



GHÂNCARAN: JURNAL PENDIDIKAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA INDONESIA

<http://ejournal.iainmadura.ac.id/index.php/ghancaran>

E-ISSN: 2715-9132; P-ISSN: 2714-8955

DOI 10.19105/ghancaran.vi.21738



Emotional Language in Madurese Culture: Implications for Culturally Responsive Counseling Practice

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Abstrak

Kata Kunci:

Bahasa emosi;
Konseling berbasis
budaya;
Budaya
Madura.

Pengetahuan tentang emosi yang dipengaruhi budaya merupakan hal penting dalam praktik konseling yang responsif terhadap budaya. Budaya mempengaruhi persepsi, pengendalian, dan ekspresi emosi, terutama dalam konseling yang menekankan kepekaan terhadap norma dan nilai budaya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan bentuk-bentuk bahasa emosional dalam budaya Madura dan implikasinya terhadap konseling yang responsif terhadap budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, di mana data diperoleh melalui tinjauan pustaka, wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Madura mengungkapkan perasaan mereka kepada orang lain secara langsung (*blak-blakan*) maupun tidak langsung menggunakan bahasa simbolik dengan nilai-nilai harga diri (*martabat*), adab (*tengka*), ketabahan (*sabbhar*), dan solidaritas sosial. Pemahaman tentang cara-cara mengkomunikasikan emosi ini sangat penting dalam konseling untuk mengembangkan hubungan terapeutik yang efektif dan peka budaya. Penelitian ini menyarankan perlunya mengintegrasikan pendekatan konseling yang lebih empati, kontekstual, dan peka budaya yang mempertimbangkan sistem nilai lokal serta perlunya menyesuaikan intervensi untuk mencerminkan kepekaan budaya lokal sebagai cara untuk meningkatkan efektivitas dukungan psikologis.

Abstract

Keywords:

Emotional language;
culturally based
counseling;
Madurese culture.

Knowledge of culturally influenced emotionality is an important set of knowledge for culturally responsive counseling practice. Culture influences the perception, control, and expression of emotions not least within counselling where much emphasis is laid on sensitivity to cultural norms and values. The purpose of this research is to describe forms of emotional languages in Madurese culture and discuss the implications for culturally responsive counseling. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, where data is obtained through literature review, interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of this study show that the Madurese people manifest their feelings to others directly (*blak-blakan*) and indirectly using symbolic language with the values of dignity (*martabat*), propriety (*tengka*), patience (*sabbhar*), and social solidarity. An understanding of these ways of communicating

emotions is critical in counseling for the development of therapeutic relationships that are both effective and culturally sensitive. The study suggests the need for integrating more empathy, contextually and culturally sensitive training approach that takes into consideration local value system as well as the need to tailor interventions to reflect local cultural sensitivities as a way of improving the effectiveness of psychological support.

Terkirim: 22 Agustus 2025; Revisi: 25 Agustus 2025; Diterbitkan: 8 September 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of emotional language plays a vital role in understanding how feelings are encoded through specific symbols and communication styles within local cultural communities. Emotional language is not only language but also implicit emotional expressions according to social customs and cultural significance. This also indicates the contention that emotions are culturally and socially constructed; as such, culture and others in the environment play a role in perceiving the way of expressing the emotions (Setyaningsih, 2021). Emotional language is one of the five key components of cultural complexity that influence emotional experience, expression, and regulation (Pascuzzi & Smorti, 2018).

Jackson et al. (2019) emphasize that while the structure of emotions is universal, their expression varies across cultures.. In the past, culture has been central to understanding how people regulate and display their emotions (Zhou et al., 2023). Culture is in part responsible for guiding the manner in which people socially manage and express their emotions and through set of social norms referred to as emotional display rules In order to do so, via which people in a given culture are guided with regard to when, how, and to what extent their emotions should be displayed in given social situations (Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008a; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013; Manokara et al., 2024).

In collectivistic cultures, such as those found in many Asian societies including Indonesia, values of interdependence and social harmony are emphasized. People from these cultures generally control their emotional outpour, especially their negative emotions to protect group harmony and minimize overt confrontation (Niedenthal, 2014; Schunk et al., 2023). Accordingly, some individuals (especially from collectivist cultures) may sometimes suppress negative emotions in order to maintain positive group bonds and harmonious interpersonal relationships (Song et al, Chan & Ryan, 2024; Lim, 2016). Even in interdependent cultures, regulating emotions, e.g., through suppression, is regarded as a constructive social strategy, because they can allow self-control without

losing social efficacy (Song et al., 2024).

Recent research has suggested that among collectivist Asian cultures, for example, adaptive emotion regulation—wherein individuals engage in suppressing or flexibly modifying their expressions according to social context—may be positively related to psychological well-being, while the relation may be different in individualistic cultures (Ang & Tsai, 2023). Early socialization may lead to maintaining norms of self-regulation and emotional control early in life in Indonesian society (Makruf et al., 2024).

Conceptually, Madurese culture has specific ways of emotional communication based on local values which influence everyday life emotional regulation and expression (Setyaningsih, 2021; Trisetiawati et al., 2025). This local emotion regulation and management emphasizes the necessity of reading emotional communication not just as a linguistic expression, but also as a socially and symbolically layered one. Madurese cultural communication researches result strong norms placed to maintain face and public harmony as stimulation from social interaction events (Dharmawan, Aji, & Mutiah, 2017; Wiyata, 2003).

Emotion expression, especially as it relates to culture, is the focus of a concern across fields of study, including counseling. An understanding of emotional language and culturally constructed emotional expressions comprises a critical element of culturally responsive counseling because culture plays a significant role in how people feel, manage, and articulate emotions in interpersonal settings (Mesquita & Frijda, 2003; Immordino-Yang et al., 2016). This is why counselors must be culturally attuned to interpret the tacit emotions and prevent any potential miscommunication or misinterpretation so that their interventions become more effective.

In the context of culturally responsive counseling, how a counselor understands local emotional language, expression—implicit and symbolic—remains key. Misalignments in dealing with emotional expressions can interfere with the therapeutic process and evoke resistance on the part of clients (Lonner & Draguns, 2018; Tanaka-Matsumi & Draguns, 2022). Also, conceptualizing the client's emotions within their cultural context enhances a successful cultural relationship in therapy (Pedersen et al., 2016).

Therefore, this study is important to bridge the gap between theoretical perspectives on emotional language and actual counseling practices in Madura. In addition, this study adds to the cultural psychology literature by embedding culturally sensitive psychological interventions. The purpose of this study are: (1) to identify the emotion language forms in Madurese culture, and (2) to explore the implication to the effective culturally sensitive

counseling service practice in line with the local values.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for counselors—emphasizing the importance of adapting communication strategies, utilizing culturally sensitive questioning formats, and aligning psychological interventions with Madurese values. Consequently, counseling interventions may become more empathetic, relevant, and impactful within the local context.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth portrayal of the forms of emotional language in Madurese culture and their implications for culturally responsive counseling practices. This approach was selected as it is appropriate for examining subjective meanings, socio-cultural contexts, and the symbolic dynamics contained in emotional expressive and communicative practices in a particular culture (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The data were generated through the following four main techniques: literature review, interviews, observation, and documentation. Upon conducting the literature review, the researchers found that the articles used for the research incorporated theoretical issues on emotional language, Madurese community's core cultural values, and cross-cultural counseling. Interviews also were semi-structured among key informants (community leaders, counselling practitioners, and representative members of the Madurese community) in order to obtain an emic (insider's) perspectives toward expression of emotions in the community. This method made it possible for investigators to examine stories, metaphors, and cultural models that shape patterns of emotional communication.

Observation took place in particular social contexts, like religious rituals, local customs, and spontaneous social gatherings in order to directly observe symbolic, contextually-bound emotional ways of communicating. Documentation was also compiled and reviewed of field notes, interview transcripts and others which supplemented and confirmed the findings.

The thematic analysis followed the concepts of a qualitative content analysis with data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and narrative generation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researcher trustworthiness relied on triangulation of sources and methods to verify the confirmability of the data collected (Patton, 2002; Moleong, 2017) and peer debriefing to reduce interpretive bias (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Each finding was discussed within the context of Madurese culture and associated with social norms and tenets of cross-cultural counseling. By doing so, the study seeks to create a deeper understanding of the use of emotional language in building or transforming effective therapeutic relationships in local contexts to contribute to the development of culture-sensitive counseling practices- especially in the Madurese community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis using a descriptive qualitative approach, the following section presents and discusses the research findings on Emotional Language in Madurese Culture: Its Implications for Culturally Responsive Counseling Practice. The presentation of findings is conducted systematically, beginning with the identification of distinctive characteristics of emotional expression in Madurese culture, followed by an analysis of how these findings contribute to the development of culturally sensitive counseling approaches. Each theme described is organized based on emergent patterns identified during the data analysis process, while also considering relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research findings.

Characteristics of Emotional Language in Madurese Culture

Emotional language is a kind of language that individuals use to express, regulate, and communicate emotional experiences to others in both verbal and non-verbal symbols (Liu et al., 2023). This idea includes not only vocabulary to describe dimensions of emotion such as anger, sadness, or joy, but also addresses the ways that people generate and make sense of emotion in particular sociocultural worlds (Parkinson, 2023). Emotional language is the bridge that connects inward subjective experience with outward expression and is critical to the regulation of emotion and social communication (Lindquist, 2021).

Theoretically, emotional expression is not entirely universal, and the level of emotional expression is predetermined by the social norms and cultural values held by a society (Matsumoto et al., 2008b). This means that the use of words, mode of expression, degree of emotion, and settings that are most likely to impart a message are largely influenced by the cultural systems in which people find themselves.

One of the common social activities among the Madurese people that represents expressing emotional language in daily life are during informal and formal events, including religious gatherings (e.g., *kolom* - communal prayers) and cultural events such

as weddings, traditional ceremonies, and memorial services (*tahlilan*) for the deceased. Some of these activities are shown in the following image.



Figures 1 & 2. Documentation of Madurese Community Activities (in Pamekasan - Madura)

The research revealed six major dimensions of emotional language in Madurese culture. One is a preference for immediate emotional expression. The Madurese character, straightforward (*blak-blakan*) and emotional (Candra, 2023; Dewi et al., 2023) It is supported by the results of previous studies. They generally avoid indirect or overly polite expressions when expressing dissatisfaction or honesty. Such bluntness, though sometimes perceived as rude (*gherra*) in more polite cultures, is regarded in Madurese society as a form of honesty and emotional transparency.

Second, emotional expressions in Madurese culture are usually intense and direct. Emotions such as anger, sadness or happiness are frequently communicated in a hyperbolic manner through exaggerated facial expressions and vocal expression. This isn't about being impulsive, it's about adopting an ethos of honesty and deep feeling. But in some cases, emotional expressions can be more implicit and symbolic. Anger, sadness, or disappointment may not be expressed verbally or directly but, in such as it does, comes veiled in non-verbal cues – long silences, stiff body language (*sekko*). These expressions are deeply embedded in cultural values including propriety (*tengka*) and social norms that maintain relational harmony (Majid et al., 2023). This is consistent with the theory of display rules, which prescribes when and how emotions are to be encoded through the influence of culture (Matsumoto et al., 2008b).

Third, dignity (*martabat*) has a key role in emotional regulation. The perception of respect or indignity can be a major determinant of the emotional response. When someone feels their dignity is being assaulted, people can react with tremendous rage, or they sometimes just cannot tolerate certain types of criticisms. On the other hand, the

appreciation and acknowledgement of one's dignity give rise to positive emotions like gratitude and fidelity.

Fourth, solidarity and loyalty to family and community are highly valued. Group identity and emotional bonds serve as a strong foundation for social relations. This commitment promotes group pride and motivation, but it also serves to elicit protective and defensive behaviors when a member of the community is at risk. This is consistent with the results of Akkuş, Postmes, and Stroebe (2017) who described loyalty, honor, and social hierarchy as core principles for creating social solidarity.

Fifth, non-verbal communication plays a significant role in conveying emotions. Madurese people normally use body language, voice tone and facial expression to express their feelings. This is consistent with the notion that the decoding of emotions requires attention to cultural context (Mesquita & Frijda, 2003; Huynh, Oakes, & Grossmann, 2018). Furthermore, it is from concrete acts – such as sacrifice or unconditional support – rather than explicit verbal assurances that love and caring are more often expressed. Therefore, the comprehension of non-verbal dimensions is very vital in interpreting the emotional dynamics in the context of Madurese culture.

Sixth, religious and customary values significantly shape how emotions are expressed in Madurese society. From a cultural psychology viewpoint, Mesquita and Frijda (2003) suggest that emotional phenomena are built in social exchanges that are shaped by the cultural context. As such, emotional language is highly context-bound, and closely related to local norms about when emotions can be displayed and when they must be controlled. This notion is consistent with display rules theory, which claims emotional modulation occurs under the direction of culturally prescribed norms (Matsumoto et al., 2008b; Kamiloglu, Manokara, Tybur, & Sauter, 2024).

In other words, emotional language performs as a multivalent symbol that is not solely instrumental in accessing emotions, but is also laden with status positions, the normative norms, and cultural meanings built into walls of culture and communication. Hence, understanding emotional language necessarily needs to be studied in the context of social interaction, and we need to consider cultural variation in the interpretation and expression of emotions (Hoemann et al., 2024). Bearing in mind that emotional language should be studied in an integrated kind of way which integrates linguistic, cultural as well as emotion regulation levels based on broader social facts in a specific social order, e.g., emotional expressions of Madurese society.

Cultural Context and Challenges in Counseling

The local culture of the Madurese community significantly plays a role in determining how they express and control their emotions. Core values such as dignity (self-respect), *tengka* (*proprieties*), and social solidarity (Setyaningsih, 2021) play an important role as a basic framework in understanding the emotional dynamics of clients. Culture that fosters an emphasis on symbols and social norms brings to bear a complicated account of emotion. Emotional expressions do not only mirror emotional experiences, but are also influenced by culturally specific levels and ranges of intensity (Cowen et al., 2034). Thus, counselors should be intercultural sensitive in understanding the verbal expressions of their clients because the meanings could be included and not directly presented (Lestari et al., 2025). If this is not the case, misconception of the emotions may arise from the counseling process.

Although Madurese are generally assumed to be blunt and proactive, their emotional styles also focus on self-control and passivity. The concept of *sabbhar* reflects emotional maturity and a commitment to maintaining personal honor. It is therefore not surprising that this frequently punitive emotion regulation style might be interpreted as defiance or detachment when not read through a cultural lens. If both self-awareness (the capacity of the counselor to recognize and handle their own values, beliefs, and prejudices) and cultural understanding (the thorough understanding of the client's cultural history) are encouraged, counselors can provide better-matched and more comprehensive support (Asri et al., 2024). Also, an empathic and non-threatening attitude is necessary for cross-cultural counseling (Pedersen et al., 2016; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

One of the major issues faced in cross-cultural counseling is the cognitive biases and the unconscious stereotypes of the counselor which can affect communication. For example, indirect communication is often misunderstood to mean someone is not being transparent when in fact it could be their way to remain peaceful, conflict-free, respectful (Mailin et al., 2023). This indicates that inhibition of emotional expression might be an adaptive strategy in a particular cultural setting.

Misunderstandings are also often caused by mismatched expectations about the place of counseling. In the Madurese context, regarding mental well-being, religious and social values hold a more central position than do Western psychological ideas. This is consistent with results reported by Subu et al. (2022), that is crucial for understanding how mental health is greatly influenced by religious beliefs. As such, culturally based counseling approaches enable counselors to perceive the psychological dynamics of

clients in a more multimodal fashion. The understanding of cultural values and beliefs is the bedrock to establishing a solid therapeutic alliance (Andrianie et al., 2024).

Another challenge experienced by trainees concerns the integration of cultural sensitivity while lacking professional experience (Farandini et al., 2024). Among the issues, there is the task of recognizing implicit and symbolic emotional language. Signs like a long silence, the use of euphemism or mild sarcasm are frequently misunderstood as indication of a lack of interest or a refusal. And here, a multicultural competence will become particularly important in order not to disturb the intervention with clients by irrelevant emotional distress.

Therefore, culturally responsive counseling must be grounded in an awareness of local communication dynamics and the prevailing social values in the client's daily life. Cultural awareness was thus considered as an essential element in preventing miscommunication and keeping the counseling process itself adaptive and applicable (Samad, Syam, & Jayadi, 2022).

Implications for Culturally Responsive Counseling Practice

Understanding emotional language is an essential aspect of multicultural counseling, especially when establishing an empathy and therapeutic relationship (Pedersen, 2016). Within the cultural context, the Madurese people are generally expressed with assertive and open behavior, but emotions can also be presented through unsuspecting signifiers of Madurese culture such as dignity (*martabat*), propriety (*tengka*), patience (*sabbhar*), and social solidarity, thus complicating emotions. This is a pattern similar to other Asian collectivist cultures (float) who commonly inhibit the expression of negative affect (Mesquita & Frijda, 2003; Klein et al., 2024) but with a more intense symbolic nature.

Interviews with counselors reveal that decoding hidden emotional cues requires sensitivity to both language and cultural context. This is further evidenced by studies that show when the therapist is not able to identify culturally specific emotional expressions and language, therapeutic approaches and interventions can be compromised in their effectiveness (Haas et al., 2024; Metin & Doğan, 2025). Hence, the mapping of culture-specific emotional expressions is important not only to strengthen counselors' cultural sensitivity, but also to develop culturally sensitive interventions.

In the practice of culturally responsive counseling, in order to gain the ability to receive social demands as a specific counseling activity, the counselor needs to have multicultural competencies, including cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and

multicultural counseling competence (Mollen & Ridley, 2021; Farandini et al., 2024). These skills are not only understanding cultural diversity, but also self-awareness for the counselors regarding their values, attitudes, and biases that can impact the counseling relationship. These competencies enable counselors to become open, reflective, and respectful of the client's cultural beliefs.

In terms of these competences developed, the use of counseling models of symbolic emotional language tends to be more successful in facilitating building trust and developing the client, as indicated by the achievement of the facilitator who uses such approaches (Lestari et al, 2025). Using narrative, symbolic counselling, folklore from the community, can be an effective way of enabling and stimulating emotional closeness, and hidden emotional expression (McLeod, 2011). Indeed, Hutchison and Gerstein (2017) suggest that work on emotional awareness, recognition, and expression be included in training.

Realistically, counseling services should be introduced based on methods that consider local emotional values and symbols. Such encouragements can take the form of indirect reflective questions to stimulate cultural self reflection (Boyer, 2022), empathic listening, attention to silence and non-verbal signals (Farandini et al., 2024) or training in sociolinguistic awareness (Haas et al., 2024) so that the counselors can pick up local emotional language from the beginning. These are the practices of culturally relevant counseling. Programs of counselor education and training also are encouraged to internalize cultural sensitivity and emotional language understanding as part of their procedures to enhance their training for counseling practices in a multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the emotional language in Madurese has its own uniqueness closely tied with the social and symbolic values of their community. The Madurese people manifest their feelings to others directly (*blak-blakan*) and indirectly using symbolic language with the values of dignity (*martabat*), propriety (*tengka*), patience (*sabbhar*), and social solidarity. There are non-verbal signs that are interpreted and these cultural aspects can be very rich in emotional information. The existence of emotional expressions that are direct, intensive, and at times oppressive, indicates that the regulation of emotions in the Madurese society is underpinned by morality and social honor.

In the context of counseling practice, these findings have implications for counselling practice that emphasize the importance of being open to culturally-framed approaches. Counseling approaches that fail to consider the intricacies related to emotional language

in Madurese culture may result in misinterpretations, covert resistance, and, finally, no therapeutic alliance. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of Madurese emotional expression is essential for designing counseling interventions that are contextual, empathic, and culturally adaptive.

Conceptually, this research in this context can enrich not only cross-cultural psychology literature but also offers the potential of incorporating local values within the training of counseling and professional practice. The implication of these results is also that culturally-based counseling model and intervention are needed that more sensitive and have higher effectiveness in Madurese communities or other communities that owns similar emotional communication patterns.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested: (1) Counseling and psychology education institutions should integrate more contextually grounded multicultural courses or training programs, including those focused on Madurese culture; (2) Professional counselors must develop and improve their cultural competence skills and intercultural communication skills as a part of ethical counseling and their commitment to multicultural counseling practices; (3) Future research should explore the dynamics of emotional language more specifically across age groups, genders, or situational contexts within Madurese society, enabling more precise counseling approaches. In addition, the creation of culturally based counseling models should not only include the participation of scholars, practitioners, and indigenous cultural agents, but also must guarantee the acceptability and efficacy of the interventions in context through teamwork with local cultures representatives.

Hence, the findings of this study are expected not only to help enhance culturally responsive counseling science but also to serve as a strategic foundation for the establishment of inclusive and culture-based counseling services, providing future directions for the provision of culturally sensitive counseling services in schools.

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