from different cultural backgrounds do not necessarily demand complete cultural similarity or total convergence. As expressed by key informants, comfort is instead created through the capsters' proactive attitude and acceptance of customers' communication styles. Capsters are therefore required to understand the characteristics of each customer and remain adaptive in their interactions. This finding challenges the assumption presented by Elhami et al. (2024), which suggests that divergence strategies tend to trigger anxiety. In the context of this study, however, new suggestions or recommendations from capsters were actually appreciated by customers as a sign of professionalism that enhances their sense of security and comfort.

In terms of theoretically, this study extends the scope of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by demonstrating that the success of multicultural interactions does not solely depend on minimizing social distance, but rather on the barber's ability to engage in a dynamic negotiation between interpersonal warmth (through convergence) and professional stability (through maintenance). These findings indicate that maintenance is not merely the absence of adjustment, but functions as a communicative strategy that preserves consistent language patterns and service gestures, as described by Giles et al. (1991), as a form of maintaining a communication style that supports clarity, efficiency, and a sense of security in cross-cultural interactions

Practically, this study provides new insights for service-based businesses that engage with multicultural customers, emphasizing the importance of accurate *quick screening* and flexibility in adjusting accommodation strategies based on the individual characteristics of customers.

For future research, comparative studies across various service-based businesses could be conducted to validate the accommodation patterns identified in this study.

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