

Cross-Cultural Aspects of Table Manners and Etiquette in Audio-Visual Materials on YouTube

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Abstract. Notwithstanding cross-cultural understanding has been widely discussed for decades, the willingness to learn and understand other cultures is still relevant. This is due to the fact that culture is continually changing which signifies its natural attribute. Therefore, discussing the topic in relation to table manners and etiquette is undoubtedly pertinent. In this case, this paper focused on investigating audio-visual materials on a mainstream platform, YouTube, discussing about table manners and etiquette. In this qualitative study, the audio-visual materials being explored were six video contents with a set of criteria including the title, viewers, uploading date, and duration. This was to answer the questions of cultures represented, notable differences found, and to what extent cross-cultural aspects were introduced in the videos. Those represented Western culture, which emphasized appropriate behavior and politeness, and Japanese one, which was more philosophical. Those also demonstrated the differences in the use of utensils, foods, and procedures.

Keywords: Cross-cultural understanding, table manners and etiquettes, YouTube, Audio-visual materials

1 Introduction

Cross-cultural understanding has been an important and interesting topic of discussion for decades. As people travel and interact across cultural boundaries, the willingness to learn and understand one another keeps being relevant. In fact, culture is changing continually, which is an embedded attribute of culture [1]. The perpetual changes, indeed, cover various aspects in societies enabling them to be discussed in various perspectives and areas.

An area where cross-cultural understanding is seen as an essential topic of discussion is tourism and hospitality. There is no doubt that cross-cultural understanding is an integral part of the tourism and hospitality industry since the area is the one where people from various parts of the world want to enjoy traveling and experience new things out of their home countries. This leads to an intersection between cultural diversities where misunderstandings should be minimized and respect and inclusivity should be fostered. In this case, the issue covers various aspects. One of which is table manners and etiquette.

An important issue to consider related to the discussion is the fact that table manners and etiquette vary across different cultures. That is, table manners and etiquette reflect values, traditions, and social norms of different societies which are the core parts of cross-cultural understanding. A clear example of how table manners and etiquette are different across cultural boundaries is related to the use of utensils. In European cultures, specific utensils such as knives, forks, and spoons are used along with their specific usage and rules, while in Asian countries like China and South Korea, chopsticks are more common with their rules and taboos. In addition, it is also common to eat with hands in various cultures including in parts of the Middle East, Africa, and South East Asia. Therefore, discussing the topic of table manners and etiquette in the frame of cross-cultural understanding is more about understanding and respecting cultural differences in multicultural environments.

In Indonesian context, western table manners and etiquette are possibly more popular than the ones from other cultures due to the big influences of Western cultures on Indonesians through movies, shows, and books. However, it is important to remember that being, pre-assumed, more popular does not mean that Western table manners and etiquette are superior and more important. In fact, the awareness of introducing table manners and etiquette from different cultures increases currently. For instance, the discussion under this topic has become an important part of cross-cultural understanding [2]. Recent studies suggested that understanding table manners and etiquette from different cultures has become an interesting topic to discuss.

When comparing Chinese and Western table manners, for instance, it was stated that understanding the differences between the two cultures could help avoid any potential cultural conflicts [3]. In another study, a case study reported that table manners and culture are closely related, culture influences table manners and etiquettes, and table manners can function as the initial stage of intercultural adaptation. Those studies clearly demonstrate raising awareness regarding the cultural differences related to table manners and etiquette, specifically in Western and Asian countries. For sure, those do not only portray how one culture is different from the others in the context of table manners but more about how to promote understanding and respect each other.

In Indonesian context, the effort to introduce and build awareness of table manners and etiquette has been done as well. Interestingly, on various occasions, such effort was made through table manners training including the one for college students in Palembang [4], members of the Indonesian National Police in Palembang [5], and members of PKK in Aceh [6] which focused on educating the trainees regarding etiquette in formal banquets. In addition, such training with the purposes of introducing and educating individuals about table manners and dining etiquette has also been conducted in academic contexts targeting school and college students like at Language, Communication, and Tourism Department of Politeknik Negeri Jember.

Aside from the training or similar activities, introducing the topic of table manners and etiquette can also be done by utilizing technology, especially the internet. This is due to the fact that the number of internet users keeps increasing time by time making the society more internet literate. According to the latest survey conducted by APJII, Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association, there were around 215 million internet users in Indonesia in the first quarter of 2023 [7]. Specifically discussing about YouTube, there were about 833 million visits on January 2023 [8]. The data indicates the potential of the platform to be utilized as the media to introduce and educate the visitors regarding the topic being discussed. In fact, it has been reported that YouTube is, to a certain extent, an effective learning platform [9], [10]. In

this case, it is safe enough to assume that the platform is effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding, especially regarding table manners and etiquette.

It needs a process to produce and publish audio-visual materials to be uploaded on YouTube. Prior to the making of the video, it is important to confirm that similar materials under similar topics have readily been available on the platform. Therefore, it was essential to investigate the currently existing YouTube materials about table manners and etiquette, which was the focus of this study. This mainly aimed at answering the question of how were YouTube audio-visual materials under the topic of table manners and etiquette which were related to cross-cultural understanding. In this case, there were three aspects being investigated including which cultures were presented in the videos which could be indicated by the use of utensils, what cultural differences were demonstrated in the videos, and to what extent was cross-cultural understanding discussed in the videos.

2 Method

This study was carried out using descriptive qualitative design with the aim of investigating YouTube audio-visual materials specifically the ones related to table manners and etiquette. The data were YouTube audio-visual materials containing the topic of table manners and etiquette. In this case, the contents being collected to be the data were only the ones that belonged to predetermined criteria including 1) the materials had been uploaded not more than five years, 2) the materials contained the phrase “table manners“ in the title, 3) the materials had been watched or visited at least 100,000 times, and 4) the materials had the durations of at least ten minutes. The first and second criteria were determined to make sure that the videos were, still, relevant to be analyzed under the topic. The third criterion was determined to make sure that only the well-accepted videos were selected to be analyzed in the study. Regarding the last criterion, it was essential due to the fact that the duration was closely related to how comprehensive the contents were.

The collected YouTube audio-visual materials were, then, analyzed by utilizing content analysis [11], [12]. The analysis focused on answering the questions as mentioned previously. Those covered the cultures being represented in the videos, what cultural differences were demonstrated in the videos, and the cross-cultural understanding being discussed in the videos. When done, the results of the analysis were presented descriptively in this study.

3 Findings and Discussion

Referring to the predetermined criteria, six YouTube contents were selected to be analyzed in this study. It is important to note that the selection of those audio-visual materials might be influenced by YouTube algorithm. As a result, different lists of contents could be suggested when different accounts were used. Therefore, it is quite impossible to claim that those really represented whole materials that might be suitable for the current study. The list of the selected data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. List of selected YouTube audio-visual materials.

No	YouTube Videos	Views	Date Uploaded	Duration
1	W1	7.4M	February 9 th , 2018	18:35
2	W2	5.9M	June 22 nd , 2020	11:51

3	J1	158K	August 28 th , 2023	21:04
4	J2	2.3M	August 19 th , 2021	15:50
5	I1	1M	February 8 th , 2020	28:04
6	I2	180K	December 3 rd , 2019	27:40

As seen in Table 1, there were six contents selected based on the criteria given. All contents consisted of "table manners" phrase in the titles. The number of views ranged from 158 thousand to 7.4 million at the time being. The oldest video was the one uploaded in February 2018. The shortest video was the one with a duration of 11 minutes and 51 seconds. In addition, due to ethical considerations, the titles of the audio-visual materials are presented anonymously by labeling them W1, W2, J1, J2, I1, and I2.

The collected contents were, then, analyzed carefully. This was to gather any information related to the questions to be answered. The results of the analysis are presented below.

3.1 Which cultures were presented in the videos

The labels given above represent the origins of the YouTube videos W1 and W2 were the audio-visual materials from Western country(s), J1 and J2 were uploaded by Japanese YouTube channels, and I1 and I2 were contents uploaded by Indonesian YouTube channels.

The W1 and W2 videos presented Western table manners. W1 basically provided the viewers with a guide to basic dining etiquette in Western style. It was indicated by the use of cutlery including knives, forks, wine glasses, and others that were commonly used in western table manners. Similar utensils were also presented in W2 video which provided the viewers with a similar topic on how to master basic table manners. Both videos focused on dining etiquette by explaining the do's and don'ts. The notable aspect that distinguished W1 and W2 videos was that W1 provided more balanced do's and don'ts parts.

The J1 and J2 videos were originally from Japanese YouTube channels. Both presented basic Japanese table manners which were indicated by the use of utensils such as chopsticks and other cutleries. The dishes were also the ones from Japan including sushi, ramen, and others. The J1 video provided three parts including how to eat properly at a sushi restaurant, how to eat properly at a ramen restaurant, and how to enjoy Japanese drinks properly. The J1 video also provided the viewers with insights into Japanese table manners through interviews with local citizens. The J2 video mainly presented basic Japanese table manners in three sections. They were how to use chopsticks properly, Japanese table setting, Japanese table manners, and taboos when using chopsticks.

Despite the fact that I1 and I2 were uploaded by Indonesian channels, the table manners presented in both videos were Western ones. This was indicated by the use of cutleries and the dishes served. The I1 was uploaded by a distinguished Indonesian chef who provided a guide to basic table manners. The I2 was uploaded as an audio-visual learning material on how to serve guests in a fine-dining restaurant. Both videos were, supposedly, uploaded for Indonesian viewers. The fundamental difference between I1 and I2 was the fact that I1 explained how to be guests or customers with acceptable manners in fine dining, while the I2 demonstrated how to be good fine dining servers.

To sum up, out of the six audio-visual materials analyzed, four videos including W1, W2, I1, and I2 referred to Western table manners and the other two including J1 and J2 belonged to Japanese table manners. In addition, in the opening of the I2 video, there was a brief written explanation about types of table services including American, Russian, French, and English services.

3.2 What cultural differences were found in the videos

Dealing with cultural differences, the videos clearly demonstrated how one culture differed from the others in the context of table manners and etiquette. From the six videos, in general, two different cultures were being demonstrated including Western and Japanese ones. The Western culture was represented by W1, W2, I1, and I2 videos and the Japanese culture was represented by J1 and J2 contents. The differences could be divided into three aspects including the foods and beverages, the utensils, and the procedures.

Regarding the foods, the Western table manners videos presented various foods that were categorized into three categories including appetizers, main courses, and desserts. For the beverages, it was explained that in Western table manners, the beverages that were served included water, champagne, white wine, and red wine. Going to the J1 and J2, the foods presented in the videos were Japanese cuisines such as sushi and ramen. Interestingly, the J1 video presented a segment about eating out at an *izakaya* restaurant that served alcoholic drinks and snacks. Recognizing Western and Japanese foods and beverages was quite easy due to the fact that both cultures had been known very well internationally because food is one of the central identity markers of a nation.

The utensils used in Western and Japanese table manners were clearly different. In western table manners, the cutlery used included knives, forks, different types of glass, dessert spoons, and other types of silverware. It is also important to note that Western table manners in the videos followed certain rules regarding the table setting making the arrangements of the utensils typical in all videos. Interestingly, the J2 video also provided an explanation about table setting in Japanese table manners. In this case, the Japanese table setting was more traditional and philosophical. For sure, Japanese traditional utensils were used in the J1 and J2 videos which included chopsticks, traditional bowls, and other items related to Japanese culture.

The next difference between Western and Japanese table manners was related to dining procedures. The W1, W2, I1, and I2 videos demonstrated dining etiquette that covered several stages including the arrival or sitting down, first course or appetizer, main course, and dessert. Every stage was explained very well, especially regarding how to use proper pieces of silverware for each stage. Quite different from the Western table manners, the videos of the Japanese table manners did not demonstrate such a complex yet well-managed dining procedure. Regarding the procedure, the J1 and J2 videos provided the viewers with quite simple stages. The most notable aspect was related to how to start dining. It was explained that anyone was highly encouraged to say "*Itadakimasu*" at the beginning. The reasonable explanation regarding the simple procedure of Japanese table manners demonstrated in the videos was because the videos presented less formal, even casual, settings. It means that there could be more complex procedures and rules in formal settings.

From the explanation above, it is clear that there are differences between Western and Japanese table manners. The fact that the differences could be found in three different aspects, and points of view, it was easy to recognize different table manners styles, specifically the

Western and Japanese ones. However, it is important to remember that the differences do not suggest that one is superior while the others are inferior. In fact, there is no universal and precise code of manners including the ones related to eating behaviors [13].

3.3 To what extent cross-cultural understanding was discussed in the videos

The discussion under the topic of table manners and etiquette is always cultural. It is obvious that different styles of table manners represent different cultural values, especially regarding how to behave, be polite, and be appreciative on the dining tables. Consequently, an action that is considered polite in one culture, specifically in the context of table manners and etiquette, may be seen as impolite or even rude in other cultures. Therefore, discussing table manners and etiquette is an important part of cross-cultural understanding as presented in the videos analyzed in this study.

In general, the western table manners, as demonstrated in the W1, W2, I1, and I2, emphasized dining etiquettes which were related to how to behave properly, politely, and, to a certain extent, elegantly. During the meal, there was a set of procedures and rules to follow. Those demonstrated and explained how to sit properly, sitting arrangement either as the host or guest, how to put the napkin on the lap, how and when to start dining, which cutlery to use first and which was next, how to eat properly including cutting food in a small piece at a time and always eating with mouth closed and avoiding making chewing noises, how to hold different types of glass, how to talk between bites, how to get food or items which were out of reach that was by asking a partner to pass not by reaching them, how to place fork and knife on the place when finished eating, how to stand and pick dropped items elegantly. The difference between American and European styles was also explained in the W1 video.

Different from the Western table manners videos, the J1 and J2 videos provided the viewers with table manners in informal and casual settings. Nevertheless, cultural values and traditional customs were explained and demonstrated in the videos. As explained in the audio-visual materials, several actions tended to be more philosophical. For example, when starting to eat, it was highly encouraged to say “*Itadakimasu!*” which translates to “I humbly receive” [14]. It was explained that the expression was cultural and was not related to any religion. There were also specific rules explained. For instance in the J1 video, when visiting a sushi restaurant, a guest must come on time, and wearing strong perfumes and colognes was not acceptable. It was also explained that a piece of sushi is supposed to be eaten in one bite.

As explained previously, one of the most recognizable aspects of Japanese table manners was the use of chopsticks instead of silverware as used in the western table manners. There were rules for using chopsticks, especially regarding taboos. Based on the J2 video, there were eight taboos when using chopsticks. They were standing chopsticks by sticking them vertically on the food such as rice, passing food with chopsticks, pointing to someone with chopsticks, moving cutlery on the table with chopsticks, losing chopsticks, licking chopsticks, eating food by stabbing it with chopsticks, and laying chopsticks over a plate or a bowl. Each taboo symbolized a bad thing. For instance, sticking chopsticks vertically on rice or any food was a big taboo because this looked like incense on a bowl of ashes at a Japanese funeral.

Another interesting action in Japanese table manners was related to how to eat ramen, as demonstrated in J1 video. Slurping was not only allowed but highly encouraged. This was to show appreciation to the cook or owner because slurping indicated that the food was very delicious to enjoy. For sure, such action could be considered impolite, or even rude, in Western table manners. In addition, the J1 video also demonstrated the rules of drinking beer at *Izakaya*

restaurant which included how to pour it into the glass, how to hold the glass, and how to clink glass.

From the results of the analysis, as presented above, it is obvious that table manners and etiquette are not merely about enjoying meals but also about how to properly eat by considering cultural values. The aspects, being discussed in the study, suggest that different cultures have their own values regarding table manners. Therefore, it is quite safe to state that each culture has ideas of good and bad table manners, correct and incorrect ways of serving dishes, and appropriate foods for various occasions [15].

An interesting consideration regarding such cultural aspects in table manners and etiquettes was proposed by Murcott who indicated that it is important to identify certain aspects regarding food preparation and the manners of consumption [15]. To adapt a similar point of view, when people from certain cultural backgrounds want to present table manners and etiquette as part of their culture, it is important to do such identification of their own culture. This may involve the questions of which food to present, how to serve the food, and how to properly enjoy the food by considering cultural values.

This study offers a basic concept of how to identify aspects of table manners and etiquette, especially in Indonesia context. To start with, it is important to identify which, of the various traditional dishes, to introduce to the whole world. Next, it is important to formulate proper ways to serve the foods including what utensils to use. Introducing certain cultural values regarding the topic should also be included as one of the most important considerations specifically in relation with cross-cultural understanding.

4 Conclusion

Under the predetermined categories in the data collection, the six videos only represented two styles of table manners covering Western and Japanese table manners. Therefore, this study mostly discusses those specifically regarding the problems to answer. Those included the cultures represented in the videos, the differences between styles of table manners, and the cross-cultural aspects that could be found in the videos.

The results of the analysis showed that the differences between Western table manners and Japanese table manners covered several aspects covering the foods, utensils, and procedures. The facts clearly suggest that both cultures have successfully identified and presented their identities specifically related to table manners and etiquette. This enables people from other cultural backgrounds to learn each custom easily because there have been standards to follow. Furthermore, the fact that the videos also demonstrated and explained certain cultural values, that belong to cross-cultural understanding, related to table manners and etiquette making it possible not only to learn and understand but also to respect and appreciate the cultures.

An essential implication regarding the particular topic of discussion is that Western and Japanese table manners are great examples of how to showcase cultural values. At least, there are several matters to consider when a nation eagers to introduce its table manners and etiquette to the world. The first thing should be the foods. In this case, one should identify which foods, out of various kinds, to be introduced as national dishes. Next, it is also important to identify the national cutlery that culturally represents the country. When possible, finding and identifying certain rules and customs regarding the procedures, teachings, and taboos should also be done. Finally, the combination of those aspects can be considered as a

package to be standardized so that people from all around the world will be able to learn from it in the context of table manners and etiquette.

As an illustration, Indonesia may choose *nasi tumpeng*, an Indonesian cone-shaped rice dish with side dishes and condiments including meats and vegetables, as one of the national dishes to be introduced. The reason why this is chosen is because the food is usually served on ceremonial occasions. Utensils used both for serving and eating the food should be identified. Even when eating with a hand, it is possible to provide a guide on how to eat properly with a hand. Next, the procedure including how to cut *nasi tumpeng*, how and who to serve including the traditional and philosophical values behind them, and the do's and don'ts during the meal can be standardized because basically this type of food originated from Javanese culture which is known with its values.

From the illustration given, it is suggested to future researchers, gastronomists, and any related experts to conduct further studies regarding Indonesian table manners and etiquette. For instance, conducting research and development on creating audio-visual materials of Indonesian table manners should be a feasible option. For sure, this could be done only when the prior process including identification and standardization have been carefully done.

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