

Saying Less, Meaning More: Conversational Implicature in Langsa Market Interactions

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Abstract. *Conversational implicature plays a central role in everyday interactions, particularly in informal settings where meaning is negotiated through context, social relations, and interactional goals. Traditional markets provide a rich site for examining how speakers convey meaning indirectly while managing negotiation, politeness, and face. This study explores conversational implicature in buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market using an interactional pragmatics perspective. Rather than treating implicature as a fixed rule-based phenomenon, the study views meaning as something collaboratively constructed through naturally occurring talk. Data were collected through audio-recorded market interactions between buyers and sellers during routine transactions and negotiations. Selected interactional excerpts were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to examine how indirectness and implied meanings emerge, are interpreted, and are responded to in real-time interaction. The findings show that implicature in Langsa market interactions is closely tied to negotiation strategies, social positioning, and situational constraints such as price sensitivity and relational familiarity. Indirect expressions are frequently used to soften requests, signal dissatisfaction, suggest alternative prices, or maintain social harmony without explicit confrontation. These implicatures are not interpreted in isolation but are co-constructed through turn-taking, shared local knowledge, and immediate contextual cues. This study contributes to interactional pragmatics by highlighting how conversational implicature functions as a practical communicative resource in marketplace discourse.*

Keywords: *conversational implicature; interactional pragmatics; Langsa market; marketplace discourse; indirectness.*

1. Introduction

Everyday communication rarely relies on fully explicit language. In many social interactions, speakers deliberately choose not to say things directly, allowing meaning to emerge through implication, shared understanding, and situational cues (Suryadi & Muslim, 2019). This tendency to “say less and mean more” is not a communicative failure, but a strategic and socially meaningful practice. In pragmatics, this phenomenon has been widely discussed under the concept of conversational implicature (AlBugami, 2019). However, the ways in which implicature operates in naturally occurring interaction, especially in informal economic settings, remain an important area for further exploration. Traditional markets provide a particularly rich site for examining conversational implicature as an interactional phenomenon. Unlike institutional or scripted encounters, market interactions are spontaneous, rapid, and goal-oriented. Buyers and sellers negotiate prices, assess product quality, and manage social relationships simultaneously (Subhani et al., 2021). In doing so, they often rely on indirect expressions rather than explicit statements. A buyer may imply that a price is too high without openly rejecting it, while a seller may signal a final offer without stating it directly. These implied meanings are usually understood and responded to appropriately,

demonstrating that implicature is not simply inferred individually, but collaboratively achieved through interaction (Firdausy & Ahmadi, 2025).

Early pragmatic accounts of implicature tended to conceptualize meaning as something derived from general conversational principles (Fedorova & Salnikiva, 2019). From this perspective, implicature was viewed as the result of speakers intentionally flouting or observing certain norms, with hearers making rational inferences based on shared assumptions. While this framework provided important theoretical foundations, it has been increasingly critiqued for its limited attention to the social and sequential nature of talk (Firdausy & Ahmadi, 2025). Meaning in real interaction does not emerge in isolation, but unfolds across turns, shaped by participants' responses, expectations, and shared histories. Interactional pragmatics offers an alternative lens by emphasizing meaning-in-interaction rather than meaning-as-inference. This approach treats language as social action and focuses on how participants jointly construct meaning moment by moment (Yuni et al., 2024). Conversational implicature, from an interactional perspective, is not merely something encoded by a speaker and decoded by a listener. Instead, it is negotiated, confirmed, adjusted, or even rejected through turn-taking, repair, and sequential organization (Hutabarat et al., 2021). Indirectness becomes a resource for managing social relations, negotiating goals, and maintaining interactional balance. In marketplace interactions, indirectness plays a particularly crucial role. Traditional markets are not only economic spaces but also social arenas where relationships matter. Transactions are often embedded within ongoing social networks, where maintaining harmony and mutual respect can be as important as securing a favorable price (Ref). As a result, speakers frequently avoid direct refusals, blunt evaluations, or confrontational statements. Instead, they rely on hints, evaluative comments, pauses, or repetition to convey meaning indirectly (Jucker, 2018). These practices allow participants to negotiate without threatening face or disrupting social cohesion.

Research on marketplace discourse has highlighted various pragmatic strategies used in buyer–seller communication, including politeness strategies, negotiation moves, and speech acts (Astraguna, 2024). However, much of this research still treats implicature as a secondary phenomenon, often subsumed under broader categories such as politeness or persuasion. Moreover, many studies rely on elicited data, role-play scenarios, or interview-based accounts, which may not fully capture the complexity of naturally occurring interaction. There remains a need for studies that examine implicature as it emerges in real-time interaction, grounded in naturally occurring talk. In culturally rich contexts, such as Indonesian traditional markets, interactional norms are deeply influenced by local values, social hierarchies, and shared community knowledge. Indirectness is often preferred over directness, especially when negotiating sensitive matters such as price, quality, or dissatisfaction (Bila et al., 2023). An utterance that appears vague or incomplete from a purely linguistic perspective may be perfectly clear within its interactional context. Understanding implicature in such settings therefore requires attention not only to linguistic form, but also to social roles, shared expectations, and situational constraints (Fitria et al., 2023). Langsa traditional market offers a compelling context for examining conversational implicature from an interactional pragmatics perspective. As a central marketplace in the region, it brings together buyers and sellers engaged in routine yet socially meaningful interactions. Conversations at the market are shaped by familiarity, repetition, and shared local knowledge. Many interactions follow recognizable patterns, yet remain flexible and adaptive depending on participants, timing, and situational factors (Syarifuddin & Djaffar, 2022). These

characteristics make Langsa market an ideal site for studying how implicature functions as an interactional resource.

Despite the relevance of market interactions to pragmatic inquiry, studies focusing on conversational implicature in Indonesian traditional markets are still relatively limited. Existing work in Indonesian pragmatics has often emphasized politeness strategies, speech levels, or honorific usage, with less focus on how implied meanings are collaboratively constructed and negotiated during everyday transactions (Irawan et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is limited research that explicitly adopts an interactional pragmatics framework to analyze implicature in naturally occurring market discourse. Examining conversational implicature in Langsa market interactions contributes to broader discussions in pragmatics by foregrounding the social and interactional dimensions of meaning-making. It allows [authors](#) to observe how speakers manage economic goals, social relationships, and communicative efficiency simultaneously (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2023). Rather than treating implicature as a static analytical category, this approach highlights its dynamic nature as a communicative practice shaped by context and interactional demands.

This study adopts an interactional pragmatics perspective to analyze conversational implicature in buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market. The focus is not on classifying implicatures according to predefined categories, but on understanding how implied meanings are produced, recognized, and responded to within interaction. By analyzing naturally occurring conversations, the study seeks to show how speakers use indirectness to negotiate meaning while maintaining social harmony and achieving transactional goals. By situating implicature within real-life interaction, this study aims to contribute to a more grounded understanding of pragmatics as lived communicative practice. It also highlights the importance of studying informal economic settings, where language use reflects both social and pragmatic complexity. Ultimately, this research underscores that meaning in interaction is not merely conveyed through words, but emerges through shared understanding, contextual knowledge, and collaborative action. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: *How is conversational implicature interactionally constructed and negotiated in buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market?*

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in interactional pragmatics to investigate how conversational implicature is constructed and negotiated in buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to understand meaning-making processes as they occur in naturally unfolding interaction, rather than to measure linguistic frequency or test predetermined categories. Interactional pragmatics views language as social action and emphasizes the analysis of real-life talk, making it particularly appropriate for examining implicature and indirectness in everyday market communication. The research was conducted at Langsa traditional market, a central marketplace that functions as both an economic and social space for the local community. Interactions in this setting are informal, spontaneous, and recurrent, often involving familiar participants who share local knowledge and interactional norms. These characteristics make the market a rich site for observing how implied meanings emerge and are interpreted within routine transactional encounters.

The primary data consisted of naturally occurring buyer–seller interactions

recorded during everyday market transactions. Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation and audio recording, allowing conversations to unfold without [authors](#) intervention. Recordings were made at different times of the day to capture variation in interactional pace and negotiation dynamics. Only interactions involving active negotiation, evaluative talk, or resistance related to price, quantity, or product quality were selected, as these interactional moments are particularly likely to involve implicature and indirectness. No scripted prompts, interviews, or elicitation techniques were employed in order to preserve the authenticity of the interaction. All recorded interactions were transcribed verbatim using simplified conversation-analytic conventions. The transcription process focused on capturing not only lexical content but also interactionally relevant features such as pauses, repetition, emphasis, and overlapping talk. These features are essential for understanding how implicature is produced and recognized within sequential interaction. When relevant, contextual cues such as laughter, changes in intonation, or noticeable shifts in interactional stance were noted to support interpretation.

Data analysis followed an interactional discourse analysis procedure. The analysis began with repeated listening to the recordings and close reading of the transcripts to identify interactional moments where meaning extended beyond literal expression. Rather than applying predefined categories of implicature, the analysis focused on how implied meanings became relevant within interaction and how they were taken up by co-participants. Selected interactional excerpts were examined sequentially, paying close attention to turn-taking patterns and the ways subsequent turns confirmed, negotiated, or resisted the implied meaning. Analytical attention was directed toward how indirectness functioned as a communicative resource during negotiation. Utterances were interpreted in relation to their immediate sequential context, shared situational knowledge, and the interactional goals of the participants. Particular emphasis was placed on how buyers and sellers used indirect expressions to manage price negotiation, signal dissatisfaction, or maintain social harmony without explicit confrontation. The analysis also considered how social roles shaped the production and interpretation of implicature within the interaction.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, reflexivity and transparency were maintained throughout the research process. The [authors](#) kept analytical notes documenting interpretive decisions and emerging insights, allowing for critical reflection on the analysis. The study does not aim for broad generalization but seeks to provide a detailed and context-sensitive account of implicature as an interactional practice in a specific marketplace setting. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Participants were informed about the recording activity, and consent was obtained prior to data collection. All personal identifiers were removed from transcripts to ensure anonymity, and the data were used exclusively for research purposes.

3. Results and Discussions

The analysis of buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market reveals that conversational implicature functions as a central interactional resource through which participants negotiate meaning, manage social relations, and pursue transactional goals. Rather than appearing as isolated or exceptional phenomena, implicatures are embedded in the routine flow of market talk and are produced collaboratively through turn-by-turn interaction. Meaning frequently emerges not from what is said explicitly, but from how utterances are positioned within sequences, how they are responded to, and how participants orient to shared contextual knowledge. One recurring pattern observed in the

data is the use of indirect evaluative remarks by buyers to signal dissatisfaction with a price without explicitly rejecting it. Buyers often produce utterances that appear descriptive or neutral on the surface, such as comments about product quality, quantity, or general market conditions. Within the interactional context, however, these utterances function as implicatures that challenge the seller's pricing stance. Sellers routinely treat such remarks as negotiation moves rather than as literal statements, responding by offering justification, adjustment, or counter-implication. This sequential responsiveness demonstrates that implicature is not merely inferred internally by participants, but publicly displayed and negotiated through interaction.

Similarly, sellers frequently employ indirectness to indicate pricing limits or resistance to further negotiation. Rather than stating a final price explicitly, sellers may repeat the same price, attribute pricing constraints to external factors, or shift focus to product quality. These moves function as implicatures signaling firmness while avoiding overt refusal. Buyers typically orient to these signals by either withdrawing, adjusting their offers, or producing further indirect challenges. The interactional uptake of these moves confirms that implicature is recognized and treated as meaningful by participants in real time. Another notable finding concerns the role of silence, pauses, and repetition in implicature construction. In several interactions, a brief pause following a price offer functions as a meaningful response, implying hesitation or dissatisfaction without verbal articulation. Sellers often respond to such pauses by elaborating, reducing the price, or providing additional justification, indicating that silence itself is treated as an interactionally relevant contribution. Repetition of price or evaluative terms also serves as an implicature strategy, reinforcing stance without explicit elaboration. These interactional features highlight that implicature extends beyond lexical choice and is deeply embedded in the temporal organization of talk. The data also show that implicature is closely tied to relational familiarity and shared local knowledge. In interactions involving familiar buyers and sellers, indirectness is often more pronounced and playful, relying on shared assumptions about acceptable pricing ranges and social expectations. In contrast, interactions between less familiar participants tend to involve slightly more explicit negotiation, though indirectness remains present. This variation suggests that implicature is sensitive to social distance and relational history, supporting interactional pragmatics views that meaning is shaped by social relationships rather than fixed linguistic rules.

Importantly, implicatures in Langsa market interactions are rarely left unresolved. Participants actively work to confirm, adjust, or reject implied meanings through subsequent turns. For example, when a buyer's indirect complaint is met with a price explanation rather than a reduction, the buyer may escalate the implicature by adding further evaluative remarks or by invoking alternative sellers. Conversely, when a seller's indirect refusal is accepted, the interaction often moves toward closure without explicit disagreement. These patterns illustrate that implicature is a dynamic process negotiated collaboratively rather than a one-sided communicative act. From an interactional perspective, indirectness in these interactions serves multiple functions simultaneously. It allows participants to pursue economic goals while maintaining politeness and social harmony. It also provides flexibility, enabling speakers to adjust their stance based on the other participant's response without committing to explicit positions too early. This flexibility is particularly valuable in market settings, where negotiation outcomes are uncertain and socially sensitive.

The findings challenge views of implicature as a purely cognitive inferential

process governed by abstract principles. Instead, they support an interactional understanding of implicature as an emergent property of talk-in-interaction. Meaning is not simply implied by one speaker and inferred by another, but constructed jointly through sequential organization, shared context, and mutual orientation to interactional norms. This aligns with broader interactional pragmatics literature emphasizing meaning as social action rather than static representation as found by Fitria, et al, (2023). As further in line with Subhani et al., (2021) finding, the data from the Langsa market also highlight the importance of studying implicature in informal, everyday settings. Unlike institutional or scripted interactions, market conversations are shaped by immediacy, economic pressure, and social embeddedness. These conditions foreground the practical functions of implicature as a communicative resource that balances efficiency, politeness, and relational maintenance. Studying such interactions enriches pragmatic theory by grounding it in lived communicative practices. Furthermore, the findings underscore the role of local cultural norms in shaping implicature use. Indirectness appears to be a preferred strategy for managing disagreement and negotiation in this context, reflecting broader cultural orientations toward harmony and face-saving. However, these norms are not static; they are enacted and reinforced through interaction. By analyzing how participants orient to implicature in real time, the study reveals how cultural norms are reproduced through everyday talk.

4. Conclusions

This study examined conversational implicature in buyer–seller interactions at Langsa traditional market from an interactional pragmatics perspective. The findings demonstrate that implicature functions as a central communicative resource through which participants negotiate meaning, manage social relations, and pursue transactional goals. Rather than relying on explicit statements, buyers and sellers routinely employ indirect expressions, pauses, repetition, and evaluative remarks to convey stance and intention within interaction. The analysis shows that implicature in this context is not produced or interpreted in isolation, but collaboratively constructed through turn-by-turn interaction. Implied meanings are recognized, taken up, and negotiated by co-participants in real time, reflecting shared contextual knowledge and interactional norms. This supports the view that meaning in everyday communication emerges through social action rather than through abstract inferential rules alone.

The study also highlights the importance of situational and relational factors in shaping implicature use. Social roles, familiarity, and negotiation goals influence how indirectness is deployed and interpreted in marketplace discourse. Indirect strategies allow participants to maintain politeness and social harmony while retaining flexibility in negotiation, which is particularly important in informal economic settings. By focusing on naturally occurring interactions in a traditional market, this study contributes to interactional pragmatics by grounding theoretical discussions of implicature in lived communicative practices. It underscores the value of examining everyday economic interactions as sites of complex meaning-making. While the findings are context-specific, they offer insights into how implicature operates as an interactional achievement in similar informal settings. Future research is potential to extend this work by examining implicature across different market contexts or by incorporating comparative perspectives. Nevertheless, this study affirms that saying less can indeed mean more, especially when meaning is jointly constructed within interaction.

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6. References

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