



Local social cohesion in Indonesian rituals and its implication in educational context

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 16, 01, 2026

Revised: 01, 03, 2026

Accepted: 24, 03, 2026

Keywords:

Implication;
Implicature;
Marital Proposal;
Ritual;
Strategy.

Abstract

This study critically examines the role of implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual as a culturally embedded communicative system that sustains social cohesion and collective identity in the face of accelerating global communication shifts. While dominant pragmatic theories emphasize clarity and efficiency, ritual discourse in indigenous contexts reveals a contrasting logic where meaning is constructed through indirectness and shared cultural knowledge. Adopting a qualitative interpretive design grounded in sociopragmatics, this research integrates implicature theory and politeness theory to analyze naturally occurring discourse collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving fifteen participants across three ritual events. Thematic analysis identifies five interrelated functions of implicature: maintaining politeness and honor, mediating negotiation, reinforcing social hierarchy, managing rejection and conflict avoidance, and enabling cultural transmission. The findings demonstrate that indirectness operates not as a strategic option but as a normative communicative system that prioritizes relational harmony over informational transparency. This challenges the universality of established pragmatic frameworks by showing that communicative effectiveness is culturally defined rather than universally fixed. Furthermore, the study advances a conceptual repositioning of implicature from a micro-level inferential process to a macro-level socio-cultural mechanism that organizes interaction and reproduces social order. Practically, the findings offer implications for developing intercultural communicative competence and culturally responsive pedagogy. By foregrounding cultural logic in meaning-making, this study contributes a novel perspective to global pragmatics, emphasizing that communication in ritual contexts is fundamentally shaped by values that sustain social cohesion and continuity.

To cite this article: Niman, E. M., Darong, H. C. (2026). Local social cohesion in Indonesian rituals and its implication in educational context. *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan*, 24(01), 255-266.

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary societies characterized by rapid globalization, cultural hybridization, and shifting patterns of communication. Within this context, traditional rituals continue to function as powerful mechanisms for sustaining collective identity, shared values, and interpersonal harmony. Ritual discourse, in particular, provides a unique site where language, culture, and social structure intersect, allowing scholars to examine how meaning is constructed beyond literal expressions. Recent studies in sociolinguistics and pragmatics highlight that communication in ritual settings often relies on implicit meanings shaped by cultural norms and expectations (Siregar et al., 2024; Usmani & Almashham, 2024). These implicit meanings, commonly conceptualized as implicature, enable speakers to convey intentions while maintaining social balance. Consequently, understanding how implicature operates in ritual contexts is essential for exploring the deeper mechanisms that sustain social cohesion. This perspective positions ritual communication not merely as symbolic practice but as an active social process that regulates relationships within communities.

Empirically, many indigenous communities in Indonesia continue to preserve complex ritual practices, particularly in life-cycle events such as marriage proposals, which involve structured and culturally embedded communication. In the Manggarai community, for instance, marriage proposal

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rituals are characterized by highly symbolic language, indirect expressions, and metaphorical utterances that require shared cultural knowledge for interpretation. Observations from previous ethnographic and pragmatic studies reveal that participants rarely communicate intentions explicitly, even in situations involving negotiation or decision-making (Visser, 2024; Yan & Yang, 2025). Instead, they rely on culturally coded expressions that subtly signal agreement, hesitation, or rejection. This phenomenon presents a communicative paradox, as critical decisions are conveyed through indirect language rather than explicit statements. Such practices challenge dominant assumptions in pragmatic theory, particularly those that associate communicative efficiency with clarity and directness. Therefore, the persistence of indirect communication in these contexts raises important questions about the relationship between language, culture, and social order.

The urgency of examining implicature in ritual discourse becomes more evident in light of increasing cultural transformation and generational shifts. Younger generations are often exposed to more direct and globalized communication styles, which may gradually reshape traditional interaction patterns. As a result, there is a growing concern that the nuanced use of implicature in indigenous rituals may be misunderstood, simplified, or even abandoned. This shift not only affects linguistic practices but also threatens the transmission of cultural values embedded within ritual communication (Alsaleh, 2024a; Susianti et al., 2024). Furthermore, the erosion of indirect communicative strategies may disrupt established mechanisms of conflict avoidance, respect, and social harmony. In this regard, documenting and analyzing implicature in traditional rituals is not only academically relevant but also culturally urgent. It contributes to preserving intangible cultural heritage while providing insights into how communication practices evolve over time.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study of implicature in ritual contexts offers a valuable opportunity to revisit foundational concepts in pragmatics and politeness theory. Grice's Cooperative Principle posits that meaning is often inferred through conversational maxims, while Brown and Levinson's politeness theory emphasizes strategies used to mitigate face-threatening acts (Aporbo et al., 2024; Ojukwu & Dike, 2023). However, these frameworks were largely developed based on Western communicative norms, which may not fully capture the complexity of communication in collectivist and ritualized societies. Recent scholarship suggests that cultural values, rather than social hierarchy alone, significantly influence the choice of communicative strategies (Cheng et al., 2022; Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). In many indigenous contexts, indirectness is not merely a politeness strategy but a cultural expectation that reflects communal orientation and relational sensitivity. Therefore, examining implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual provides a meaningful context to reassess and extend existing pragmatic theories. This approach allows for a more culturally grounded understanding of communication practices.

A growing body of literature has explored the role of implicature, metaphor, and indirect communication in various cultural settings, particularly within Indonesian and Southeast Asian contexts. Studies by Lizardo, (2022); Naveen & Trojovský, (2024); Rotolo, (2022) emphasize the importance of cultural knowledge in interpreting implicit meanings in discourse. Similarly, research by K et al., (2024); Niman, (2022) highlights how ritual language in Manggarai is rich in symbolism and indirect expressions that function to maintain social harmony. Other studies, such as Alsaleh, (2024b); Chu, (2025); Mohyeddin, (2024), further demonstrate that traditional communication practices serve as mechanisms for preserving cultural identity and regulating social relationships. In broader contexts, Li et al., (2024); Syam et al., (2023) illustrate how ritual discourse reflects deeper socio-cultural structures across different societies. Collectively, these studies suggest that implicature plays a significant role in mediating communication within culturally embedded practices. However, most of these works tend to focus on descriptive accounts of linguistic features rather than examining their broader social and theoretical implications.

Despite the growing interest in pragmatic and cultural studies, several limitations remain evident in the existing literature. First, many studies treat implicature primarily as a linguistic phenomenon without adequately connecting it to broader constructs such as social cohesion and collective identity. Second, the interaction between implicature and politeness strategies is often analyzed within conventional theoretical frameworks, with limited consideration of how these frameworks may be challenged or redefined in indigenous contexts. Third, there is a lack of integrative research that links ritual discourse to educational applications, particularly in fostering intercultural competence and communicative awareness. As a result, the potential of ritual

communication as a pedagogical resource remains underexplored. More importantly, there is still insufficient critical examination of how cultural values reshape pragmatic strategies beyond hierarchical considerations. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to studying implicature in ritual contexts.

In response to these gaps, this study aims to analyze the use of implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual and examine its role in sustaining social cohesion and cultural values. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the communicative strategies embedded in ritual discourse and to interpret their functions within the social structure of the community. The study also aims to contribute theoretically by offering a culturally grounded perspective that challenges and extends existing pragmatic and politeness theories. From a practical standpoint, the findings are expected to provide insights for educational contexts, particularly in developing students' pragmatic competence, cultural awareness, and intercultural communication skills. By integrating linguistic analysis with social and cultural perspectives, this research offers a more holistic understanding of communication in indigenous rituals. Ultimately, the study contributes to both academic discourse and the preservation of cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized world.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design grounded in sociopragmatics and informed by an ethnographic orientation to examine how implicature operates within the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual and how it contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion. A qualitative approach is deliberately selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves implicit meaning, culturally embedded expressions, and interactional nuances that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement. In line with contemporary developments in intercultural pragmatics, meaning is treated as context-dependent and co-constructed through shared cultural knowledge rather than as a fixed linguistic entity (Xu et al., 2025). The integration of implicature theory and politeness theory provides an analytical lens for uncovering both the inferential mechanisms of meaning and the relational strategies that regulate social interaction (Baloch et al., 2024; Bărbuleț, 2025). Furthermore, an ethnographic sensitivity is adopted to ensure that the interpretation of discourse remains grounded in local cultural practices and community norms. This design enables the study to move beyond descriptive accounts and to generate theoretically informed insights into culturally situated communication.

The research was conducted in Manggarai, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, a region where traditional rituals continue to be actively practiced and socially significant. Fieldwork took place over a four-month period from June to September 2025, allowing for sustained engagement with the community and repeated exposure to ritual events. The temporal scope of the study was intentionally extended to capture variations in communicative practices across different ceremonies and contexts. Conducting the research in a naturalistic setting enhances ecological validity, as the data reflect authentic interactions rather than elicited responses. In addition, prolonged engagement in the field contributes to a deeper understanding of contextual meanings and reduces the risk of superficial interpretation (Finkelstein et al., 2024; Ivey, 2023). The selection of this site is therefore both theoretically and empirically justified, as it provides a rich context for examining the intersection of language, culture, and social structure.

The participants consisted of 15 individuals who were directly involved in three separate marriage proposal ceremonies, including traditional elders, family representatives from both parties, and key ritual speakers. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants possessed communicative authority and cultural competence relevant to the ritual discourse. Inclusion criteria required participants to actively produce or interpret ritual utterances, while individuals without direct communicative roles were excluded from the core analysis. Although the number of participants may appear limited, qualitative research prioritizes depth and analytical richness over numerical representation, and adequacy is determined by the achievement of theoretical saturation (Peters, 2023; Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). In this study, saturation was reached during the third ceremony, when no new categories of implicature or communicative functions emerged. This was further confirmed through iterative comparison of codes across datasets. The

sampling approach thus ensured that the data were both information-rich and analytically sufficient for addressing the research objectives.

Data collection was carried out using a combination of non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and audio-visual documentation to enable methodological triangulation. The observation protocol was designed to capture naturally occurring utterances, interactional sequences, turn-taking patterns, and contextual cues within the ritual setting. The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions aimed at eliciting participants' interpretations of specific expressions, their communicative intentions, and the cultural meanings underlying those expressions. The development of the instruments was theoretically informed by key constructs in implicature and politeness, particularly indirectness, inference, and face management (Zhang & Wu, 2025). All interactions were audio-recorded with consent and supplemented by detailed field notes to document non-verbal elements such as gestures, tone, and situational context. The integration of multiple data sources enhances the credibility of the findings by allowing cross-verification of interpretations.

The validity and reliability of the study were ensured through several rigor-enhancing strategies. Content validity was established through expert review by two scholars specializing in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, who evaluated the alignment between the research instruments and the theoretical framework. Construct validity was addressed by systematically linking analytical categories to established theoretical constructs. Reliability was strengthened through an intercoder agreement procedure involving two independent coders who analyzed approximately 30% of the dataset. The level of agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, yielding a value of 0.82, which indicates strong agreement and consistency in coding. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and refinement of the coding framework. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing selected interpretations with participants to confirm their accuracy. These procedures align with widely accepted criteria for qualitative rigor, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Fidan, 2025; McGill et al., 2023).

The data collection procedure followed a systematic and transparent sequence. Initially, the researchers obtained formal permission from community leaders and secured informed consent from all participants. This was followed by a familiarization phase involving preliminary observations to understand the structure and norms of the ritual. During the main data collection phase, three marriage proposal ceremonies were observed and recorded in their entirety. Immediately after each ceremony, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to clarify the meanings and intentions behind specific utterances. All recordings were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English while preserving semantic and pragmatic nuances. Field notes were integrated with the transcripts to provide contextual depth. The entire process was documented in an audit trail to ensure transparency and replicability of the research procedure. (Braun & Clarke, 2023, 2024)

Data analysis was conducted using a rigorous thematic analysis approach following the procedures outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2023, 2024), combined with pragmatic interpretation. The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, followed by open coding to identify initial units of meaning related to implicature and communicative strategies. A total of 48 initial codes were generated and subsequently organized through axial coding into 12 categories based on functional similarity. These categories were further refined into five overarching themes representing the core functions of implicature in the ritual. The final stage involved selective coding and theoretical interpretation, where themes were analyzed in relation to implicature theory and politeness theory to explain how meaning is inferred and how social relationships are managed. Throughout the process, constant comparison techniques were applied to ensure consistency and analytical depth. This multi-stage analysis enables both descriptive and explanatory insights, bridging empirical findings with theoretical contributions. In addition, the iterative refinement of themes ensured that each category captured not only recurring patterns but also subtle contextual variations embedded in the discourse. This enhances the analytical robustness by allowing the findings to reflect both stability and nuance in the use of implicature across different interactional settings. Moreover, this approach strengthens the interpretive validity of the study by ensuring that theoretical insights are firmly grounded in systematically derived empirical evidence rather than isolated observations.

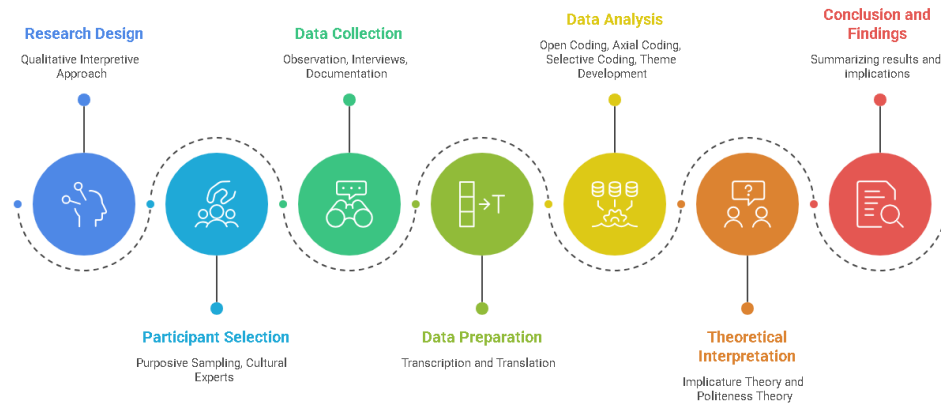


Figure 1. Flowchart of Data Collection and Thematic Analysis Process

Figure 1 presents the overall analytical procedure, beginning with research design selection, participant recruitment, and data collection through observation and interviews, followed by transcription, coding (open, axial, and selective), theme development, and theoretical interpretation. The structured workflow ensures transparency and enhances the reproducibility of the study.

Reflexivity was incorporated to address potential researcher bias and positionality. The researchers acknowledge their role as external interpreters of the cultural context and actively engaged in reflexive practices throughout the study, including maintaining reflective journals and critically examining their assumptions during data interpretation. This approach helps to minimize subjective bias and ensures that interpretations remain grounded in participants’ perspectives. Additionally, triangulation across data sources and analytical perspectives further strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable information from the dataset. Cultural sensitivity was also prioritized, particularly in respecting the sacred nature of ritual practices and adhering to local customs and protocols. All data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. These ethical practices are consistent with international standards for research involving human participants and reinforce the integrity of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of data obtained from observations, in-depth interviews, and discourse documentation reveals a systematic pattern in the use of implicature within the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual. Through a rigorous thematic analysis, five interrelated themes were identified, each representing a distinct communicative function that contributes to the maintenance of social cohesion. These themes extend beyond surface-level linguistic features and demonstrate how implicature operates as a culturally embedded mechanism that structures interaction, regulates social relations, and encodes collective values. Rather than functioning as incidental pragmatic phenomena, implicatures in this context emerge as deliberate communicative strategies shaped by shared cultural knowledge and normative expectations.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Implicature in Manggarai Marriage Proposal Ritual

No	Theme	Code	Function	Extract
1	Courtesy and Honor Strategy	Indirect Speech, Politeness	To maintain respect and preserve mutual dignity	“We came with betel nut and areca nut, knocking on the door of the big house.”
2	Negotiation of Dowry and Social Responsibility	Symbolism, Harmony in Negotiation	To avoid confrontation and sustain relational balance	“The betel leaf is still young. It is not yet ready to be picked.”

No	Theme	Code	Function	Extract
3	Social Hierarchy and Role of Elders	Wisdom, Authority, Figurative Speech	To reinforce authority and provide moral guidance	"To find the water, a long way must be passed."
4	Rejection and Conflict Avoidance	Euphemism, Indirect Rejection	To minimize social tension and preserve relationships	"The betel leaf is not ready to be chewed."
5	Cultural Transmission and Collective Identity	Cultural Encoding, Identity Formation	To transmit values and sustain collective identity	Implicit expressions used to teach norms and ethics

The first theme demonstrates that implicature functions as a culturally regulated politeness strategy aimed at preserving honor and relational dignity. The consistent avoidance of direct speech in proposal contexts reflects a systematic preference for indirectness, where meaning is conveyed through metaphorical and symbolic expressions. For instance, the utterance "We came with betel nut and areca nut" implicitly communicates the intention to propose without explicitly articulating it. This pattern indicates a deliberate deviation from the maxim of manner and quantity, as clarity and brevity are subordinated to social appropriateness. The finding suggests that, within this cultural context, communicative effectiveness is measured not by explicitness but by the ability to maintain interpersonal harmony. This challenges the assumption in dominant pragmatic frameworks that indirectness primarily serves as a mitigation strategy, demonstrating instead that it operates as a normative communicative standard embedded within cultural practice.

The second theme reveals that implicature plays a critical role in mediating negotiation processes, particularly in discussions related to dowry and social obligations. Expressions such as "The betel leaf is still young" function as indirect signals that negotiations remain open and require further deliberation. Rather than providing explicit statements, participants strategically employ symbolic language to manage potentially sensitive interactions. This reflects a systematic suspension of the maxim of quantity, where speakers intentionally provide less information than required to avoid confrontation. The finding demonstrates that negotiation in this context is not oriented toward efficiency or direct resolution but toward maintaining relational equilibrium. Consequently, implicature serves as a pragmatic mechanism that transforms negotiation into a socially regulated process, where harmony takes precedence over transactional clarity.

The third theme highlights the role of implicature in reinforcing social hierarchy and legitimizing the authority of traditional elders. Within the ritual discourse, elders occupy a privileged communicative position, and their utterances are characterized by high levels of metaphorical abstraction. The expression "To find the water, a long way must be passed" conveys moral instruction and social expectations without imposing them directly. This indicates a strategic use of implicature to assert authority while simultaneously avoiding overt imposition, thereby aligning with but also extending existing notions of negative politeness. Importantly, the data suggest that indirectness in this context enhances, rather than diminishes, authority. This finding contradicts dominant assumptions that link power with directness, demonstrating instead that communicative authority in Manggarai culture is enacted through interpretive depth and symbolic expression.

The fourth theme demonstrates that implicature functions as a face-saving mechanism in situations of rejection, where maintaining social harmony is prioritized over communicative transparency. The expression "The betel leaf is not ready to be chewed" serves as a culturally encoded form of refusal that avoids explicit rejection. This indicates a deliberate violation of the maxim of relevance, as the literal meaning does not directly correspond to the intended message. However, within the shared cultural framework, the implicature is immediately interpretable. The finding highlights that ambiguity in this context is not a communicative flaw but a strategic resource that allows speakers to navigate socially sensitive situations without causing relational damage. This reinforces the notion that indirectness operates as a protective mechanism that safeguards both individual and collective face.

The fifth theme underscores the role of implicature as a medium for cultural transmission and identity formation. The repeated use of indirect expressions within ritual discourse exposes

participants, particularly younger members of the community, to culturally appropriate communicative norms. These expressions function as implicit pedagogical tools that encode values such as respect, patience, and social responsibility. Unlike formal instruction, this transmission occurs through participation and observation, allowing individuals to internalize communicative practices organically. The finding suggests that implicature operates not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a cultural system that sustains collective identity over time. In this sense, ritual discourse functions as a living repository of cultural knowledge, where meaning is preserved through repeated enactment rather than explicit explanation.

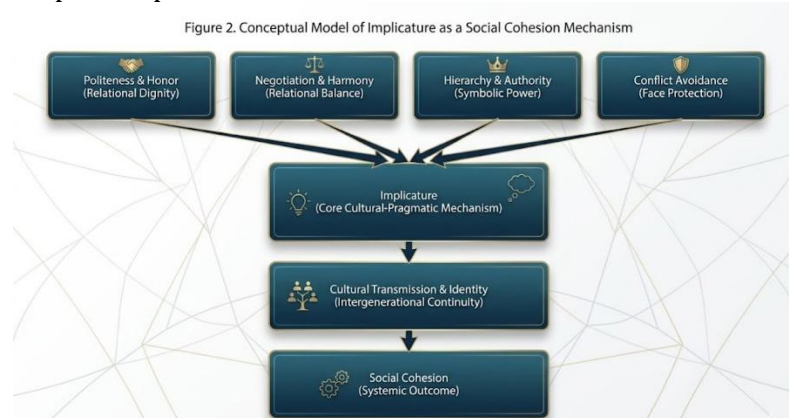


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Implicature as a Social Cohesion Mechanism

Figure 2 illustrates the integrative relationship between implicature and its broader social functions within the ritual context. The model positions implicature as a central communicative mechanism that connects five functional domains: politeness, negotiation, hierarchy, conflict management, and cultural transmission. These domains interact dynamically to produce and sustain social cohesion. The diagram emphasizes that implicature is not a peripheral linguistic feature but a core organizing principle of communication that regulates interaction, maintains relational balance, and reinforces cultural continuity.

A cross-theme synthesis of the findings reveals that implicature operates as a unified system of communication that systematically prioritizes relational harmony over informational transparency. Across all themes, speakers consistently employ indirectness not as a compensatory strategy but as a primary mode of interaction. This suggests a fundamental reorientation of pragmatic principles, where the Cooperative Principle is not abandoned but culturally reinterpreted to align with collective values. In this context, communicative success is achieved not through maxim adherence but through the ability to navigate social expectations and maintain equilibrium.

Furthermore, the findings indicate a significant divergence from dominant Western pragmatic models, which often associate directness with efficiency and authority. In contrast, the Manggarai data demonstrate that indirectness can function as a marker of respect, authority, and social competence. This divergence highlights the need to reconceptualize implicature as a culturally contingent phenomenon rather than a universally fixed mechanism. By situating implicature within a broader socio-cultural framework, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how language functions as a tool for organizing social life.

Overall, the results confirm that implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a complex socio-cultural system that integrates communication, social structure, and cultural values. Through its multifunctional role, implicature enables individuals to negotiate relationships, maintain hierarchy, avoid conflict, and transmit collective identity. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language and culture, demonstrating that meaning is not only constructed through words but also through shared norms, values, and practices that define a community.

Discussion

The discussion demonstrates that implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual operates as a culturally institutionalized system of politeness that fundamentally redefines the notion of communicative effectiveness. The findings indicate that indirect expressions are not optional strategies but obligatory norms that regulate interpersonal interaction, thereby shifting the

evaluative standard of communication from clarity to relational harmony. This observation extends Grice's Cooperative Principle by showing that maxim adherence is culturally reinterpreted rather than universally applied, particularly in contexts where social equilibrium outweighs informational transparency. While classical pragmatics assumes that speakers aim to maximize clarity, the present findings challenge this assumption by revealing that intentional ambiguity can be a marker of communicative competence. This aligns with recent intercultural pragmatics studies emphasizing context-dependent meaning construction (Siregar et al., 2024; Usmani & Almasgham, 2024), yet goes further by positioning indirectness as a normative system rather than a compensatory mechanism. In contrast to studies that frame politeness as mitigation, this research demonstrates that politeness is structurally embedded in cultural expectations. Theoretically, this finding repositions implicature from a micro-level inferential process to a macro-level socio-cultural regulator. Consequently, it contributes to a critical reconceptualization of pragmatic theory by foregrounding cultural normativity as a central determinant of meaning-making.

The role of implicature in mediating negotiation processes reveals a more complex communicative logic than previously acknowledged in mainstream negotiation theory. The findings show that symbolic expressions function as temporal and relational regulators that deliberately delay explicit agreement in order to preserve social balance. This expands Brown and Levinson's politeness theory by demonstrating that face management is not merely an individual strategy but a collectively shared communicative framework. While prior studies suggest that effective negotiation relies on clarity and efficiency (Yan & Yang, 2025; Visser, 2024), the present study challenges this assumption by illustrating that ambiguity can enhance relational sustainability. The divergence can be attributed to differing cultural orientations, where collectivist societies prioritize long-term harmony over immediate transactional outcomes. Moreover, the strategic suspension of explicitness indicates that negotiation is embedded within broader social obligations rather than confined to economic exchange. This supports recent arguments that communication in ritual contexts is governed by cultural logic rather than instrumental rationality (Cheng et al., 2022; Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). Importantly, the findings introduce a conceptual shift by framing implicature as a mechanism that regulates not only meaning but also the pacing and ethics of interaction. Thus, the study contributes to expanding negotiation theory into a culturally grounded communicative paradigm.

The findings further reveal that implicature functions as a discursive mechanism for enacting and legitimizing social hierarchy, thereby challenging dominant assumptions about the relationship between power and directness. The use of metaphorical and indirect expressions by elders demonstrates that authority is constructed through interpretive depth rather than explicit command. This contradicts conventional pragmatic models that associate power with linguistic directness and aligns with emerging perspectives that view indirectness as a form of symbolic capital (Aporbo et al., 2024; Ojukwu & Dike, 2023). Compared to previous research that conceptualizes hierarchy as structurally imposed, this study highlights its performative and communicative dimensions. The difference may stem from the ritualized context, where authority is enacted through culturally sanctioned discourse rather than institutional enforcement. Furthermore, the findings suggest that indirectness enhances authority by requiring active interpretation, thereby positioning elders as custodians of cultural knowledge. This interpretation extends sociolinguistic theories of power by integrating cultural epistemology into the analysis of discourse. Consequently, implicature emerges not only as a communicative strategy but as a mechanism of social reproduction that sustains hierarchical order.

Another critical finding concerns the role of implicature in managing rejection and preventing conflict, where ambiguity operates as a deliberate and constructive communicative resource. The use of indirect refusal strategies demonstrates that meaning is strategically obscured to protect interpersonal relationships, thereby redefining ambiguity as a functional rather than problematic feature of communication. This supports and extends politeness theory by showing that face-saving is achieved through culturally encoded expressions rather than universal linguistic patterns. While similar patterns have been observed in high-context cultures (Alsaleh, 2024a; Mohyeddin, 2024), the present study advances the literature by demonstrating that such strategies are ritualized and systematically reproduced. In contrast to Western communicative norms that prioritize transparency, the Manggarai context reveals that opacity can serve as a form of relational intelligence. This divergence underscores the limitations of applying universal pragmatic models

without cultural adaptation. Additionally, the findings suggest that implicature enables speakers to navigate socially sensitive situations without triggering conflict escalation. Therefore, the study contributes to a critical re-evaluation of ambiguity, positioning it as a key resource in maintaining social cohesion.

The role of implicature in cultural transmission and identity formation highlights its function as an implicit pedagogical system embedded within ritual discourse. The findings demonstrate that repeated exposure to indirect expressions facilitates the internalization of cultural values, thereby extending sociocultural theory by emphasizing the role of implicit learning mechanisms. While previous studies have acknowledged the symbolic nature of ritual language (Lizardo, 2022; Rotolo, 2022), this research advances the field by conceptualizing implicature as a medium of value transmission rather than mere representation. The difference lies in the focus on process rather than form, where meaning is learned through participation and interpretation rather than explicit instruction. This aligns with recent scholarship on cultural reproduction in discourse (K et al., 2024; Niman, 2022), yet introduces a novel perspective by linking implicature to identity formation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that communicative competence in this context is inseparable from cultural competence. This reinforces the argument that language functions as both a cognitive and social tool in shaping human behavior. Consequently, implicature is repositioned as a core mechanism in sustaining cultural continuity across generations.

A cross-thematic synthesis reveals that implicature operates as an integrated communicative system that systematically prioritizes relational harmony across multiple domains, thereby challenging the fragmentation often found in pragmatic theory. Rather than functioning as isolated strategies, the identified themes interact dynamically to sustain social cohesion, indicating that communication is governed by an overarching cultural logic. This supports interdisciplinary perspectives that conceptualize language as a social system (Li et al., 2024; Syam et al., 2023), yet extends them by identifying implicature as the central organizing mechanism. The findings also challenge the universality of the Cooperative Principle by demonstrating that communicative norms are culturally redefined rather than universally applied. This introduces a critical theoretical contribution by proposing that implicature should be understood as a culturally embedded system rather than a purely inferential process. Moreover, the integration of multiple communicative functions within a single framework highlights the complexity of ritual discourse. The study therefore offers a more holistic model of communication that bridges linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions. This repositioning situates the research within the broader global discourse on intercultural pragmatics.

Despite its contributions, the findings must be interpreted within their contextual and methodological boundaries. The ritual setting represents a highly regulated communicative environment, which may limit the transferability of findings to everyday interaction. This raises important questions about the extent to which implicature functions similarly in less formal contexts. Additionally, the relatively small sample size, while sufficient for qualitative saturation, may restrict broader generalization. Alternative explanations may also be considered, including the influence of historical traditions and socio-cultural transformations on communicative practices. However, the consistency of patterns across multiple ceremonies and data sources strengthens the credibility of the findings. The interpretive approach adopted in this study allows for a nuanced understanding of context-specific communication, although it inevitably involves subjective interpretation. Future research is therefore needed to explore the applicability of these findings across different cultural and communicative settings. Such exploration would further validate the theoretical propositions advanced in this study.

Ultimately, this study makes a significant conceptual contribution by reconceptualizing implicature as a central mechanism of social cohesion rather than a peripheral linguistic phenomenon. It challenges dominant Western-centric frameworks by demonstrating that indirectness can function as a normative, authoritative, and pedagogical system within collectivist cultures. This repositioning not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also provides a new lens for analyzing communication in culturally embedded contexts. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for educational applications, particularly in fostering intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness. By highlighting the importance of cultural context in shaping communication, the study encourages a shift toward more culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.

Furthermore, it positions implicature as a key concept in understanding the relationship between language, culture, and social structure. In the global landscape of pragmatic research, this study contributes a culturally grounded model that extends existing theories and opens new directions for future inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that implicature in the Manggarai marriage proposal ritual functions as a central socio-cultural mechanism that systematically organizes communication, regulates social relations, and sustains collective identity. Rather than operating as a peripheral linguistic feature, implicature emerges as a culturally embedded system through which politeness, negotiation, hierarchy, conflict management, and cultural transmission are simultaneously enacted. The findings demonstrate that indirectness is not merely a communicative strategy but a normative expectation that defines appropriateness and competence within the community. This challenges dominant pragmatic assumptions that equate communicative effectiveness with clarity, showing instead that ambiguity can serve as a productive resource for maintaining relational harmony. In this context, meaning is not transmitted through explicit expression but constructed through shared cultural knowledge and interpretive engagement.

Theoretically, the study extends implicature and politeness frameworks by repositioning them within a culturally grounded perspective that prioritizes relational values over individual intentions. It highlights the limitations of Western-centric models and proposes a reconceptualization of implicature as a macro-level social system rather than a micro-level inferential process. This contribution advances the field of intercultural pragmatics by demonstrating that communicative principles are not universal but shaped by cultural logic and social structure. Empirically, the study provides evidence that ritual discourse serves as a living medium for preserving cultural values and reinforcing social cohesion across generations. The integration of multiple communicative functions within a single framework underscores the complexity of language as both a social and cultural institution.

Practically, the findings offer important implications for educational contexts, particularly in developing students' pragmatic competence, intercultural awareness, and sensitivity to culturally diverse communication styles. By incorporating insights from ritual discourse, educators can design learning approaches that emphasize not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural appropriateness and ethical communication. At the same time, the study acknowledges its contextual limitations, as the findings are derived from a specific ritual setting and may not fully represent everyday communication practices. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine the application of implicature across different contexts and cultural settings to further validate and expand the proposed framework. Overall, this study provides a robust and original contribution by demonstrating that understanding communication requires a holistic perspective that integrates language, culture, and social cohesion within a unified analytical framework.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Erna Mena Niman conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, conducted data collection and fieldwork, performed data analysis, and drafted the original manuscript. Hieronimus Canggung Darong contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, assisted in data interpretation, validated the analytical findings, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. Both authors discussed the results, contributed to the final version of the manuscript, and approved it for publication.

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