

INTERCULTURAL NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AMONG PLAYERS OF MANCHESTER UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB IN ENGLAND

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Abstrak

Permasalahan sederhana yang terjadi di sepak bola Liga Inggris adalah mengenai bahasa yang digunakan oleh pemain lokal Inggris dan luar Inggris. Sebuah klub seperti Manchester United yang memiliki hampir setengah persentase dari keseluruhan skuad tentu mengalami permasalahan seperti ini. Beberapa pemain luar Inggris tidak familiar dengan berkomunikasi menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara verbal akan menyebabkan bahasa sebagai penghalang di dalam tim. Komunikasi nonverbal antar budaya adalah media untuk sekelompok individu dengan bermacam kewarganegaraan dan penghalang bahasa dalam situasi tertentu. Dalam proses tersebut melibatkan bahasa tubuh yang dimengerti secara semi-universal oleh anggota kelompok. Highlight pertandingan dari musim 2012/2013 hingga musim 2015/2016 adalah fokus utama dalam studi ini. Dokumentasi menjadi instrumen dalam studi ini, sedangkan metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Hasil dari studi menunjukkan bagaimana pemain membangun komunikasi di dalam lapangan. Sumber data adalah *screenshot* yang diambil dari video highlight pertandingan maupun individual diunduh dari *Youtube* dan alamat web klub.

Kata Kunci: komunikasi antar budaya, komunikasi dalam lapangan, Manchester United.

Abstract

A cliché complication in English Premier League football is about languages which are used by English and non-English players. A club like Manchester United which possess nearly half percentage of non-English players in the whole squad certainly have this problem. Several non-English players are not quite familiar in communicating verbally in English. It surely emerges language barrier among the players. Intercultural nonverbal communication is a medium for a group of individuals with assorted nationalities and language barrier to communicate in particular circumstances. Match highlights from season 2012/2013 until 2015/2016 are the main focus in this study. Documentation is the instrument for this study. It applies descriptive qualitative method in analysing the data. The results of the study show how players build up their communication whilst playing with nonverbal behaviours.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, on-the-pitch communication, Manchester United.

INTRODUCTION

English Premier League (EPL) can be said as the multicultural league in Europe. The number of foreign players per club may reach nearly half percentage of the total players in one club¹. Communication in the

middle of football game crucially requires a language-related skill. The language barriers occasionally bother players to communicate with each other. Football is about not only shouting, giving commands, or talking with the coach on the touchline but also communicating with the referee and his assistants. A foreign player, who is a *newbie* in English Premier League and does not have any

¹ Total minutes played by foreign players have reached 60, 36 % in 2013. On average players recruited since January 2013 represented

just over 41% of all squads, an average of more than 10 signings per club. EPL possesses second-largest possession of foreign players, preceded by Cyprus.

knowledge about English, might misunderstand the referee's warning towards him.

Some football pundits remark that language barrier is not a big problem in football, as long as the speaker and the interlocutor comprehend each code. However, in some occasion the players would encounter the difficulty. It is fine for foreign players who understand English even though they are unable to speak it. On the contrary, this emerges one big problem for local English players when those foreign ones send command to them and they might express different reaction.

Inability to speak English will also trouble the players to adapt with the squad. Football may be an international language. However, every national language possesses their own terms which are employed in football. In a case of David de Gea, a Spaniard goalkeeper who plays for Manchester United is comprehensible. He had not learnt to speak English before migrating to England. Manchester United former goalkeeping coach, Eric Steele once revealed that De Gea's first six months in United were horrendous. The trouble of commanding his area was obvious as he was lack of physical presence and communication ability in English. He was fortunate that with the help of Steele who is capable to speak Spanish, his language barrier was not that hard to destruct.

Kellerman noted that professional sports people seem to be succeeding in learning language (quoted in Long, 2005). This can be proved from the decent ability of speaking English by non-English players such as van Persie (Dutch), Mata (Spanish), and Januzaj (Belgian). The external factor, to play for an English club, is primarily burning the passion to learn English. The internal factor, however, also plays a massive role in assisting a player to learn English. Ander Herrera, a Spanish midfielder, already masters English well before he joined Manchester United. Those can be advantaging fellow English players to communicate with non-English ones. That makes those players *diglot*, or capable to speak two languages.

The Dutch football league or *Eredivisi* precisely exemplifies the importance of language learning. Either the command in Dutch or speaking Dutch during training is significant, as what the players have been rated. The main concern is regarding cultural understanding (Auer and Wei, 2007: 395). Unlike, EPL, Eredivisi clubs mostly consist of substantial number of local players, unless it is Ajax Amsterdam or Feyenoord, whose players' nationalities are assorted.

Danish sports club oblige their players to learn Danish, as language skills are high priority for foreigners. By providing language training and social support, it crucially will assist the foreigners to master Danish well. Language learning in football is influenced by pragmatic aspects (effective communication), ideological aspects (team sports, national importance and identification), fluctuation of players, recruitment, and money (Auer and Wei, 2007: 396).

RESEARCH QUESTION

- How do players build their on-the-pitch communication?

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Discovering problems in verbal communication, non-verbal one is another key to understand each other's intention. According to Tracy Novinger in the book *Intercultural Communication – A Practical Guide*, "We cannot not communicate. All behaviour is communication, and we cannot not behave" (4). See the statement below.

Even a person who does not want to "communicate"—who sits huddled with arms folded and head down—communicates that he is trying to avoid communication. By nature, communication is a system of behaviour. And because different cultures often demand very different behaviours, intercultural communication is more complex than communication between persons of the same culture. All communication takes place in the matrix of culture; therefore, difference in culture is the primary obstacle to intercultural communication. (Novinger, 2001)

It is obvious that communicating with someone from different culture is much more complex than doing it so with another one with similar culture. One that must be giving concern, is that they way of communicating in each culture is different from another. That is why Novinger emphasised on behaviour. It is one of the obstacles in communicating in intercultural situation. Every culture forms its own accepted and unaccepted behaviours and different cultures can cause misunderstanding between cultures (Colero, 2005: 105)

From two-thirds to three-fourths of all communication is nonverbal, as what has been estimated by communication specialists. A person can express their thought by showing gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, dress, body language, etc. Non-verbal language somehow is the natural form of communication that is learnt well. If people have an obligation to translate verbal language, they also need to translate non-verbal language (Novinger, 2001).

This is the most common case happening in football field. As Manchester United squad is assorted, intercultural communication is the main concern to give attention. In football case, variety of cultures, which are related to the behaviour, is not really a major problem. Verbal language is stronger to make complication on the

pitch rather than non-verbal one. Some foreign players may not be able to speak English. However, non-verbal communication can become the key to unravel the problem. As football language around the world is universal.

Non-Verbal Communication

Whenever information which is not spoken or written is delivered to someone, it is called nonverbal (Colero, 2005). Nonverbal cues consist of facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, smells, signs, and touch. From those cues, people can comprehend deeper about information even emotion when spoken or written signals cannot describe explicitly. It was also uncovered the research result of messages between individuals are transmitted less than 55 percent from the body, 38 percent from the voice – inflection, intonation, volume – and 7 percent from the words (Colero, 2005: 5). It is remarked that *greater understanding of nonverbal communication will enhance the quality of our lives and also will give us the ability to relate to others with a greater degree of understanding, empathy, sympathy, and compassion (Colero, 2005).*

Five nonverbal cues below are taken from Novinger's theory about types of nonverbal cues (2001).

- **Facial expression**
It is the expression shown upon someone's face. It can be smile, frown, and scrunch. An emotion of a person can be noticed easily and mostly from facial expression. Universal patterns of facial expression are supported by communication research which has been done.
- **Gestures**
are the movement made by parts of the body, while emblem is a gesture chosen a specific meaning in a culture. The way someone stands can signal others about the state of emotion. For example, when a person is standing but not that erect, it is the indication that his emotion is not stable.
- **Eye contact**
is the way two or more people communicate to each other. It is indicated with the movement of eyeballs. Direct eye contact indicates close attentiveness.
- **Touch/Haptics**
is merely about body contact. Physical touch will be remembered if it is firm, pleasant, and nonthreatening, one will be considered as an

open, warm, and strong person. Otherwise, it will emerge something inappropriate if the opposite happens (Colero, 2005: 7).

- **Postures**

can be meant variously. It is related with the use of body posture and stance. A person can be told pretty much from their posture and gestures (Colero, 2005: 88).

METHOD

This study employs descriptive qualitative method as it does not require any calculation or statistics in collecting the data. The instrument of this study is documents and materials culture. Subject and setting of the study are players of Manchester United first team and U21s team in season 2012/2013 until 2015/2016. The data are taken from match highlights downloaded from *YouTube* and club website.

There are two aspects which are required as reference to analyse the data, which are: two players with different nationalities and nonverbal cues applied by players. Procedures of data collection are starting from downloading the videos, watching match videos, taking screenshots, and dividing players' nationalities into two categories, which are English and non-English one.

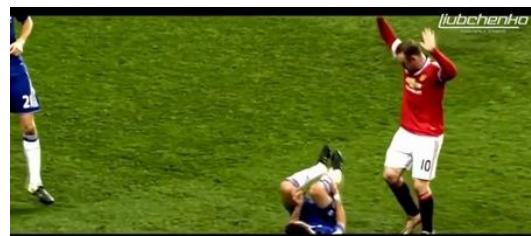
Four components of data analysis technique are used for analysing data, those are data collection, data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Results**

All data below are classified based on nonverbal language they applied on the pitch. There are five nonverbal cues and each cue consists of two screenshots of two different players with different nationalities.

- 1) Gestures
Datum 1



Datum 2



The first screenshot was taken from a video compilation of Wayne Rooney's fights, fouls, injuries, dives, and red card². As shown in the video Rooney was standing with both of hands up, while the Chelsea player below him seemed to have just fallen over. Rooney's hand signal could be meant that he attempted to signal the referee that he did not commit any tackling upon that Chelsea player.

The same reaction was similarly expressed by Daley Blind in the second screenshot. It was taken from an individual highlights of Blind versus West Bromwich Albion³. Both screenshots share identical circumstances, where they were lifting their hands above opponent's players who fell over. This reaction aimed to avoid the judgement from the referee even though referee's decision from his and his assistant's vision was not always the same with theirs. Even though if a player unintentionally tackled an opponent's player, he would still be reacting like that to challenge his luck as sometimes the referee could misjudge, for example, giving the opponent a yellow card from doing a dive.

Considering that both Rooney and Blind shared similar reaction with that hand signal even though their nationalities are different, that expression is universally comprehensive by other international football players because EPL consists of multicultural players.

2) Eye contact

Datum 3



Darmian was taking a throw-in on the sideline and before he threw the ball to one of his teammates, he looked around on his surroundings. Considering that he was a *newbie* in the club and did not speak English, Darmian was not attempting to give shouting to his teammates to get into right position. Instead, he just stared around seeking for somebody standing in the right position to receive the ball. This signal was also overseen by opponent's player to block the ball before getting passed to the teammate. Deception of look was sometimes required to outwit the opponent's player. It could be done by pretending looking at a teammate straight in front of him as if the ball was aimed to him; however, the ball was thrown to somebody else on his right.

Datum 4



A free-kick had been given to Man United U21s as Pereira was fouled right near the penalty box. Pereira alone was appointed the executioner for this free-kick. As displayed on picture above, he was piercing his eyes as he had caught his teammate's appropriate position to give a volley pass. Pereira only showed a short look before he kicked the ball up. It was to avoid the opponent's player to notice what was being planned by him. Once again, this signal was very beneficial to outwit the opponent from blocking the ball before the goal. The teammate he was giving a pass to was fortunately out of marking. Thus, he could directly receive the ball by jumping and give a header straight into the goal. Screenshot above was captured from an individual highlights of Andreas Pereira versus Chelsea U21s on February 9th 2015⁴.

Unlike previous two data, either player in eye-contact expression is a non-English player. Nevertheless, they still shared the same style of looking around by looking intensely in distant area before passing the ball to a teammate, even though both of whom were situated in different circumstances. This nonverbal cue is pure nonverbal because it is not generally added with verbal one.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CszFOOcO0uk> retrieved February 28th 2016

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV3Yt-asDNw> retrieved November 5th 2015

⁴ Retrieved February 10th 2015 (deleted video on website)

3) Facial expression

Datum 5



Screenshot above is a part of a moment when a referee giving a wrong accusation towards a player who allegedly committed a foul. This event occurred in UEFA Champions League (UCL) game between Manchester United versus Wolfsburg on September 30th 2015⁵. In the video, Schweinsteiger seemed to tackle the opponent's player when the ball was slightly out of control as the opponent's player loses his balance. The referee gave him a yellow card as Schweinsteiger was suspected to have a body contact with the opponent. He was furious with referee's decision, as according to him he did not commit a single foul. It occurred because Schweinsteiger's opinion was based on EPL regulation that it was quite different with UCL regulation. He showed anger by scrunching his face, swearing, and bad mouthing the referee's assistant on the sideline. Schweinsteiger intended to tell the manager that he did not deserve this booking as shown in the picture. His hand movement also played a role in emphasising something what he was trying to say, however it did not seem that his hand movement contained specific meaning.

Datum 6



The screenshot above was captured from a personal highlights of Nick Powell versus Fulham on February 2nd 2015⁶. The video showed Powell's anger after his aerial duel was intentionally blocked by a Fulham's player in Fulham's box. Powell attempted to

receive a volley pass to continue heading it toward the goal. However, Powell's attempt was bailed by the opponent with an unnoticed foul. Man United should have given a penalty as it was clearly a foul as shown in the replay, yet the referee failed to notice it as he signalled play-on. Powell who was not satisfied with the decision expressed it with anger. His expression was quite similar with Schweinsteiger in the previous screenshot, with lowered eyebrows, intense glare, and scrunched nose with his mouth kept blabbering about his dissatisfaction.

Anger reaction was expressed identically by the two players above and could be comprehended universally through facial expression. It is not purely nonverbal as players usually keep blabbering whilst being overcome with anger.

4) Touch

Datum 7



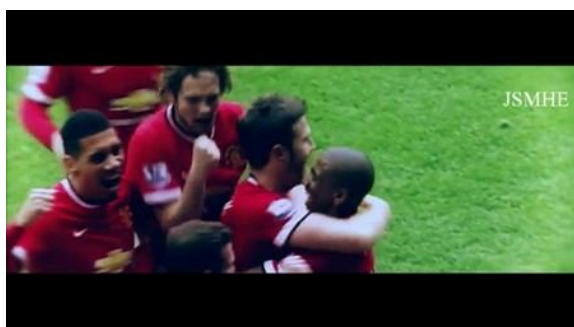
Januzaj (left) and Vermijl (right) are both Belgian players who played for U21s team in season 2012/2013⁷. Screenshot above was captured from a final play-off match between United U21 versus Tottenham Hotspur U21 in 2013. Those players showed that hug as an act of affection after Vermijl scored one goal in second half after they were down 2-0 in the first half. Their smile was like a new hope had been ignited to win the title. Januzaj was the first player to come over and picked Vermijl in a hug considering that both of them were compatriots. The hug was slightly done by putting one or two arms circling a teammate's body which would make a contact. Their smiles completed the overwhelming situation between them. Vermijl's goal eventually escalated other two goals created by United where finally the final score sheet decided that United went as the champions.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK0MeRDLuM4> retrieved November 15th 2015

⁶ retrieved February 19th 2015 (deleted video on the website)

⁷ <http://www.manutd.com/en/Players-And-Staff/Reserves/Reserves-News/2013/May/video-highlights-of-manchester-united-under-21s-vs-tottenham-in-league-final.aspx> retrieved May 21 2013

Datum 8



Second screenshot was a goal celebration with a group hug where Michael Carrick (middle) netted a goal against his old team, Tottenham Hotspur in season 2014/2015⁸. It was captured from Michael Carrick's gold moments compilation video during his career as a Man United player. Smalling, the player with clenched fist on the left, is also an English player as well as Young, the bald one, whose neck was wrapped by Carrick. That group was dominated by English players, only one Dutch player, Blind, who was beside Smalling captured in that picture. They shared affection upon the goalscorer by hugging each other and celebrating in front of the spectators. It was quite emotional as Tottenham was known as one of the hardest opponents in EPL, plus considering that it is Carrick's former club.

From those screenshot, it can be concluded that affection given to the goal scorer was expressed by giving hug. Those hug examples were done by making body contact with arms wrapping each other. Body contact is usually added with verbal language in terms of complimenting teammates or in fighting. In addition, their faces which were full of excitement completed their joy.

5) Postures

Datum 9



Manchester United made it through to seal the twentieth title in season 2012/2013 along with Robin van Persie as the top scorer of the season⁹. It was the first

season of Van Persie becoming a Man United player after his long life devotion to Arsenal FC. His motivation to move to Man United was to obtain a premier league title which he longed to have. Screen shot above was taken from Man United Celebration after the referee blew the whistle noting that the game versus Aston Villa ended with Man United as the league champions. Van Persie's body stance was erected as displayed in the picture. Whilst lifting both of his hands, he showed everybody at the stadium that he was utterly overwhelmed with the result in the entire season. It was as if he conveyed a message, saying *I've finally made it*. Along with his teammates, he celebrated their victory in front of 75,000 supporters in Old Trafford stadium. Erected body stance also occurs in every celebration of a goal scorer when they usually run and shout with his teammates. It is a universal signal for every footballer in the world to convey messages of celebration.

Datum 10



Ashley Young as an English left-wing midfielder has the habit of breaking through the opponent's defence area. He frequently assists the striker or his fellow midfielders to create chances inside of the box. Goals are often created from his left foot. The screenshot above was captured from a compilation video of his best moments as a left-wing and left-back¹⁰. It was Young's celebration after netting a goal in a league game versus Newcastle United held in St. James' Park, Newcastle's stadium. Young did this celebration in front of Newcastle's supporters while patting Man United's crest on his left chest to show them that he was still worth it. Young's face showed the excitement from ecstasy he was having after scoring a goal while his hands were extended with clenched fists. He seemed to scream his heart out in front of the crowd with that mouth wide-open.

There was a little similarity between Van Persie and Young despite their national differences. Their body

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7uYBLHCo04> retrieved February 28th 2016

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCKJeJ1X6RE> retrieved April 24th 2013

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKREN1-DcJ4> retrieved February 28th 2016

stance was erected with both hands extended. Players' postures sometimes are accompanied with verbal language in terms of shouting their joy to the supporters, however, in Van Persie's situation, he did not seem to make any verbal language.

• Discussion

Starting from body movement, Rooney and Blind were the exemplification hand signals where both of them shared similar movement to inform everybody else involved in the game about something that they did or they did not do. Their action could be included as *sign*. It is stated by Yule (2006) that sign is implemented rather than speaking. Rooney and Blind applied this movement to defend themselves instead of speaking it out loud. For eye contact, Darmian and Pereira acted almost identical in communicating by staring at their teammates before passing the ball. Both of them stared with intensity. Those could be verified with a theory that on cultural habit, eye behaviour such as staring, frequency of contact, and lowering the eyes are part of rules in some cultures. Direct eye contact also indicates close attentiveness (Novinger, 2001: 65). Even though eye contact is not included in football rules, direct contact plays the role of attentiveness on marking teammate's position before passing the ball one to another.

Showing expression apparently was also a part of communicating on the pitch. Schweinsteiger and Powell showed their anger after getting *false* accusation and not getting a penalty kick from the referee. By displaying their rage, they unconsciously dragged their teammates to be on their side for protesting the referee. According to Novinger (2001), universal patterns of facial expression are supported by communication research which has been done. Those two players' expressions could be said that those were universal and uni-cultural. Anger and disappointment are expressed similarly by any footballers despite their different cultural background.

Communication in showing affection upon a teammate was expressed by sharing a group hug. Januzaj put his arm around Vermijl after the latter created a glimpse of hope by scoring a goal. As well as players in the next screenshot who gave big hug to Carrick who did the same thing. Those hugs was a part of communication in showing affection and giving appreciation to teammates who had netted the ball. Hug is included in touch or haptics theory. According to Colero, physical touch will be remembered if it is firm, pleasant, and nonthreatening, one will be considered as an open, warm, and strong person. Otherwise will happen if the touch does not seem as mentioned above (2005: 7). More examples of it would be included in appendixes.

As for Young and Van Persie's acts, those were also actually about wanting to share their happiness with the crowd by making certain body stance as words were not enough to express their contentment at that moment where Van Persie had to close his eyes to savour that moment. Body stance is included in a theory about posture. Colero argues, that a person can be told pretty much from their posture and gestures (2005, p. 88). Facial expression is pretty much the additional factor to interpret someone's emotion.

From all verification above, a conclusion could be drawn that all players in the screenshots, whose cultural background are different, shared similar expression of communication with nonverbal language particularly with behaviour. Therefore, they have implemented intercultural communication. Novinger stated that 'even a perso who does not want to "communicates" – who sits huddled with arms folded and head down – communicated that he is trying to avoid communication.[...] All communication takes place in the matrix of culture; therefore, difference in culture is the primary obstacle to intercultural communication' (2001). Therefore, players implemented nonverbal behaviour to communicate with teammates whose cultures are different.

CONCLUSION

Several primary points are concluded during the analysis of on-the-pitch communication. There are five important cues of nonverbal behaviour which are frequently implemented by footballers of Manchester United to build up communication. Those are gesture, eye contact, touch, facial expression, and posture. Ten data were found from match highlights videos. Two hand signals represent signs; eye contact before taking a throw-in and a free-kick represent eye contact; touch is represented with hugs among players; anger, sadness, disappointment, and happiness expressions represent facial expression; and two body stances after becoming a champion and scoring a goal represent posture. In spite of players' different nationalities, they shared similar ways in communicating

SUGGESTION

The results of this study are expected to assist the next researchers who are about to have topic about intercultural communication or communication in sport field. The suggestion includes terms which are applied in football world, official nonverbal signals, and recommendation of subjects.

There should be more examples of nonverbal behaviours implemented by football players on the pitch.

Referee and his assistants will greatly suffice the shortness of data regarding nonverbal cues. The new researchers can also seek for information by doing questionnaire to international players who play for Indonesian football clubs. If researching in European football club is more relevant, selecting for one club whose players' nationalities are assorted is the best way to do it once again.

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