

The Use of BISINDO In the Social Interaction of Deaf Individuals In the “TIBA” Community of Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

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Deaf people in Indonesia face communication barriers that limit their social interactions in everyday life. This study examines the use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) in social interactions within the TIBA Community (Tim Bisindo dan Aksesibilitas) in Surabaya as a form of inclusive communication. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this research analyzes how BISINDO functions not only as a communication tool, but also as a form of social accommodation and a marker of Deaf cultural identity. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six informants from within the community, as well as documentation. The findings show that interactions within TIBA form three layered accommodation strategies, namely pedagogical convergence, kinesthetic convergence, and cultural divergence. Hearing individuals are encouraged to adopt the logic of Deaf visual language, while the community maintains teaching authority as a way of protecting its cultural identity. This study concludes that inclusive communication within TIBA is not one-sided, but instead requires the active involvement of both parties without eliminating each other's identities.

INTRODUCTION

Public awareness of the existence, rights, and communication needs of Deaf individuals remains an important issue in efforts to create a more inclusive society. Inclusive education, accessible public services, and equal opportunities for participation are essential to ensuring that Deaf individuals can engage fully in social life. However, one of the most persistent barriers to inclusion concerns communication between Deaf and hearing individuals. Differences in language and communication practices may limit access to information, social participation, and everyday interaction, particularly in social environments that continue to be dominated by spoken communication.

From a sociocultural perspective, Deaf individuals should not be understood merely through a deficit-oriented view of hearing loss. Deaf communities

possess their own languages, communication practices, and cultural identities. Sign language therefore functions not simply as a substitute for spoken language, but as a linguistic and cultural resource through which Deaf individuals express meaning, build relationships, and construct collective identity. Sign languages involve their own grammatical structures, vocabulary, visual logic, facial expressions, and bodily movements. These characteristics make communication within Deaf communities fundamentally different from communication systems that primarily rely on spoken language.

In Indonesia, Deaf communities commonly use Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) as part of their everyday communication practices. BISINDO has developed naturally within Deaf communities and

contains linguistic and regional variations that reflect the social and cultural experiences of its users. At the same time, the coexistence of BISINDO and the Indonesian Sign System (SIBI) has generated continuing discussions regarding language use, accessibility, and communication practices among Deaf individuals and wider society (Mursita, 2016). Despite the important role of sign language, many hearing individuals still have limited knowledge of BISINDO and may experience difficulties when interacting with Deaf people. Consequently, communication barriers often remain present not only because of differences in physical abilities, but also because hearing society has not fully adapted to the visual and cultural logic of Deaf communication.

Previous studies have generally discussed BISINDO and Deaf communication from linguistic, educational, accessibility, or social interaction perspectives. These studies have contributed to understanding the importance of sign language as a means of communication for Deaf individuals. However, less attention has been given to the ways in which communication between Deaf and hearing individuals involves processes of mutual adaptation and accommodation. In particular, limited research has examined how communication accommodation operates within visual and bodily forms of communication, where meaning is conveyed not only through language but also through gestures, facial expressions, body movements, rhythm, and visual attention. Furthermore, existing discussions have not sufficiently explored how communication accommodation can simultaneously promote inclusion while allowing Deaf communities to maintain authority over their language and cultural identity.

This gap is important because inclusive communication should not be understood simply as requiring Deaf individuals to adapt to communication systems dominated by hearing people. Instead, inclusion may involve reciprocal efforts in which hearing individuals also learn and adapt to the communication practices of Deaf communities. Understanding this reciprocal process is particularly important for examining how social interaction can be built without requiring one group to abandon its linguistic or cultural identity.

The TIBA Community (Tim BISINDO dan Aksesibilitas) in Surabaya provides an important context for examining this phenomenon. Established on November 4, 2016, by Pak Wawan, a Deaf

individual who experienced communication difficulties in public spaces due to society's limited understanding of sign language, the community was created to build a bridge of communication between Deaf and hearing individuals. TIBA organizes both paid BISINDO classes and free socialization programs at the Car Free Day event in Taman Bungkul. A distinctive characteristic of the community is that BISINDO instruction is primarily conducted by Deaf individuals themselves. This practice is significant because Deaf individuals are positioned not merely as recipients of communication support, but as active agents and holders of authority over their own language and communication practices.

The present study therefore examines how BISINDO is used in social interaction within the TIBA Community in Surabaya. Specifically, the study investigates how communication accommodation operates in interactions between Deaf and hearing individuals, how visual and bodily elements contribute to the accommodation process, and how BISINDO simultaneously functions as a communication resource and a marker of Deaf cultural identity. To address these questions, this study employs Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as its primary analytical framework.

The novelty of this study lies in applying Communication Accommodation Theory to the context of BISINDO and visual communication practices. While CAT has commonly been used to explain adjustments in verbal and nonverbal communication, this study highlights how accommodation can also occur through pedagogical practices, bodily movements, communication tempo, facial expressions, and visual interaction. The study further demonstrates that accommodation within inclusive communication is not necessarily a one-directional process. Deaf instructors may adapt their teaching strategies to facilitate understanding among hearing participants, while hearing individuals are also expected to adapt to the visual logic and communication practices of the Deaf community. At the same time, the preservation of Deaf authority in teaching BISINDO illustrates that communication accommodation can coexist with the maintenance of cultural identity.

Accordingly, this study contributes theoretically by extending the understanding of Communication Accommodation Theory to a visual and kinesthetic communication context. Practically, the findings

contribute to broader discussions of inclusive communication by demonstrating that meaningful inclusion requires reciprocal participation and adaptation rather than assimilation into a dominant communication system. By examining the TIBA Community, this study provides insight into how communication, cultural identity, and social inclusion can be negotiated simultaneously within everyday interactions between Deaf and hearing individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles, explains how individuals adjust their communication behaviors in response to their interaction partners to facilitate understanding, reduce social distance, or maintain social identity. These adjustments may occur through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors, including gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and other forms of communication (Giles, 2016; Dortje et al., 2016). In the context of BISINDO, accommodation is particularly relevant because communication does not primarily rely on spoken language but on visual and bodily elements such as hand movements, facial expressions, body posture, eye gaze, movement direction, and rhythm. Therefore, communication between Deaf and hearing individuals requires reciprocal accommodation, in which Deaf individuals may adjust their communication or teaching strategies to facilitate understanding, while hearing individuals also need to adapt to the visual logic and communication practices of the Deaf community. This reciprocal process supports inclusive communication because inclusion should not merely require Deaf individuals to adapt to communication systems dominated by hearing people, but should involve the active participation and adjustment of both parties (Camelia, 2024). At the same time, CAT also recognizes divergence as a strategy for maintaining group membership and social identity (Giles, 2016). In this context, the preservation of BISINDO and the authority of Deaf individuals over their own language can be understood as an effort to maintain Deaf cultural identity, as sign language functions not only as a means of communication but also as an important component of linguistic and sociocultural identity within the Deaf community (Hasdiana, 2018; Mursita, 2016). Thus, CAT provides an appropriate framework for understanding how BISINDO functions

simultaneously as a means of communication, a mechanism for creating inclusive interaction, and a marker through which Deaf identity and cultural authority are maintained.

2. Inclusive Communication

Inclusive communication ensures that every individual can participate equally in the communication process regardless of social status, background, abilities, or other differences. This approach not only involves the delivery of information, but also ensures that every party feels heard, respected, and has equal access to decision-making processes (Ilyvia Camelia, 2024).

3. Communication Media

Joseph DeVito, in his book *The Interpersonal Communication Book* (1989:4), defines interpersonal communication as the process of sending and receiving messages that occurs between two people or within a small group, where the process produces various effects and direct feedback. In other words, interpersonal communication is not merely about messages being delivered, but also about how responses from each party emerge spontaneously during the interaction. Furthermore, interpersonal communication is understood as communication that takes place in face-to-face situations, whether between two individuals or within larger groups, and it may occur in both organized contexts and more fluid situations such as crowds (Wiryanto, 2004 dalam Awi et al., 2016).

4. BISINDO (Indonesian Sign Language)

Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) is a sign language that has developed naturally within the Deaf community in Indonesia. BISINDO is used as the primary means of communication by Deaf individuals to interact both with one another and with the wider society. Unlike artificial sign systems, BISINDO possesses a rich variety of regional forms and is not standardized nationally, allowing each region to have its own unique variations of signs. BISINDO also differs from the Indonesian Sign System (SIBI), particularly in its use of two-handed signing and its

lack of affixes as commonly found in spoken Indonesian.

5. *Social Interaction*

Social interaction is essentially a reciprocal relationship that occurs between two or more individuals, in which each party is actively involved and mutually influences one another. Interaction is not merely ordinary contact, as it contains a deeper social dimension. Many people consider interaction important to maintain and preserve because it is through interaction that a person's behavior, meaning, and language can change and develop. In other words, interaction becomes one of the quickest and easiest ways for individuals to understand and obtain what they seek (Fahri & Qusyairi, 2019).

6. *Deafness*

Deafness is defined from a clinical or pathological perspective as a condition or disability in which an individual loses the ability to hear due to impairments in the auditory organs. However, from a social and cultural perspective, Deafness is understood as a sociocultural condition in which the development of language and culture forms the identity of the Deaf community. Within this perspective, Deafness is regarded as an entity that emerges from the grouping of people based on linguistic richness, within a society predominantly dominated by hearing individuals (non-Deaf people) (Hasdiana, 2018).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the processes, experiences, and meanings perceived by community members in depth. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not on measuring frequency or distribution, but rather on how communication practices take place, how meaning is constructed, and how identity is negotiated within everyday interactions.

The research was conducted within the TIBA Community in Surabaya from February to March 2025, with locations varying according to community activities, ranging from paid classes held at the community's basecamp on Jl. Bratang Gede VI F No. 28 Surabaya to socialization activities during the Car Free Day event at Taman Bungkul. The research

subjects consisted of six informants from within the community who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in teaching activities and community management. These six informants included Pak Wawan (community founder, informant 1), Alya (sign language interpreter, informant 2), Jason (teacher, informant 3), Amel (teacher, informant 4), Abhi (teacher, informant 5), and Fajar (teacher, informant 6). Four out of the six informants were Deaf individuals.

Data were collected through three techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted directly with all informants using open-ended questions regarding teaching experiences, communication strategies, and perspectives on BISINDO. Second, direct observation was carried out during paid classes and Car Free Day socialization activities in order to observe communication practices contextually. Third, documentation was gathered in the form of photographs, field notes, and learning materials used by the community. Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) serving as the primary analytical framework.

RESULT

This study was conducted within the TIBA Community (Tim Bisindo dan Aksesibilitas) in Surabaya by involving six informants from within the community, including the founder, a sign language interpreter, and Deaf instructors. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation during socialization activities and learning classes, as well as documentation.

1. *BISINDO as the Primary Communication Medium*

The first finding shows that BISINDO functions as a communication medium that goes beyond merely transferring messages. In the daily life of the community, BISINDO is used to deliver learning materials, engage in discussions, answer questions, and facilitate informal interactions. What distinguishes BISINDO from other communication systems is its dynamic and continuously evolving nature. The TIBA Community, for instance, creates new signs for words that do not yet have established equivalents, such as "bocil," "Suramadu," and

“warung tegal,” through a collective agreement process among community members. These signs do not emerge arbitrarily; rather, they are shaped through the visual experiences and social practices of the Deaf community itself.



Gambar 1 “Warung Makan Tegal”



Gambar 2 Kata “Suramadu”



Gambar 3 Kata “Bocil”

It was also found that BISINDO carries an unwritten ethical principle: the teaching of BISINDO to hearing individuals should only be conducted directly by Deaf people, not by sign language interpreters who are hearing individuals. This is not merely a technical rule, but rather a way for the community to maintain authority over its own language.

2. Non-Manual Components in Sign Language Communication

The second finding relates to the role of body gestures and facial expressions as inseparable components of BISINDO. Deaf individuals do not rely solely on hand movements, but also on facial expressions, head nods, body posture, and eye gaze as carriers of conceptual meaning. A particularly striking

example is the difference between the signs for “meeting” and “marriage,” which may appear visually similar but differ subtly in movement direction and rhythm. If performed incorrectly, these differences can lead to serious miscommunication. Members of the Deaf community describe these non-manual components as the “soul” of BISINDO.



Gambar 4 Kata “Bertemu”



Gambar 5 Kata “Menikah”

3. Learning Strategies in the TIBA Community

Within the context of learning classes, the TIBA Community implements two learning models. The first is a socialization class held in public spaces such as the Car Free Day event at Taman Bungkul, which is open and free of charge, focusing on basic materials such as the alphabet and simple greetings. The second is a paid class consisting of ten meetings that provide more in-depth materials, including sentence construction. In the paid classes, instructors utilize various learning media, including presentation files, interactive games, video materials, and direct practice sessions. On average, hearing participants require four to five repetitions simply to memorize the alphabet from A to Z, indicating that learning BISINDO requires a lengthy adaptation process.

4. Regional Variations in Sign Language

Another interesting finding is that BISINDO contains significant regional variations in signs. Words such as “Monday,” “Father,” and “Thank you,” for example, are signed differently in Surabaya, Jakarta, Jember,

and Bali. Nevertheless, these differences are not regarded as barriers. When Deaf communities from different regions meet, they use lip movements accompanying the signs as additional contextual cues, allowing mutual understanding to still occur. Regional variations are therefore viewed as a form of local cultural richness that enriches, rather than divides, the cohesion of the Deaf community as a whole.

DISCUSSION

1. BISINDO within the Framework of Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is often associated with adjustments in speaking styles and verbal communication. However, the findings from the TIBA Community demonstrate that the basic principles of CAT can also be understood within a visual and bodily communication context. Communication within the community does not primarily rely on voice or intonation, but instead involves hand movements, facial expressions, body posture, communication tempo, and visual attention. Consistent with the central premise of CAT, interaction requires communicators to adjust their communication behaviors in response to their interaction partners in order to facilitate understanding and manage social relationships (Giles, 2016). In the context of BISINDO, these adjustments take distinctive visual and bodily forms. Therefore, this study does not propose pedagogical convergence and kinesthetic convergence as entirely new dimensions of CAT, but rather identifies them as context-specific manifestations of the broader convergence process when CAT is applied to sign language communication.

The findings show that convergence within the TIBA Community occurs through at least two interconnected forms. The first is pedagogical convergence, which refers to the adjustment of teaching and communication strategies to accommodate the learning needs and communication abilities of hearing participants. Deaf instructors simplify sentences, begin learning with basic materials such as the alphabet, repeat signs, and use multimodal learning media to facilitate understanding. Pedagogical convergence can therefore be understood as a practical manifestation of CAT convergence in an educational interaction, where communicators adjust

the complexity, structure, and delivery of messages to reduce communication barriers. The second form is kinesthetic convergence, which refers to adjustments involving bodily movements, rhythm, tempo, repetition, and other physical elements of visual communication. The need to repeat signs several times and adjust the tempo of movements demonstrates that accommodation in BISINDO is not limited to what is communicated but also involves how bodily movements are performed and perceived. Together, these findings extend the application of CAT by showing that convergence in sign language communication may operate simultaneously through pedagogical strategies and kinesthetic adjustments.

Importantly, convergence within the TIBA Community is reciprocal rather than one-directional. Deaf instructors adjust their teaching strategies and communication practices to support hearing participants, while hearing individuals are also expected to adapt to the visual logic and linguistic structure of BISINDO. For example, understanding BISINDO requires hearing participants to move beyond the grammatical assumptions of spoken Indonesian and learn how meaning is constructed visually and contextually. Learning BISINDO, therefore, is not simply a process of memorizing gestures but also involves adjusting one's way of understanding and interpreting communication. This reciprocal accommodation demonstrates that inclusive communication cannot depend solely on Deaf individuals adapting to hearing communication practices. Instead, both parties participate in the accommodation process, although the forms of adjustment may differ.

Alongside convergence, the findings also demonstrate the role of divergence in maintaining Deaf cultural identity. The unwritten ethical principle that BISINDO should be taught directly by Deaf individuals can be interpreted as a form of communicative divergence that preserves cultural and linguistic authority. In this context, divergence does not function to isolate Deaf individuals from hearing society. Rather, it enables the Deaf community to maintain ownership and authority over its language while still participating actively in inclusive interaction. Similarly, the acceptance of regional variations in BISINDO demonstrates that inclusion does not require linguistic uniformity. Differences in signs are maintained and respected as part of the

cultural richness of the Deaf community. These findings suggest that convergence and divergence can coexist: convergence facilitates mutual understanding, whereas divergence protects linguistic and cultural identity.

The relationship between these communication processes and associative social interaction should therefore be understood as complementary rather than overlapping concepts. CAT explains the communication mechanism through which Deaf and hearing individuals adjust their behaviors through convergence and divergence. In contrast, associative social interaction refers to the broader social outcomes that may emerge from these communication processes, such as cooperation, accommodation, and the development of mutual understanding. In the TIBA Community, reciprocal communication accommodation creates conditions that support associative interaction because Deaf instructors and hearing participants actively cooperate to overcome communication differences. Thus, associative social interaction is not treated as a competing theoretical framework to CAT, but as a social consequence of successful communication accommodation.

From this perspective, cooperation within the TIBA Community emerges because both Deaf instructors and hearing participants actively contribute to the communication process. The willingness of hearing participants to learn BISINDO and the willingness of Deaf instructors to adapt their teaching strategies create opportunities for mutual understanding. Similarly, the supportive learning environment, in which mistakes in signing are treated as part of the learning process, helps develop positive relationships between participants. These social outcomes demonstrate how communication accommodation can contribute to more inclusive forms of interaction. Therefore, the findings suggest that CAT provides the primary theoretical explanation for how communication adjustments occur, while the concept of associative social interaction helps explain the broader social relationships that develop as a result of these adjustments.

Overall, the findings contribute to the application of CAT by demonstrating that communication accommodation in a sign language context extends beyond adjustments in spoken or conventional

nonverbal communication. In the TIBA Community, convergence is manifested through pedagogical and kinesthetic adjustments, while divergence enables the preservation of Deaf linguistic and cultural authority. These processes operate simultaneously to support reciprocal communication and inclusive social interaction. Accordingly, inclusive communication should not be understood as the elimination of differences between Deaf and hearing individuals, but as a process in which both parties actively negotiate mutual understanding while respecting and maintaining the distinctive identity of the Deaf community.

2. *Associative Social Interaction*

The pattern of interaction formed within the TIBA Community tends to move toward an associative direction. Deaf individuals and hearing individuals do not simply wait to be understood by one another; instead, both actively work together to build mutual understanding. This can be observed through three interconnected forms: cooperation, social accommodation, and acculturation.

Cooperation is most clearly visible in the BISINDO learning process itself, where Deaf instructors provide access to knowledge while hearing participants learn to adapt themselves. Social accommodation can be seen in the way the community creates a safe environment for experimentation: mistakes in signing are not immediately interpreted as failures, but rather as part of a learning process that can be corrected collectively. Informant 3, for example, explained that when hearing participants feel afraid to attempt communication, Deaf members instead create space for them to ask questions and improve their mistakes. Acculturation emerges when hearing individuals begin to enter the visual logic of BISINDO, not by abandoning the communication patterns they already know, but by allowing these two communication habits to gradually influence one another.

3. *Implications for Inclusive Communication*

The findings of this study carry fundamental implications for how inclusive communication should be understood. So far, inclusion has often been interpreted as an effort to integrate people with disabilities into existing communication systems. However, what occurs within the TIBA Community is quite the opposite: it is the hearing individuals who are

expected to enter the visual communication system of the Deaf community, rather than the other way around. Hearing individuals learn BISINDO, learn to interpret facial expressions, pay attention to body movements, and respect regional variations in signs.

Inclusive communication as developed within TIBA, when viewed through the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), is built through reciprocal relationships, although not always symmetrical ones. Deaf instructors engage in convergence through adapted teaching methods, while hearing participants engage in convergence through the transformation of their ways of thinking. At the same time, divergence is still maintained in matters of identity, particularly through the preservation of teaching authority within the Deaf community itself. This suggests that inclusive communication is not about making all parties become the same, but rather about creating space for differences while ensuring that every party actively participates in the process of mutual understanding. In this context, TIBA can be understood as a social space that demonstrates that inclusive communication truly occurs only when the language, identity, and authority of Deaf individuals are recognized as central components of interaction, rather than merely as complementary elements.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study that has been conducted, the researcher found that the use of BISINDO within the TIBA Community serves as the primary medium of communication. The use of BISINDO in the community is not limited to functioning merely as a communication tool; it is also utilized as a medium of learning between Deaf individuals and hearing people. Within this community, the teaching of BISINDO always begins with introducing the alphabet from A to Z. In addition, the community organizes various programs and activities independently, such as seminars, workshops, learning classes, and socialization activities in public spaces. All members of the community are Deaf individuals, except for the sign language interpreters. This arrangement is intentional because the community upholds an unwritten ethical principle stating that only Deaf instructors are allowed to teach BISINDO to hearing individuals.

Within this community, new signing styles are also created and collectively agreed upon by

community members. These signing styles emerge because certain concepts or terms do not yet have existing signs. For example, for a place name such as "Suramadu," community members created a specific sign, which was then discussed and mutually agreed upon by other members. These sign variations may continue to develop over time because BISINDO is both flexible and a natural language used by Deaf individuals and the wider Deaf community. Such signing styles may also vary across regions, depending on how each local community establishes and agrees upon them.

The role of BISINDO within this community is highly significant because it functions as the primary communication medium. BISINDO is strongly preserved and maintained by Deaf community members because it represents their main means of communication. For this reason, the Deaf community organizes both paid and free learning programs so that the surrounding society can learn BISINDO and communicate more effectively with Deaf individuals around them. This initiative is rooted in the social conflicts experienced by the first informant in this study, who explained that public awareness and concern regarding Deaf individuals remain limited. As a result, Deaf people often experience difficulties communicating in public spaces dominated by hearing individuals.

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