

Conversational Implicature In Tampan Market Transactions: A Pragmatic Perspective For Language Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the violations and adherence to conversational maxims in verbal transactions between sellers and buyers at traditional markets in the Tampan District, Pekanbaru, using a pragmatic approach based on Grice's theory of maxims. Through a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected via participant observation and direct recordings of natural conversations, which were then analyzed using contextual discourse analysis techniques. The findings reveal that violations of the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner are often carried out intentionally to generate conversational implicatures that are persuasive, polite, and adaptive to social norms. Sellers use maxim violations to persuade, guide consumer choices, or enhance the symbolic value of their products, while buyers employ them to negotiate subtly, maintain politeness, or foster social closeness. These findings indicate that both violations and adherence to maxims are not forms of pragmatic deviance, but rather represent complex and functional communication strategies. Interdisciplinary analysis reveals that this phenomenon is closely related to the concepts of politeness (Brown & Levinson), social impression management (Goffman), microeconomic negotiation, and reflections of local cultural values. Therefore, this study not only contributes to the field of pragmatic linguistics but also enriches understanding in intercultural communication, language education, and social anthropology. The implication is that integrating pragmatic awareness and real-life communicative strategies into classroom instruction can help students develop more adaptive, context-sensitive language skills for authentic social interaction.

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Introduction

Language is the primary tool humans use to communicate. However, its function goes far beyond the mere transmission of literal information. Language plays a vital role in expressing intentions, attitudes, and emotions, as well as in building and maintaining social relationships. This highlights the communicative aspect of language, the ability to use language not only correctly according to grammatical rules but also appropriately, effectively, and in accordance with the social context. In linguistic studies, this ability is referred to as communicative competence. As Thomas (1995) argues, implicature plays a central role in how interlocutors construct meaning beyond what is explicitly stated. Thus, pragmatics becomes essential in understanding interpersonal and intercultural communication (Levinson, 1983).

In Indonesia, pragmatic language use is commonly observed in various social spaces, one of the most prominent being traditional markets. These markets are not merely economic arenas but also vibrant social spaces filled with negotiation, communicative strategies, and cultural symbolism. Sellers and buyers often employ indirect language, such as subtle praise, sarcasm, or implicit bargaining as part of their interaction. These practices align with pragmatic principles and reflect deeply rooted social values. Sitorus et al. (2022) note that traditional market discourse is rich in non-literal strategies that convey politeness, humor, and communicative efficiency. Marasabessy et al. (2023) also emphasize the importance of pragmatic sensitivity in interpreting everyday interactions in Indonesian society, especially in informal settings like markets.

This study focuses specifically on examining the violations and adherence to conversational maxims in verbal transactions between sellers and buyers at traditional markets in the Tampan District of Pekanbaru. The primary aim is to understand how conversational implicature emerges from strategic maxim violations used by both parties during the negotiation process. The central research questions are: What types of implicature arise in traditional market discourse? How do these implicatures reflect communication strategies that are polite, persuasive, and aligned with local social norms? Through these questions, the study highlights the traditional market as a linguistically rich environment where language serves not only as an economic tool but also as a socio-pragmatic medium.

The study draws on H. P. Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature as presented in his seminal work *Logic and Conversation*. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle and four conversational maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. When these maxims are intentionally flouted, implicature is generated, allowing interlocutors to infer meanings based on context rather than literal words. In market settings, such violations are not linguistic errors but communicative strategies aimed at

persuasion, politeness, or conflict avoidance. This view is supported by findings from Irnanda & Hamzah (2018) and Maydolina et al. (2019), who note that implicature functions as a rhetorical device in everyday negotiations and social interactions.

In addition to Grice's theory, this study incorporates the politeness model developed by Brown & Levinson (1987), which explains how speakers maintain face and navigate social interactions through indirectness and mitigation. In traditional markets, speakers often employ strategies such as veiled criticism, indirect praise, and strategic understatement to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation. Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management further enriches the analysis by offering insights into how market participants manage self-image and social perception during interactions. These interdisciplinary perspectives underscore that conversational implicature is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a complex social practice embedded in cultural and economic contexts.

This research makes both theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of implicature theory into the domain of local, informal, and transactional communication in Indonesian traditional markets. Empirically, it offers concrete insights into how local communities utilize strategic and polite language in their daily interactions. This contributes to broader interdisciplinary discussions involving linguistics, cultural anthropology, and microeconomics. Market discourse, as shown in this study, is not only about selling goods but also about performing social roles, preserving relationships, and expressing shared cultural values, areas often overlooked in formal linguistic research.

The findings of this study have important implications for language education, particularly in developing learners' pragmatic competence. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), communicative success is measured not merely by grammatical accuracy but by appropriate and context-sensitive language use (Nggawu & Phuong, 2023; Chaudhury, 2015). Hence, awareness of implied meanings, speaker intentions, and social norms is essential in modern language pedagogy. Authentic materials drawn from traditional market interactions can serve as valuable resources for helping students understand implicature and real-world communication strategies. Norweg (2015) emphasizes that without pragmatic competence, communication becomes rigid, restricted, and prone to misunderstanding. Therefore, integrating pragmatic awareness into classroom instruction is key to fostering adaptive and meaningful communication skills.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of linguistic phenomena, particularly in everyday speech that is rich in implied meaning. According to Moleong (2017), the purpose of

qualitative research is to describe social realities and uncover the meanings behind linguistic actions that cannot be explained through quantitative methods. The research design used is a pragmatic case study, focusing on a specific location and context, namely the traditional market in Tampan District, Pekanbaru. This type of research enables the researcher to observe, record, and analyze conversations between sellers and buyers in depth within an authentic social setting (Irnanda & Hamzah, 2018). Data were collected naturally in the field. The research data consisted of verbal utterances, gathered through participant observation and direct audio recordings. The researcher recorded natural interactions between sellers and buyers without their awareness, and then transcribed them in detail, including intonation and relevant non-verbal elements. The data were analyzed using Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature, which posits that meaning is often conveyed not explicitly but through violations of the four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. In analyzing the data, the researcher identified utterances that contained implicatures, determined which maxims were violated, and interpreted the implied meanings resulting from those violations. This technique follows the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA), which emphasizes the structure and patterns of conversation within real-life social interaction (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984). After interpretation, the findings were further reflected upon and connected to language learning, particularly in terms of developing learners' pragmatic awareness. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher employed peer triangulation with fellow researchers as a strategy to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

Results and Discussion

Results

From the ten buyer-seller transaction conversations analyzed, buyers were found to violate the maxim of quality 13 times and the maxim of quantity 15 times. The maxim of relevance was violated 10 times, while it was adhered to 17 times. These violations and adherences to the maxims popularized by Grice can be observed in the following data examples.

Tabel 1. Summary Table of Conversational Implicature in Market Interactions

No.	Quote (Original + Translation)	Maxim Involved	Type of Implicature	Intended Meaning	Pedagogical Note
1	Buyer: "Semuanya 13 ni buk?" [Is it 13 for all of these, ma'am?]	Quantity	Conventional	The buyer hopes to negotiate or lower the price.	Teaches learners how indirect bargaining occurs through implicature.

2	Seller: "Yang ini 15. Cantik ini besar ni ha." [This one is 15. It's beautiful, big and nice, look.]	Quality	Conventional	The seller exaggerates quality to justify higher price.	Highlights persuasive strategies via exaggeration.
3	Seller: "Ini kulitnya jelek, isinya cantik, oren isinya." [This one has rough skin, but the inside is nice orange flesh.]	Quality & Relevance	Conventional	Even if the outside is unattractive, the inside is worth buying.	Useful for teaching contrastive reasoning and evaluative speech.
4	Buyer: "Yang 15 aja deh buk." [I'll take the 15 one, then, ma'am.]	Relevance	Conventional	Direct acceptance relevant to the prior turn.	Models responsive and contextually tied utterances.

From the ten buyer-seller conversations analyzed, the data show that the maxim of quality was violated 13 times, the maxim of quantity 15 times, and the maxim of relevance was violated 10 times but also explicitly observed 17 times. These patterns illustrate that in marketplace interactions, implicatures are not incidental but represent deliberate pragmatic strategies.

Utterance 1 demonstrates a violation of the maxim of quantity, as the buyer's vague query implies a bargaining intention. Rather than explicitly requesting a discount, the buyer uses an indirect strategy to initiate negotiation. Utterance 2 illustrates a violation of the maxim of quality, as the seller makes promotional claims that may be exaggerated. The implicature serves a persuasive function by increasing the product's perceived value. Utterance 3 involves violations of both quality and relevance. The seller acknowledges a flaw but redirects focus to a hidden quality (the attractive interior), balancing honesty and persuasion. This dual strategy reflects how speakers negotiate meaning and value in culturally appropriate ways. Utterance 4 aligns with the maxim of relevance, as the buyer's statement is a logical and relevant conclusion to the previous turn. Though concise, it reflects pragmatic competence in maintaining coherence. For language education, especially in teaching pragmatics, these findings underscore the importance of exposing students to authentic, context-rich interactions. Learners must be trained to recognize and interpret implicatures, particularly in cultures where indirectness and politeness are valued (Gultom, 2024). By analyzing real-life conversational data, students can gain insight into how communication operates

beyond textbook norms highlighting how pragmatic strategies like implicature are used for bargaining, persuasion, refusal, and relationship-building. Instructional materials should include examples like these to develop learners' pragmatic awareness and intercultural competence.

Discussion

The analysis of violations and adherence to conversational maxims in buyer-seller interactions extends beyond the domain of pragmatics alone; it is intricately interwoven with social psychology, communication studies, economics, education, and cultural anthropology. The utterances exchanged between sellers and buyers in traditional markets do more than communicate price and product information. Beneath these surface-level interactions lie strategies of persuasion, social negotiation, and cultural adaptation, which are compelling to examine through interdisciplinary lenses.

From a pragmatic linguistic perspective, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle remains central. The four conversational (maxims quantity, quality, relation, and manner) are often intentionally violated to create implicatures. These indirect meanings enhance the speaker's persuasive or relational intent. For instance, when a seller remarks, "The skin looks bad, but the inside is nice," they violate the maxim of quality. This statement, while subjective and possibly exaggerated, functions as a persuasive strategy rather than misinformation. The violation, therefore, serves a communicative purpose and supports effective meaning-making.

In line with Rahardi (2019), who found that indirect speech acts dominate communication in traditional Javanese markets, this study confirms that pragmatic violations in local marketplaces serve both strategic and relational functions. Similar to Rahardi's observations, sellers in this study use implicatures to maintain interpersonal harmony while subtly guiding buyers' decisions. From a social psychological viewpoint, these maxims help speakers perform impression management, as proposed by Goffman (1959). Sellers seek to shape the buyer's perception, while buyers may pose vague questions to negotiate politely. In this sense, language becomes a tool for social positioning, self-presentation, and the preservation of face.

In the field of communication studies, violations of maxims reflect indirect strategies common in high-context cultures like Indonesia. As Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, speakers use indirectness to maintain politeness and avoid face-threatening acts. For example, a buyer's indirect question such as "Is this all 13?" functions to express price sensitivity while preserving the seller's dignity. Such pragmatic behavior is not an error but a culturally grounded communicative strategy. From an economic perspective, these conversations serve as real-life negotiation models. Sellers employ micro-promotion through language (e.g., "This one is big and beautiful") to subtly market their goods (Marzuki & Ramdaniah, 2019; Wibowo, 2021),

while buyers use implicature to navigate fair pricing. As Ulyati (2015) argues, language is a persuasive tool in informal economies, and maxim violations often help justify perceived value.

In language education, these findings hold practical pedagogical implications. Understanding implicature is vital to developing learners' communicative competence (Prasetyo et al., 2022). However, teaching implied meaning should not remain theoretical. Instead, educators should integrate activities such as: (1) role-playing bargaining situations in local market settings, (2) analyzing transcriptions of real buyer-seller conversations, (3) using listening and speaking tasks that highlight maxim violations, (4) explicitly teaching Gricean maxims and their real-world functions.

These approaches align with the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, which fosters students' ability to interpret and produce socially appropriate language in everyday interactions. From a cultural anthropology and sociolinguistic standpoint, violations of maxims reflect deeper cultural values. In Indonesia, where social harmony, politeness, and mutual respect are prioritized, indirectness in communication is often preferred (Ramadhany et al., 2022; Wijaya, 2019; Andriyani, 2022; Samosir, 2015). Rather than stating "too expensive," buyers might suggest a price indirectly. Sellers, too, avoid outright rejection, opting instead to divert attention tactfully. These acts align with cultural norms such as *rasa malu* (sense of shame), *tepa selira* (mutual consideration), and relational maintenance.

Critically, the data also reveal that multiple maxims are often flouted simultaneously, complicating the simplistic one-maxim-per-violation assumption often presented in textbooks. This suggests that real-life implicature involves a more nuanced and layered interplay of meanings than what is often captured in formal models. Despite these insights, this study has some limitations. The data were collected from a specific geographical area (Tampan District, Pekanbaru), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, since the analysis was based on audio recordings, non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions or gestures) may not have been fully captured, potentially leading to partial interpretations of implicature. Furthermore, the number of interactions was limited, and meaning interpretation in qualitative work remains subject to researcher bias, though this was mitigated through peer triangulation.

Conclusion

Violations and adherence to Grice's conversational maxims, quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, are not merely technical aspects of discourse, but reflect deliberate pragmatic strategies rooted in local socio-cultural norms. This study found that particularized implicatures were more frequent, emerging in context-dependent exchanges where meaning was implied through culturally sensitive negotiation tactics. The most frequently violated maxims were those of manner and relevance, used by both

sellers and buyers to bargain persuasively, maintain politeness, or soften refusals without direct confrontation, an approach aligned with Indonesian values such as *rasa malu* and *tepa selira*. While maxims were sometimes upheld to ensure clarity in final pricing or decisions, their violation often enriched communication, serving economic and relational functions. These findings highlight the adaptive and culturally embedded nature of implicature, emphasizing that pragmatic competence in Indonesian marketplace discourse involves not just linguistic ability, but also social and cultural sensitivity. For language education, this implies the need for explicit teaching of implicature and maxims through real-life simulations, role-play, and discourse analysis tasks to equip learners with functional communication strategies for authentic contexts. Ultimately, the study contributes to both pragmatic theory and pedagogical practice, showing how local communicative norms can inform global understandings of indirectness, politeness, and meaning-making in everyday interaction.

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Authors' Note

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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