

## AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES ACROSS CULTURE AND GENDER

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini adalah suatu penelitian kepustakaan mengenai isu gender dalam analisis komunikasi di antara di negara barat dan bagaimana jika dibandingkan dengan kondisi Indonesia khususnya untuk komunikasi inter gender. Bukunya seorang ahli linguistik di barat, Deborah Tannen, yang berjudul “You Just Don’t Understand” akan di analisis dalam studi ini. Tannen berpendapat bahwa kesulitan-kesulitan berkomunikasi yang dihadapi oleh pria dan wanita sama halnya dengan kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh orang-orang dengan latar belakang kebudayaan yang berbeda. Ini menjelaskan mengapa perbedaan kelamin tetap masih menimbulkan masalah dalam komunikasi. Teori Tannen memperlihatkan keterkaitan antara komunikasi antar gender yang ada di Indonesia, namun analisis yang lebih mendalam mengenai budaya sangat perlu dikaji dalam hal ini. Teori-teori dari Tannen dapat di pakai untuk menganalisis bagaimana nilai-nilai budaya yang ada dalam masyarakat khususnya dalam hal komunikasi antar gender. Study ini menganalisis inter gender yaitu jenis komunikasi yang tercipta antar gender yaitu kaum laki-laki dan perempuan yang terjadi di budaya barat yang diungkapkan oleh Tannen dalam bukunya dan kemudian dibandingkan dengan komunikasi antar gender yang terjadi dalam masyarakat Indonesia yang banyak dipengaruhi oleh nilai-nilai budaya dan agama. Dalam kajian studi ini ditemukan bahwa gaya pria dalam berkomunikasi mengacu kepada nilai; status dan kemandirian, sebaliknya wanita lebih mengarah kepada nilai; hubungan dan keakraban. Yang menarik adalah apa latar belakang yang mempengaruhi perbedaan nilai-nilai ini? Dan bagaimana yang terjadi di Indonesia? Kajian ini akan mengulas semua hal-hal di atas.

**Key Words:** Inter gender Communication- western- Indonesian – cultural - values

This study will analyze parts of the book *You Just Don't Understand* by linguist Deborah Tannen. Focussing on her theory that communication difficulties encountered by people when they communicate with the opposite sex are just like the difficulties encountered by people of different cultures. I will cover her theories regarding communication barriers between difference cultures and how this relates to communication between men and women. Essentially Tannen states that different styles of speaking in different cultures can be related to gender communication issues if one is prepared to view different genders as different cultures. I will apply Tannen's theory regarding inter-gender communication to Indonesian couples to see if her theory is true even with the cultural change. I will discuss the problems encountered applying her theory and suggest where these problems might come from. Unfortunately, this study necessitates the speaking in generalities. It is of course, careful to remember that men and women exist who do not conform to the generalisations made in Tannen's book or in this kind of library study. However, what should be kept in mind, is that a generalization is a description that applies nearly all of the time.

Linguist Deborah Tannen has changed the way western people think about communication between men and women with her new book *You just don't Understand*. She uses her theories on communication between people of different cultures, outlined in her other book, *That's not what I meant!* to reveal some of the hidden complications in communication between people of different gender. For the purpose of this essay, I shall coin two possibly new terms: inter-culture and inter-gender. Inter-culture indicates the type of communication that occurs when people of different cultures communicate and inter-gender is the type of communication that arises when men and women communicate.

### **Tannen's Theory on Communication Between Cultures**

First an outline of Tannen's theories on communication between cultures. She thinks different cultures have different communication styles and that differences in styles of communication can lead to misunderstanding between people with different conversational styles. Examples of different conversational styles include high-considerateness and high-involvement, cooperative overlapping and non-overlapping. For example, cooperative overlapping occurs in cultures such as some Italian cultures, where it is natural in conversation for more than two people to be talking at once. The contrast is non-overlapping conversation in which it is the height of rudeness to talk while another person is talking. For example, in Indonesia it is very

rude to interrupt while a person with a higher social status; parents, husband, or boss, are speaking.

Different cultures have different communication styles. People who have a culture in which conversation involves very short pauses often find that two people talking at the same time without pauses is natural and acceptable – the cooperative over-lappers fall into the high-involvement category. People from New York are considered as high-involvement speakers because for a person to stop speaking is considered to be a big enough pause for the next person to begin their part of the conversation. Other examples are found in Jewish, African, Arab communities, where interrupting is common and even expected. These high-involvement speakers often have their conversation seen as loud, pushy and aggressive especially compared to a quiet, polite person from London (Tannen 1990: 209). On the other end of the scale there are what Tannen calls high-considerateness speakers. Some people grow up in an environment where they have longer pauses between sentences and the people around them are familiar with the length of time to wait before they know it is the time for their turn to speak. Tannen has called these people high-considerateness speakers because it appears to her that they are very considerate of the other person, waiting until a person completely finishes before they begin to speak. This group includes those who wait for definite pauses in conversation before speaking and rarely interrupt social groups can include mid western Americans, Finns and Swedes who expect much longer pauses between speakers. These two conversational styles, high-involvement and high-considerateness are the cause of a great deal of misunderstanding when people in two different cultures engage in conversation. For example, a Californian person may feel that a New Yorker is extremely rude and constantly interrupts them, not pausing for long enough for them to speak. While the person from New York may wonder why the Californian is not contributing to the conversation. Tannen's theory of high-involvement and high-considerateness speakers focuses mainly on pauses, interruptions and instances in conversation where two speakers speak at once (Tannen 1984; Tannen 1986; Tannen 1990 and Tannen 1994).

Another aspect of cross-cultural communication is the amount of conflict or argument a person expects in conversation. Italians, for example will have loud arguments in the street, they call it *discussione*. For an Italian, *discussione* is a perfectly acceptable pass-time, one does it with one's closest friends. Studies on Italian children have found that they would prefer to be arguing loudly than playing (Tannen 1990: 160). In other cultures, however, the reverse is true and people will go to great lengths to avoid conflict. Some

Indonesian cultures are extremely reluctant to engage in any sort of debate, and this aspect of their culture is reinforced by a strict hierarchy in which people of high status are simply not questioned. One only has to imagine an Italian attempting to relate to an Indonesian and one can easily see how misunderstandings could occur. An Italian person may disagree with an Indonesian as a gesture of friendship, whereas the Indonesian person might be highly insulted by this gesture. Tannen has used the concept of cross-cultural communication in an attempt to explain problems that men and women encounter when communicating. She places men and women in different cultural spheres.

### **Men and Women as Different Cultures**

According to Tannen, males and females are essentially different cultures. She explains that the misunderstandings that cause many stereotypes complaints such as “my wife talks too much”, “he never talks to me”, “he never consults with me when making plans”, “she’s always too nosey”, “he never wants to ask for directions” are caused by men and women viewing the world in completely different ways. As men and women usually take it for granted that both sexes have the same view of the world, clashes are unavoidable. Men have their own way of speaking and listening to language, which refers to 'status' and 'independence'. However, women have their own way of speaking and listening to language, which centers on 'connection' and 'intimacy'. The question is, how does this happen? We know that men and women as brothers and sisters grow up in the same families, with the same circumstances, why should they be so different? Tannen suggests that men and women learn different modes of communication from early childhood, and that these different modes of communication are the outward manifestations of a completely different world view. Tannen says that through "taking a cross-cultural approach to male-female conversations... [it is]... possible to explain why dissatisfaction is justified without accusing anyone of being wrong or crazy" (Tannen 1990: 47).

Tannen outlined that men and women have their own way to engage the world. Men engaged the world as an individual in a hierarchical social order in which they are either one up or one down. Negotiation occurs in their conversation when they work at achieving or trying to keep their position. However, they will protect themselves from others who will try to undermine their status or position in the hierarchical order (Tannen 1990: 25). Life for men is a struggle to reach independence and avoid failure. On the other hand, women have their own way to engage the world. They approach the world as

an individual in a network of connections. Life for them is a struggle to reach intimacy and avoid isolation. It is this desire for connection that makes it far easier for women to place themselves as lower in the hierarchy. It is this aspect of the woman's world-view that allows her to ask for help with directions, they do not hesitate to ask because not only can asking help them faster but they can also make the connections with others that they value highly. The different approach of men and women toward communication reflects the different priorities that men and women have. For example, men's preoccupation with status and independence and women's view that networking and intimacy are more important. The rest of Tannen's book relates to this principle concept and this concept will be referred to as Tannen's theory.

Tannen states that Women and men are basically equal. They are just have different styles. Men refer to status and independence and women point to connection and intimacy. In order to reach these things they look at and perform in the world differently. Men will try to keep and maintain the status by showing that they are strong, independent, and appearing to want to win as often as possible. However women, with their focus on 'connection' reach this by building relationships, being warm, close each other. This desire to be close will neglect the desire to win. Consequently, it is from these contradicting world view that misunderstandings arise. Tannen's book carries the controversial message that, "The effect of dominance is not always the result of an intention to dominate." (1990: 18). Tannen means that it is the contradicting conversational style which creates problems in inter-gender communication. Men do not consciously try to dominate, and women do not consciously place themselves below them. Tannen has found an explanation which avoids unnecessary blame and distributes the burden of repairing the situation fairly between two genders.

### **Examples of Tannen's Theory in Action**

Tannen gives many instances where she can show these differences in action. As these situations are common in western culture, she speaks to a wide audience and this, if nothing else, could be an indicator of the accuracy of her theory at least where western culture is concerned. Though not every situation fit true to an Indonesian, the underlying themes of status and connection still apply in their culture. Only a few of Tannen's situations could be included; the asking and giving of sympathy, and roles in giving and receiving help. She analyses these situations in terms of male status and female connection. She also uses this analysis to introduce the reader to the

concept of framing, which is another important aspect of her communication theory.

### **Asking and Giving of Sympathy**

With regard to the asking and giving of sympathy Tannen points out that women and men expect different behaviour from themselves when it comes to just having a problem let alone asking or giving sympathy for one. Men rarely like to admit to having a problem, as it places them below the person they are trusting with their problems. They are more likely to keep their problems to themselves and are surprised when women seem to share their troubles with the world. Women treat a problem differently, maintaining their place in the hierarchy is not a first priority for them, so it is easier for them to say they have a problem. However, it is not necessarily the different comfort levels between genders that is the key problem. It is when they try to communicate a problem that the trouble starts. Women use the revealing of problems as a means to intimacy, they generally respond to a colleague with a confirmation of feelings “I know how you feel, I feel that way sometimes too”. When women seek sympathy, they seek understanding, a confirmation that someone knows how they feel. However, it could be said that men do not generally seek sympathy at all, they seek solutions. On the rare occasion that men do trust in another person it is to seek help solving the problem. It is when inter-gender revealing of problems happens that the problems start. In one case, women tell their problems to men and instead of receiving understanding and sympathy they get a seemingly unemotional solution to their problem. The men, instead of receiving help or advice feel that their problems have been belittled, or dismissed as problems that anyone else can have, because their colleague feels that way too. These different expectations invariably lead to disappointment and frustration in inter-gender communication. With men and women giving and receiving contradicting forms of sympathy (Tannen, 1990: 52).

### **Giving and Receiving Help**

Help is another form of human interaction that Tannen has redefined in terms of inter-gender interaction. Any offer of help contains a hidden message from the helper, “I think you need help”. This places the person who has offered help in a superior position, as the person who can determine whether the person in need of help will succeed in their attempt. Of course not every offer of help is loaded with meta-messages but one gets the general idea. The idea that help can be viewed in terms of status means that a man

will generally view help in this way. If a man is offered help, he is inadequate, below the giver of help in the hierarchy. If a man is to offer help, however, he is empowered. As a woman views the world with a view to connecting with it, she is not as likely to feel inferior asking for help as, in fact, it will allow her to make another connection with the world. It is because of these different ways of viewing help that misunderstandings between men and women arise. The classic example is where a man will drive around in a car for an hour looking for a location, while a female in the passenger seat will be hot, "Why don't you just ask someone?". The woman does not understand that for a man, asking is a last alternative, and the fact that she is telling him to ask indicates a lack of faith in him. This usually will make the man angry (if he wasn't already). Of course the woman does not intend for her request to hurt him, she merely wants to get to their desired location, so the resistance and anger displayed by the man not only look foolish to her but hurt her as well. Another aspect of help which contributes to misunderstandings between the sexes is instruction. Unusual though it may seem, most men do not make good teachers, especially in an area in which they are expert. Their status is maintained only if the student does not understand. Tannen claims that women, especially are reluctant to seek help from men as they are made to feel stupid, requesting help from women, however, was rarely stated as a problem. Tannen believes that another way in which men feel they are maintaining their status is by being the person who can fix things – performing the role of "helper" rather than the one "helped". Even if something cannot be fixed, the men will still assume a superior position by stating that the thing was impossible to fix. Tannen underlined that where fixing things is concerned, there is a social contract happening, "... [women] feel honour bound to seek [help], accept it and display gratitude in exchange. And men feel honor bound to fulfill the request for help" (Tannen, 1990: 65).

### **Framing**

When you address a person or ask them a question, what you say "frames" them or gives them a description. They will answer back from the description you have given them. For example, when an individual asks for help, they are framing another party as "helper". A substantial amount of misunderstanding occurs when couples try to talk to each other from different frames of reference, the women in the frame of connection and symmetry and the man in the frame of asymmetry and status. Whether men and women are placed in these frames as a result of their upbringing, or as a result of an in

built difference specific to gender is still a hotly debated topic. Women in society are often framed in subordinate positions, specifically mother, nurse, housewife. In these positions they are framed in a way so they may also be seen as serving others or doing others bidding (Tannen, 1990: 69).

The theory of different frames explains one puzzle regarding husband and wife relationships, in that the women seem to prefer to communicate via hints and requests rather than outright orders and this is seen by the men to be deceptive somehow sneaky. The husbands rarely take the time to look beyond the wife's actual words for deeper meaning because they simply assume that if the wife wanted something she would say so, just like he would. Women, however, are reluctant to do this as it upsets their sense of symmetry, saying what it is that they want feels like an outright demand to them.

### **Do Indonesian couples experience the same communication gap?**

Because gender roles tend to be so well defined in traditional Indonesian households it is difficult to find an instance where ambiguity in communication could occur. However, there is evidence that misunderstandings do occur, though they are generally felt by the women rather than the men. For example, an Indonesian wife instead of saying that she is hungry might ask her husband if he is hungry and would he like dinner prepared? The husband thinks he has been asked a yes or no question and responds accordingly. In Indonesia it seems that women also like to communicate via subtle hint which are totally lost on their male counterparts. Of course there are households in Indonesia that are not traditional and where ambiguity in communication can occur. It is also the case in some of these households that the gender roles in communication can be reversed, with the man taking on the communicative role and the woman communicating in terms of status, just like in western countries.

I have been researching into communication between genders especially the communication between husband and wife couples in Indonesia. I gave some open questions to four respondents. They consisted of two ladies who have lesser-education backgrounds (one finished elementary school and another passed Junior high school) they are from Java and Sumatera. The other two ladies who have higher education backgrounds (they are doing a masters degree), they are also from Java and Sumatera. Analysing the answers to the questions, I found that relationship between husband and wife that reflects their communication style is very much influenced by culture and religious values. Culturally, the husband is already placed in the position of higher status. For example, a wife can show respect



to her husband by calling him Mas (In Javanese people), Bang or Uda (in Sumateranese people). Indonesians culturally refer to the high context style of communication where parents, old people, husband have to be appreciated, given respect. This cultural value reflects the communication style of the society. Still, despite the rules that govern communication, Indonesian couples can still experiences the same fundamental differences between them that Tannen describes.

Here is a response to the questions that highlights the fact that the same sorts of situations that Tannen describes occur even in a radically different culture. “Yes it happen, men do not like to ask [for] information, For example, even in here, it is not our home town, when I and my husband walked together in city one day, some weeks after he arrived from Indonesia, we try to find taxation office in city. He [only] ever went there once when he went with his friends by their car, now we went by foot, he forced [us] to find it even though, it made us have to walk around and spent time. I was upset and said [why] we do not just ask [?] and he did not want, he said I just is not sure but I can find it without asking and at last he found. The experience like that happen many times between us and made me frustrate and upset.... I do not understand why he just not asking.”

However, Tannen does not effectively account for different cultural views of gender in her connection and status theory. I would like to point out which parts of the culture agree to with Tannen's theory and which do not.

### **Tannen's Theory as it Applies to Indonesian Inter-gender Communication**

At first glance, Indonesian society does seem to have modeled itself on Tannen's theory. Tannen said that boys and girls even are grown up in the same circumstances, but they are treated differently by adults. How others speak to the boys and girls and how the boys and girls speak to others are different between boys and girls (pp 43). In Indonesia boys and girls tend to play in the same sex groups, or even if they play together, they will play differently. Boys prefer games that have a leader and present opportunity for competing for that position. Girls, however, tend to play in a more egalitarian way. If there is an authority figure in the game, that figure is responsible for ensuring that every one has a turn, and even the authority role is shared. This is represented Indonesian as what Ong (1989) said that Indonesian is a hierarchical society where the senior is placed in the high position.

The place where the boys and girls play are also different, boys tend to play outside and girls tend to play in the house or in terrace, or 'field of a

house'. However, as these children grow up their ways of dealing with the world are increasingly influenced by religion and the culture around them (Hofstede and Bond 1984; Hofstede, G 1991; Irwin, 1990 and Hafidz 1993). It appears that their behaviour begins to contradict Tannen's theory. But this may be just on the surface.

### **Money and Status**

There seems to be a contradiction in the way an Indonesian household deals with its money, and Tannen's Theory. One would think that if the husband's preoccupation was on status and power, he would control the money and have power of veto over anything the family needed. Contrarily, a husband tends to give all of his earnings to his wife and she has the power to arrange how the money is spent. The men Indonesia believe that their wife will use the money effectively and efficiently. The husband in this case just asks for money for buying his basic needs such as cigarettes, or petrol for the car. To western eyes this seems to be a case of the man placing himself willingly in an overwhelmingly inferior position. However, for an Indonesian it is the only action that will bring him status. The primary role for men in Indonesia is to provide the money for their families. This represents Indonesian as a patriarchal society (Muniati 1993; Hofstede 1991; Katjasungkana, 1991; Wolf, 1992; Hafidz 1993; Istiadah 1995, and Wolf 1998). The connection to status is how much the man is able to provide. If their wife is a career woman, it would be insulting to her husband if she offered to pay for some of the families basic needs – THAT would be a lowering of status for him. So, though at first sight it seems as though an Indonesian man is handing over his status along with his pay check, closer inspection of the situation proves that he is actually adhering to Tannen's theory quite nicely.

### **Giving and Receiving Sympathy in Indonesia**

Tannen's description of the giving and receiving of sympathy, does not fit well with the responses for the survey or my experience. Indonesian people are taught not to hurt other feelings, so they try to give their sympathy whenever they feel it is needed. Culturally Indonesian are more tolerate people's feelings (Hofstede 1991). Because they are taught not to hurt other feelings, so even the men always try to get the suitable words to express disagreement for example, in order not to hurt other' feeling. It is hard for them to be straight forward. For Indonesian people sympathy is an integral part of the social and cultural rules for politeness and the two cannot really be

discussed meaningfully if they are separated. However, it seems that the sympathy/politeness rules for public life and the rules for inside the home are different. I have found that the home relationship is just as asymmetric as Tannen describes it (pp67), but for different reasons. In Indonesian marriages it is more often than not the wife who is expected to take on the role of sympathiser, while receiving no sympathy in return (at least from her husband). While this will vary from household to household, my interviewees and my experience confirmed that it is expected of a wife to be sympathetic to her husband's troubles. When I asked the interviewees why this was so they constantly referred to their religion, Islam. Also, Indonesian women for example tend to choose an indirect way of speaking in order to be more polite to their husband. They use this indirect technique representing one characteristics of eastern cultures which is indirect way of communication (Hall 1976 and Hofstede 1991 and Gallois & Callan 1997). I would like to give one example from my own experience as an Indonesian woman who owns the culture value, in the situation where to request help from and to express disagreement with their husband. For example, like my way, I will back off for a while and try to find a relaxed situation where I can tell my husband that I disagree as well as my reasons. The Muslim women in Indonesia are brought up to believe that the husband must always be deferred to as the leader in the household. It is impossible to determine whether the communication problems that Tannen associates with sympathy exchanges are present here, they do not really have a chance to arise.

### **The Effects of Indonesian Culture and Religion on Inter-gender Communication**

It is interesting to note that Tannen's theory is particularly relevant to western couples struggling to communicate on an equal footing. In Indonesia it is never assumed that men and women are equal in the first place, so if problems to occur, they are quickly "removed" via a religious formula which entails the women backing down in every single instance. Women are expected to tolerate more, give more consideration to, and lose arguments with men. Men's voice is dominant in family decision making (Williams 1990). The power imbalance survives via strict religious and cultural rules. For example, if a husband and wife have an argument, the husband is at freedom to leave at any time, however, the wife must stay until the argument is resolved or she is given leave to go. Western couples' communication problems arise from assuming that the other has the same world-view. In Indonesia this assumption is never made. Many of the interactions that occur

in between Indonesian couples can be explained with Tannen's theory of status and connection. However, the difference is that men are ALREADY in a position of status and the women are ALREADY forced into a position of making connections and networking in the community to get things done. The religious and cultural force is so strong that it is hard to assume that Indonesian people would be like this without their religion and culture.

### **Where does the gender bias in Indonesian communication come from?**

One key question where do these gender biases come from? Is it the religion or the culture? And if it was either the religion or the culture, what came first? It is difficult to tell, as culture and religion are always intricately bound in a society. Let us suppose for the moment, that if the gender bias has its roots in religion, then the bias must come from God, however, if the bias is rooted in culture then the bias comes from the people who make up the culture. This leads us to suppose that if the bias comes from the people who make up the culture then Tannen might just be right in proposing that male domination is the result of different world views, but not the result of the intention to dominate and that gender bias is the result of these different world views. Besides, a person who believed in an all knowing, all powerful and kindly creator would be reluctant to believe that this bias was rooted in religion.

There are many religions in the world influenced by gender bias: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jewish religion, Christian Catholic. In all these religions the position of a man in family life is very dominant (Muniati, 1993: 5-8; Wajidi 1993). Gender bias can be found in all of the religions where women are placed in second place. The function of a woman in society life, religious life and family life is as a servicer. In the Catholic church for example, women's role is different to men's. A woman can not be a leader of a church celebration, a woman can not be a decision maker. Women do not have rights to contribute in members' meetings because it is not polite for women to express opinions; in Tim.2; 8-15. (Muniati, 1993: 8). The Catholic church is a well known example of the patriarchal system where women are placed in inferior position.

In Indonesia women's position in society is greatly influenced by Islam and in general, there is still a big bias regarding men and women's relationship (Hassan, 1991: 67). The gender bias is reflected in that men's dominance places women as a subordinate, secondary and inferior to men in almost every aspect of life. A husband is considered the leader in the family and is placed in a higher position, his word is law. Men are placed above

women in general because the Muslim's society believes and assumes that it is said in Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an is the primary source of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the word of God conveyed by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad, who transmitted it to the first Muslim without change or error and Hadith is oral tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad.

However, Prof. Hassan Riffaat who is a feminist theology specializing in Islam argues that there is no inherent gender bias in Qur'an, and that the gender bias occurs in Hadith. She points out that while all of Muslim agree that where Hadith contradicts the Qur'an, the Hadith must be rejected, the gender bias in Hadith has not been rejected. This implies a couple of things. First, the Qur'an may have been interpreted incorrectly in the first place. For example, the word Adam is a Hebrew term and used as a collective noun in the Qur'an not to refer to a specific male person. This implication is, of course, still hotly debated. Secondly, that nobody thought of rejecting the gender bias because the scholars are men and it simply did not occur to question something that they already regarded as an axiom. This implies that gender bias already existed in culture, so when this bias was supported in Hadith there was no contradiction or surprise.

Regardless of the implications of Professor Hassan's arguments. It can probably be safely assumed that a religion with gender bias will be more readily accepted by a society that already has gender biases in it. It is possible that Indonesia had these gender biases before Islam came.

## **Conclusion**

You Just Don't Understand by linguist Deborah Tannen focuses on the misunderstanding that can occur in inter-gender communication. Her theory that inter-gender communication difficulties are just like the difficulties encountered by people of different cultures, goes a long way toward explaining why men and women still have trouble communicating. Tannen's theory regarding inter-gender communication does apply to Indonesian couples, however, one has to look beyond the surface presented by the culture to see this. It is important to be able to see Tannen's theory at work even with the cultural change. There are problems applying her theory mostly because communication in Indonesia follows social rules that are supported by a strong religious belief. One has to get past the surface politeness to see what is really happening in communication. However, as it is apparent that there is already a power imbalance between husband and wife, Tannen's theory may or may not explain what is really going on. It is important to

make sure that the gender bias is not mainly from the religion or culture before claiming that the genders are basically different even when they are very small. As there is very little work on gender at all in Indonesia, it is difficult to make a decision. It would be nice to see more research done on the linguistics of inter-gender communication in Indonesia. As for remedying the inequalities that already exist in Indonesia, it is a tricky question. These inequalities are strongly rooted in religion, and any change to religious beliefs is generally met with much resistance. There is also the question of whether there really is a need for change. It is possible that the inequality that exists in Indonesian marriages is perfect for survival in an Indonesian society. It is a very complicated question. And hence there is a need for more research into the communication between men and women in Indonesia.

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