

# Pragmatics Challenges Faced by Senior High School Students in Speaking at SMA Negeri 4 Semarang

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the practical challenges that senior high school students encounter in speaking comprehension. Understanding inferred meanings, conversational implicatures, and cultural allusions—collectively referred to as pragmatic competence—is critical for effective communication. However, many students struggle with indirect communication, sarcasm, idioms, and contextual meanings, which can contribute to comprehension problems. Using a qualitative approach, this study examines the factors that contribute to these issues, including cognitive load, schema activation, and instructional techniques. The findings revealed that, first, students encountered challenges in generating suitable conversational implicatures owing to limited pragmatic awareness, inadequate vocabulary, and difficulties in identifying indirect speech acts. Many students responded literally to inquiries or statements, leading to communication failures and misinterpretations of intent. Regarding communication strategies, students employed explanation requests, repetition, and contextual inference when facing pragmatic difficulties in speaking. Although these strategies facilitated interaction, they were often constrained by low confidence and limited pragmatic ability. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for English Language

Teaching (ELT), particularly in the areas of speaking instruction. By identifying specific pragmatic difficulties faced by learners, the research emphasizes the need to integrate pragmatic awareness training into classroom practices. Teachers can incorporate authentic materials, context-based dialogues, and cross-cultural communication tasks to help students interpret implied meanings more effectively. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of developing instructional strategies that strike a balance between linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence, enabling students to communicate more effectively and confidently in a variety of communicative situations.

**Keywords:** *Pragmatic Competence, Speaking Comprehension, Conversational Implicature*

## INTRODUCTION

In this era of global communication, the ability to communicate and listen effectively in English has become critical, particularly for senior high school students preparing for academic and professional opportunities. Grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge are vital, but they are insufficient for effective communication. Pragmatics, or the ability to use language effectively in various social and cultural situations, is an essential facet of language learning that is frequently overlooked.

Pragmatics is vital for speaking. It entails comprehending inferred meanings, regulating discussions, employing civility methods, and evaluating speakers' intentions. However, many senior high school students struggle with these practical issues, which can result in communication breakdowns, misunderstandings, and even uncomfortable social situations. Despite the significance of pragmatics in communication, it is frequently overlooked in English language instruction courses. As a result, children may perform well on written tests but struggle while participating in real-life conversations or understanding spoken texts.

In the classroom of teaching the English language, speaking is a crucial ability that greatly influences a student's overall language competency. To effectively connect with these skills, Indonesian Senior High School students frequently face practical obstacles. In a world that is growing increasingly interconnected by the day, being able to understand spoken English is crucial for both potential careers and academic achievement. Although the increasing significance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is evident, many Indonesian students still struggle with speaking comprehension. The research has linked the challenges to several issues, including a limited vocabulary, unsuitable instructional practices, and a lack of exposure to real-world language use. More than basic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is needed for effective communication in English; pragmatic competence, or the ability to utilize language in connection with social and cultural contexts, is also necessary. High school students often struggle with this area of language use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly when speaking.

Senior high school students often face challenges in their English-speaking abilities. They may lack an understanding of native speaker communication patterns, which can lead to doubts and hesitations

when speaking English. Additionally, their knowledge of conversational context and linguistic systems may be limited, which is reflected in their low speaking proficiency scores. To address these issues, this study adopts a pragmatic approach to teaching English in senior high schools. Pragmatics, a field of study that interprets the meaning and situational context of utterances, focuses on effective communication by considering the cultural contexts in which they are used. By incorporating pragmatics into English language instruction, this study aims to enhance the speaking skills of senior high school students and identify specific aspects of speaking that can be improved through this approach. As English continues to serve as a global language, connecting people worldwide, the importance of pragmatics becomes evident. English users must possess pragmatic competence to avoid inaccuracies and misunderstandings during communication. Pragmatic competence involves analyzing language consciously and constructing accurate and contextually appropriate speech.

The development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context remains a significant concern in language education, particularly in countries where English is not used as a means of daily communication. According to Astuti et al. (2022), students' achievement is greatly influenced by the psychological components of language learning. EFL learners frequently experience nervousness related to language use, especially when completing speaking assignments. Peer or instructor criticism is often feared by students, which can lead to avoidance behaviors and further restrict their growth. Gaining an understanding of these psychological obstacles is crucial for creating effective instructional tactics that foster a more encouraging learning environment.

In summary, Indonesian senior high school students encounter various practical difficulties with speaking comprehension. These include a lack of exposure to real-world language use, unfavorable opinions

about speaking assignments, flawed curriculum design, and psychological obstacles such as nervousness. Addressing these issues is crucial to enhancing students' overall English language proficiency and equipping them with the necessary skills for their future academic and professional pursuits.

Pragmatics is essential in communication because it focuses on how language is used effectively in social contexts, rather than just the literal meaning of words. It enables speakers to interpret suggested meanings, intentions, and context-dependent references (such as deixis), leading to more effective and meaningful interactions. For example, pragmatic competence includes understanding speech acts (e.g., requests, promises), conversational implicatures (implied meanings), and presuppositions (shared assumptions), all of which are necessary for clarity and social harmony in communication (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics bridges the gap between literal language and intended meaning, making communication appropriate and effective in a variety of social and cultural contexts. The theory is based on this (Lech, 1983).

Pragmatics is the study of how language is utilized in context. Understanding language requires knowledge of its context. "Pragmatics" is the study of how languages are used in practice. The capacity to discern the underlying meanings, assumptions, intentions, and aims of a situation, as well as the nature of the activities being undertaken, is what is meant by "pragmatic competence," as conducted by Ishihara et al. (2014). Meanwhile, pragmatics is attentive to speech acts occurring within the classroom context, which encompasses (a) representative acts, wherein teachers inform students about something; (b) commissive acts, whereby the teacher declares their intention to take a particular action; (c) directive acts, designed to prompt the addressee (teacher) to perform a specific task; (d) expressive acts, which enable the expression of feelings and attitudes concerning the relationship's state; and (e)

declarative acts, utilized to describe a shift in the status of a relationship the theory regarding (Amiczak, 2019).

The importance of pragmatic ability in teaching English is evident. Using a practical approach, pupils' English skills in introducing themselves and others improved significantly, as noted by Ubaidilah (2020). Pragmatic failure, or the incapacity to use language in ways that conform to social and cultural standards, is one of the main problems that students encounter. According to a study by Rahmawati (2022), students often struggle pragmatically when speaking in class, particularly when using speech acts such as declarations, remarks, and requests. Fast speech, a variety of accents, and the use of informal expressions that are not typically taught in the classroom frequently cause students to report trouble recognizing spoken English, thereby supporting Nasihin et al. (2022). Their problems might get worse as a result of this lack of exposure, which can cause severe anxiety in real-life listening scenarios (Farhani et al., 2020).

Pragmatics studies the use of language in communication, including both verbal and nonverbal aspects. It acknowledges the connection between language and culture, emphasizing the significance of cultural context for understanding meaning. To promote natural communication, teachers should incorporate these ideas into their lessons. A teacher with excellent pragmatic competence can help students enhance their communication skills in various interaction settings. Teachers who have pragmatic competence can interact effectively, according to a study conducted by Deda (2013). This comprehension enables teachers to transmit relevant messages to students effectively. The term "meaningful" refers to a teacher's speech that is easily understood by students and serves as a primary source of information for them to consider and reflect upon. The learning process aims to stimulate students' thinking. A teacher's ability to convey a complex issue effectively might make it easier for

students to understand. Conversely, a simple topic can be confusing if discussed in a complicated and uncommunicative manner. Pragmatics is a field of study that helps teachers enhance their students' communication skills. This research examines non-native EFL lecturers' tactics for developing pragmatic competence, the benefits of these strategies, and their impact on students' pragmatic competence in the classroom.

Discourse can also be either planned or unplanned. Unplanned discourse encompasses most conversations and some written texts, including informal notes, letters, and other forms of written communication. Planned discourse encompasses preparing speeches or sermons for oral delivery, as well as carefully edited or published written work. Discourse refers to the interrelated spoken or written language used in communication, which includes how meaning is formed and interpreted beyond individual statements. It entails the investigation of language use in context, including conversational flow, coherence, and the social functions of communication, as noted by Yule (1996). Pragmatics is essential in language because it studies how context affects meaning, speaker intentions, and interlocutors' inferences of suggested meanings beyond explicit utterance. For example, pragmatic discourse analysis examines speech acts (e.g., requesting, apologizing), deixis (context-dependent terms such as "here" or "now"), and implicature (implied meanings) to understand how language conveys and negotiates meaning based on its context (Van, 1977).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the discipline of linguistics that investigates how context influences the understanding of meaning in communication. It examines how speakers utilize language in social interactions and how listeners interpret utterances within the context of situational context, speaker

intentions, and shared knowledge (Yule, 1996).

### Implicature

Implicature is a concept in pragmatics that refers to the meaning conveyed by a speaker that is not explicitly stated but is implied, requiring the listener to make inferences based on context and background knowledge (Grice, 1975). The theory, based on Yule (1996), proposes the concept of implicature as part of his cooperative principle and conversational maxims, arguing that communication frequently involves speakers hinting and listeners inferring more than is explicitly stated. Implicature refers to the mechanism via which a speaker conveys meaning indirectly, prompting the listener to deduce that meaning from the context rather than through explicit verbal expression.

### Speaking in an EFL Context

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situation, Speaking is generally characterized as the process through which learners articulate ideas, thoughts, and emotions verbally in English, as described by Kayi (2012) and Efrizal (2012). Speaking is a multifaceted skill that encompasses articulating words, formulating meaning, utilizing suitable vocabulary and grammar, regulating pronunciation and fluency, and, importantly, negotiating meaning with others during contact (Rao, 2019; Numan, 1995).

## MATERIALS & METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to investigate the pragmatic difficulties senior high school students experience in speaking. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of students' real-life experiences, perceptions, and language use in authentic classroom interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Guided by Yin's (2018) case study principles, the research focused on examining how students navigated pragmatic features, such as implicature,

politeness strategies, and indirect speech acts, within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, pragmatic speaking tasks, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. These diverse sources provided rich, contextual insights aligned with interlanguage pragmatics (Kasper & Rose, 2002). The data were analyzed using content analysis, which involved transcription, systematic coding, categorization of emerging patterns, and interpretation through established pragmatic theories. Throughout the process, strict adherence to ethical procedures was maintained, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation, and handling data securely.

## RESULT

### The Challenges in Comprehending Conversational Implicatures in Speaking (RQ1)

The analysis of questionnaire responses indicated that senior high school students have several pragmatic difficulties in understanding conversational implicatures during speaking. These issues pertain not only to language constraints but also to pragmatic awareness, especially in recognizing implied meanings, indirect speech acts, and context-dependent interpretations. Such challenges can lead to miscommunication, diminished confidence, and restricted engagement in discussions. The results from the questionnaire are presented below:

The first question is about the difficulty in understanding implied meanings. It is about when listening to people speaking in English, do you always understand what they really mean? (*Ketika mendengarkan orang berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris, apakah Anda selalu memahami apa yang sebenarnya mereka maksud?*). Here, some students answered.

"No, not always. Sometimes I understand the words, but I do not catch the full

meaning, especially when they use jokes, idioms, or indirect expressions."

"No, not always. Sometimes I understand the words but not the real meaning."

"No, I do not always understand the real meaning, especially with jokes or idioms."

"No, when listening to people speaking in English, I do not always understand what they really mean."

"Not always. Sometimes I understand the words, but not the implied meaning, especially if they use idioms or expressions that I am not familiar with."

Then, the question about "Have you ever felt confused when someone did not speak directly, like when they were joking?" (*Apakah kamu pernah merasa bingung ketika seseorang tidak berbicara secara langsung, seperti saat mereka sedang bercanda?*). Here are some students' answers.

"Yes, I have felt confused. Sometimes jokes or sarcasm are difficult to understand because they do not say things directly, and the meaning depends on tone or context."

"Yes, I have. I often get confused when someone is joking or being sarcastic."

"Yes, I sometimes feel confused when people do not speak directly."

"Yes, I have felt confused when someone did not speak directly, like when they were joking."

"Yes, I have. For example, when someone was joking sarcastically, I thought they were being serious. It confused me until they explained it was just a joke."

Furthermore, can you give an example of when you misunderstood someone's message? (*Bisa berikan contoh kapan kamu salah mengerti pesan seseorang?*). Some students answered.

"Once, someone said, "Nice job," but they said it sarcastically. At first, I thought they were praising me, but later I realized they were actually criticizing me."

"One time, my friend said, "Wow, you are so early," when I came late. I thought he was serious, but he was actually joking."

"Once, I thought 'Nice job' was praise, but it was said sarcastically."

"Once, a friend said, 'That is a great idea!' when I suggested something impractical. I misunderstood their message and proceeded with the idea, only to realize later that they were being sarcastic."

"One time, my friend said, 'It is cool in here,' and I thought he meant the temperature, but actually, he was complimenting the place. I realized I misunderstood his meaning."

The second question concerns the difficulties in interpreting indirect language or politeness. The question about "What would you think if someone said 'It is cold'? What do they want you to do?" (*Apa yang kamu pikirkan jika seseorang berkata "Dingin"? Apa yang mereka ingin kamu lakukan?*).

"I would think that they want me to close the window, turn on the heater, or do something to make the room warmer."

"If someone says, 'It is cold, I think they might also be expressing a desire for warmer conditions or suggesting that others might feel cold too."

"If someone says, 'It is cold,' I think they want me to close the door or turn on the heater."

"I think they are describing the weather at that time, or they could also be describing the temperature of an object."

"I think they want me to close the window or turn off the fan."

The next question is, "Do you understand when people use polite requests like 'Would you mind...?' instead of direct commands? (*Apakah kamu mengerti saat orang menggunakan permintaan sopan seperti "Apakah kamu keberatan...?" daripada perintah langsung?*). The students answered.

"Sometimes I understand, but sometimes it is confusing because it does not sound like a direct order. I need to pay attention to the context to know what they really want."

"Sometimes I understand polite requests, but sometimes they confuse me."

"Not always. Sometimes I have to think more to understand what they really want."

"Yes, I do. Even though I am studying, I know that this sentence is more polite because it does not directly give an order, but asks about the person's condition."

"Sometimes I understand polite requests, but sometimes they confuse me."

Then, the question is, "Do you sometimes focus on the words and miss the real meaning? (*Apakah kamu kadang-kadang fokus pada kata-kata dan melewatkan makna sebenarnya?*). Some students answered.

"Yes, sometimes I focus too much on the exact words and miss what the person really means, especially if they are trying to be polite or indirect."

"Yes, I sometimes focus on words and miss the meaning."

"Yes, sometimes I understand the words but not the real meaning behind them."

"Yes, I do. Because sometimes I still remember or even hear that word."

"Yes, I sometimes focus on words and miss the meaning."

The third question is about the Influence of Context and Cultural Knowledge. The question is "Do you think words can have different meanings depending on who says them and in what situation?" (*Apakah kamu pikir kata-kata bisa memiliki makna berbeda tergantung siapa yang mengucapkannya dan dalam situasi apa?*)

"Yes, definitely. The meaning of words can change depending on the speaker's intention and the situation where they are spoken."

"Yeah, words can have different meanings depending on who says them and where."

"Yes, words can have different meanings depending on who says them and where."

"Yes, I do. The background, experiences, and intentions of the speaker all influence how a word or phrase is interpreted."

"Yes, I think the meaning can change depending on who is speaking and the situation."

The question of Have you ever heard an English expression that sounded polite or rude depending on the speaker? (*Apakah kamu pernah mendengar ungkapan bahasa Inggris yang terdengar sopan atau kasar*

*tergantung pada pembicara?*. The students answered.

"Yes, for example, when someone says, "What is up?" it can sound friendly if said casually, but it can sound rude if said with a harsh tone."

"Yeah, the same phrase can sound polite or rude depending on tone."

"Yes, for example, when someone says "What do you want?" — it can sound rude or just neutral, depending on the tone and who says it."

"Yes, this is because the speaker's intention, tone, influences the interpretation of language, the social relation between the speaker and me, and cultural background."

"Yes, the same phrase can sound polite or rude depending on tone."

The question about "Does your background or culture make it harder to understand English conversations sometimes?" (*Apakah latar belakang atau budaya kamu kadang-kadang membuat sulit memahami percakapan bahasa Inggris?*)

"Yes, sometimes my cultural background makes it difficult because I am not familiar with certain English expressions or the way people use indirect language."

"Yeah, my culture sometimes makes understanding English harder."

"Yes, my culture sometimes makes understanding English harder."

"No, it does not. Because I was reading some English words every day, familiarity was created, which helps in understanding conversations smoothly across different contexts."

"Yes, sometimes. In my culture, people are more indirect, so I get confused when English speakers are too direct."

The fourth question concerns Classroom Exposure to Pragmatics. The question of "Does your English teacher explain things like hidden meanings or indirect messages?" (*Apakah guru bahasa Inggris kamu menjelaskan hal-hal seperti makna tersembunyi atau pesan tidak langsung?*).

"Sometimes yes, my teacher explains about hidden meanings and how people do not always say exactly what they mean."

"Sometimes my teacher explains hidden meanings."

"Sometimes my teacher explains hidden meanings."

"Yes, she does. Miss Witri always explains to us about the indirect messages."

"Sometimes yes, my teacher explains about hidden meanings and how people do not always say exactly what they mean."

The question about "Have you used role-plays, movies, or conversations to practice detecting hidden meanings in the classroom?" (*Apakah kamu pernah menggunakan bermain peran, menonton film, atau percakapan untuk berlatih mendeteksi makna tersembunyi di kelas?*)

"Yes, we often do role-plays and watch movies to practice understanding jokes, sarcasm, and polite requests."

"Yeah, plays movies to practice."

"Yes, we often do role-plays and watch movies to practice understanding jokes, sarcasm, and polite requests."

"Yes, I have, for example, in English class. We make a dialogue between 2-3 people. Then, in the dialogue, sometimes we can find some word that we do not even know the meaning of."

"Yes, we use role-plays and movies to practice."

The question about "Do you feel prepared to understand conversations with native speakers?" (*Apakah kamu merasa siap untuk memahami percakapan dengan orang asing?*).

"Not completely. I still find it challenging sometimes, especially when they speak fast or use slang and idioms, but I am improving with practice."

"I am still learning, but I am getting better."

"Yes, I do. Because I have a big interest in English, and I really want to be fluent in English."

"I am still learning, but I am getting better."

The resume of the students' findings is presented in the table below, which includes the categorization of students' challenges, descriptions, and a sample of students' responses.

Category of Challenge	Description	Sample Student Response
<b>Literal interpretation</b>	Students often focus only on the literal meaning and miss the implied intention.	"Sometimes I only understand the words but not the real meaning."
<b>Sarcasm &amp; jokes</b>	Difficulty identifying sarcasm or irony; often mistaken for praise or neutral comments.	"When someone says 'Nice job,' I think it is positive, but later I know it was sarcasm."
<b>Politeness &amp; indirect requests</b>	Confusion with polite forms and indirect speech, such as <i>Would you mind...?</i> or <i>It is cold</i> .	"I do not understand if the teacher says something indirectly, like asking to close the window."
<b>Cultural/contextual differences</b>	Struggles with idioms, slang, and culturally bound expressions that change meaning by context.	"Expressions like 'What is up?' confuse me because sometimes it is just a greeting, sometimes it is serious."
<b>Limited classroom exposure</b>	Lack of practice with pragmatic elements in class activities; exposure mainly to literal textbook language.	"We learn grammar, but not how to understand jokes or hidden meanings."
<b>Low confidence/coping strategy</b>	Students hesitate to ask for clarification or stay silent when they do not understand the implied meaning.	"If I do not get it, I just keep quiet."

**Table 1. Students' Challenges in Comprehending Conversational Implicatures in Speaking**

Based on Table 1, students encounter various difficulties in understanding conversational implicatures during speaking tasks. The predominant difficulty is their reliance on literal interpretation, which hinders them from deducing the speaker's intended meaning. This is intricately associated with their difficulties in understanding sarcasm, humor, and indirect requests when the intended meaning diverges from the exact expression. Cultural and contextual understanding is essential, as numerous students indicated challenges with idioms or slang terms prevalent in actual communication. The table indicates that these issues are intensified by insufficient classroom exposure to the pragmatic qualities of English, as the majority of instructional emphasis is placed on structural components of the language. Furthermore, students diminished confidence and passive coping mechanisms further restrict their capacity to interpret meaning when they do not comprehend implicatures.

The findings suggest that students' pragmatic challenges in speaking are complex, encompassing both language and cultural-pragmatic constraints. According to Grice's Cooperative Principle, numerous obstacles arise since pupils often do not discern when a speaker violates maxims to generate implicature. For instance,

misinterpreting sarcasm pertains to the maxim of quality, whereas challenges with indirect requests indicate problems with the maxims of approach and relation. The absence of cultural background information also poses difficulties in interpreting implicatures that depend on a shared context. The inclination to remain silent instead of seeking clarification indicates that students have challenges not only in comprehension but also in pragmatic performance when addressing communication failures. The findings suggest that students require more explicit instruction and practice in pragmatic competence, particularly in identifying indirectness, sarcasm, and context-dependent meaning, as well as in developing tools for clarification to address misconceptions.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Comprehension of Conversational Implicatures in Speaking**

The statistics indicate that senior high school students employ various methods to address the challenges they encounter in understanding conversational implicatures in speaking. These tactics typically entail enhanced awareness of tone, gestures, and context, posing clarifying inquiries, utilizing past knowledge and classroom experience, and participating in cultural education to

understand indirectness more effectively. Students do not rely on a single strategy but instead integrate multiple approaches, depending on the type of implicature and the communicative situation.

Research has yielded some results on strategies that enhance comprehension of conversational implicatures in speaking. The first question concerns identifying implied meaning in Speaking. The question of "How can one tell if an English speaker is implying something?" (*Bagaimana cara menentukan apakah seseorang menyiratkan sesuatu selama percakapan dalam bahasa Inggris?*) Here, some students answered.

"No, I do not always understand the real meaning, especially with jokes or idioms."

"By paying attention to tone, facial expressions, and context."

"Look for tone, context, and nonverbal cues."

"Usually, people will differ in their choice of words."

"One can tell if an English speaker is implying something by recognizing hints or suggestions in what they say without them explicitly stating it."

The next question "Have you ever noticed that someone transmitted more than words during a conversation?" (*Pernahkah Anda menyadari bahwa seseorang berkomunikasi lebih dari sekadar kata-katanya sendiri selama percakapan?*)

"Yes, I sometimes feel confused when people do not speak directly."

"Yes, sometimes their body language or tone says more than their words."

"Yes, through tone/gestures."

"Yes, sometimes."

"Yes, definitely! For example, when one of my friend say "I am fine", but her expression and tone say that she is stressed."

Then. The question of "Can you spot sarcasm, comedy, or indirect politeness?" (*Dapatkah Anda menemukan ketika seseorang menggunakan sarkasme, humor, atau menyampaikan sesuatu dengan tersirat?*)

"Once, I thought 'Nice job' was praise, but it was said sarcastically."

"Sometimes, but not always. It depends on the situation."

"Sarcasm/humor are hard without context."

"Yes, sarcasm can usually be seen from the tone of voice and facial expression."

"Yes, I can. I usually identify it by their tone and expression."

The second question is about the Strategies for Responding to Indirect Speech. The question of "You respond to indirect communication, such as a nice request or suggestion?" (*Apa tanggapan Anda ketika seseorang berkomunikasi secara tersirat, misalnya mengatakan permintaan atau sebuah saran?*)

"If someone says, 'It is cold,' I think they want me to close the window or turn on the heater."

"I try to understand the hint and respond politely."

"I respond politely but may miss hints."

"If someone says, 'It is cold,' I think they want me to close the window or turn on the heater."

"I prefer responding thoughtfully and respectfully to indirect communication."

Further the question of "Do you understand nonverbal communication easily? Why or why not?" (*Apakah Anda memahami ketika seseorang berkomunikasi tanpa menggunakan kata-kata, baik lisan maupun tulisan?*)

"Sometimes I understand polite requests, but sometimes they confuse me."

"Not always, because it can be different in every culture."

"Not easily – I rely on words."

"Yes, I can usually understand nonverbal communication like facial expressions, tone of voice, or gestures."

"Yes, I do."

Then, the question of "Which expressions create uncertainty on the speaker's intentions?" (*Jenis ungkapan apa yang menimbulkan ketidakpahaman tentang maksud sebenarnya dari pembicara?*)

"Yes, I sometimes focus on words and miss the meaning."

"Sarcasm, jokes, or polite requests that are not direct."

“Phrases like "If you want..."”

"Expressions like 'Maybe we can try something else,' or 'That is interesting' can create uncertainty."

"For example, "the thing we talked about yesterday," that lacks specific details, forcing the listener to guess the intended meaning."

The third question is about Role of Context and Nonverbal Cues. The question is “Do you infer intent from context, facial expressions, or voice?” (*Apakah Anda memahami konteks, ekspresi wajah, atau nada suara untuk menyimpulkan maksud sebenarnya seseorang?*)

“Yes, words can have different meanings depending on who says them and where.”

“Yes, they help me understand the true meaning.”

“Yes, but words are primary.”

“Yes, I often infer meaning from the speaker’s facial expressions, tone of voice, and context. These nonverbal cues help me understand the true intention behind their words.”

"Yes, I do. Based on my experience, when I talk with my friend,"

The question of “How does the speaker's relationship or situation affect your understanding?” (*Apakah hubungan pembicara dengan anda memengaruhi pemahaman Anda terhadap apa yang mereka samapiakan?*)

“Yes, the same phrase can sound polite or rude depending on tone.”

“It changes the tone and how the message is delivered.”

“Closer relationships help understanding.”

“The speaker’s relationship with me affects how I interpret their message. For example, if the speaker is a close friend, I can better understand their jokes or sarcasm than if they were a stranger.”

"Yes, it is. Because sometimes, when I talk with a stranger or people who just met me yesterday, I am scared to talk with them because I do not already know about their personality, their character, and we have no experience together."

Then, the question of “Would you describe an occasion when context helped you understand an implicit verbal message?” (*Bisakah Anda memberikan contoh apa hal yang meningkatkan pemahaman Anda terhadap pesan tersirat dalam komunikasi verbal?*)

“Yes, my culture sometimes makes understanding English harder.”

"Yes, when my teacher smiled and said, "Nice try," I knew it was not serious praise.

"Example: A sigh + 'Fine' = frustration."

"Once, a teacher said, 'It would be nice if everyone submitted their work on time,' and I understood that it was actually a warning. The context and her serious tone helped me realize what she really meant."

"When someone says, 'It would be great if we could have the report by Friday,' the literal wording is polite and indirect, but the implicit message is a clear deadline request."

The fourth question concerns Learning and Classroom Practice. The question of "Has English class taught you how to employ implicature while speaking?" (*Apakah kelas Bahasa Inggris mengajarkan Anda cara menggunakan implikatur saat berbicara?*)

“Definitely. Past lessons and experiences make understanding implied meanings easier.”

“Yes, through examples and discussions.”

“Somewhat, through examples.”

“Yes, English classes have taught me how to use implicature when speaking. I learned how to give polite suggestions or express disagreement without being too direct.”

"Yes, my teacher explained that sometimes we do not say things directly and taught us some common polite phrases."

The question of “Have role plays, talks, or speaking activities helped you perfect this skill?” (*Apakah permainan peran, atau kegiatan berbicara telah membantu Anda dalam menyempurnakan kemampuan berbicara?*)

“Remember class or media examples that helped you understand similar situations?”

“Yes, watching movies or role-plays in class helped me recognize hidden meanings.”

"Yes, they are invaluable."

"Role-plays help practice."

"Yes, role plays and speaking activities have helped me improve this skill. Practicing real-life situations in class helped me become more aware of implied meanings."

"Definitely, practicing with role plays and movies really helped me understand how to use and recognize implied meanings."

The next question is about "Which classroom activities aid in developing communication skills for inferred meaning?" (*Kegiatan kelas apa yang membantu mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi untuk memahami makna tersirat?*)

"Culture affects what expressions or jokes I understand, so sometimes I miss things if they are very different from my culture."

"Role plays, group discussions, and dialogues."

"Analyzing movie dialogues."

"Group discussions, debates, and role-playing activities help develop communication skills related to implied meaning. They make me more alert to context and indirect expressions."

"Role plays, watching conversations in movies, and group discussions where we try to read between the lines have helped the most."

The fifth question concerns Coping with Misunderstandings in Speaking. The question of "How do you handle missing someone's meaning?" (*Bagaimana cara Anda mengatasi kesalahpahaman terhadap maksud seseorang?*)

"Yes, my teacher explained a lot about polite and indirect ways people speak."

"I ask them to explain or repeat."

"When I miss someone's meaning, I usually ask for clarification politely. Sometimes I also try to guess the meaning based on the context."

"Of course, I will ask the speaker what their real messages are."

"Usually, I just ask them to explain again or say something like "Sorry, what did you mean?" so I do not get confused."

Then, the question of "Do you request an explanation, guess the meaning, or change the topic?" (*Apakah Anda meminta penjelasan, menebak-nebak artinya, atau mengganti topik?*)

"Yes, those activities really helped me practice and get better."

"I usually ask or guess the meaning."

"Yes, I often ask follow-up questions or ask the speaker to explain again using simpler words. If it is still unclear, I may try to change the topic gently."

"I prefer to request an explanation, so that there is no misunderstanding of someone's messages."

"I prefer to ask for explanations first, but if it is not important, sometimes I just move on to a different topic."

Furthermore, the question of "What is your confidence in handling indirect or assumed messages in English conversations?" (*Seberapa percaya diri Anda dalam menangani pesan tersirat atau asumsi dalam percakapan bahasa Inggris?*)

"What classroom activity do you find most effective for understanding implicit meaning?"

"Role-plays and watching movie clips are the most helpful for me."

"I am still learning, but I am becoming more confident."

"I feel fairly confident in handling indirect or assumed messages in English. I still make mistakes sometimes, but I have improved through practice and experience."

"Maybe 50%, because I am not fluent in English."

"I am getting more confident, but sometimes I still feel unsure, especially with slang or jokes I do not get."

The sixth question concerns Cultural Understanding and Communication Confidence. The question of "Does culture affect how people speak directly in English?" (*Apakah budaya memengaruhi cara orang berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris?*). The students answered.

"Can you confidently interpret implied meanings in English listening tasks?"

I am getting more confident, but sometimes still miss some meanings."

"Yes, culture affects how direct or indirect people are."

"Yes, I believe culture affects how people speak directly or indirectly. In my culture, people tend to be less direct, so at first, I found English conversations more straightforward than I expected."

"In my opinion, maybe it is a yes."

"Yes, some cultures are more direct while others use a lot of hints or polite expressions, so it affects how people talk."

Then, the question "Have you ever misinterpreted someone because of different communication styles?" (*Pernahkah Anda salah menafsirkan seseorang karena gaya komunikasi yang berbeda?*)

"How do you enhance your listening abilities for better comprehension of indirect messages?"

"I listen to English shows, pay attention to tone and body language, and practice a lot."

"Yes, I once thought someone was rude, but it was just their style."

"Yes, I have misinterpreted someone before because I was not used to how directly they spoke. I thought they were being rude, but later I realized it was just their communication style."

"Yes, I have. For me, I always misinterpret someone's messages because of their accent, so I cannot understand their message clearly."

"Yeah, I misunderstood some jokes or polite hints because I was not familiar with their culture."

Further, the question "What tactics do you employ to enhance your comprehension of implicature in speech?" (*Taktik apa yang Anda gunakan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman Anda tentang implikatur dalam tuturan?*)

"What advice would you give an individual who has trouble understanding English conversations?"

"Do not be afraid to ask questions and practice listening a lot. Watching movies and chatting with others helps too."

"I observe, ask questions, and practice more."

"To improve my understanding of implicature, I pay attention to the speaker's tone and expressions. I also try to learn common idioms, indirect phrases, and cultural habits that influence how people speak."

"When something is not clear, I am not afraid to ask polite clarifying questions."

"I try to watch English shows, listen carefully to tone and body language, and ask questions if I am confused."

The resume of the students' findings is presented in the table below, which includes the categorization of students' challenges, descriptions, and a sample of students' responses.

Strategy Category	Description	Sample Student Response
Attending to tone, facial expressions, and context	Students rely on paralinguistic and situational cues to infer implied meaning.	"I can tell by their tone, facial expression, or the situation."
Recognizing indirectness and hints	Students look for hints in utterances and respond politely or indirectly.	"If someone says 'It is cold,' I think they want me to close the window."
Clarification-seeking strategies	Students often request repetition, rephrasing, or a direct explanation.	"I usually ask them to repeat or explain more clearly."
Using prior knowledge and classroom practice	Role plays, movies, and class discussions help students recognize indirect speech.	"Role plays and watching movie clips are the most helpful."
Making use of cultural awareness	Students observe cultural differences in directness and adjust accordingly.	"Yes, culture affects how directly or indirectly people speak."
Confidence-building strategies	Students practice listening and speaking with the media to become more confident.	"I am fairly confident, but still learning with tricky expressions."
Guessing and inferring from context	Students make educated guesses when the meaning is unclear.	"Sometimes I just guess based on the situation."
Polite responding strategies	When unsure, students try to respond politely to avoid offense.	"I usually try to respond politely, even if I am not sure."

**Table 2. Strategies Used by Students in Comprehending Conversational Implicatures in Speaking**

Table 2 illustrates that students employ both cognitive and social techniques to navigate conversational implicatures while speaking. The predominant techniques emphasize the significance of tone, gestures, and context, indicating that students heavily depend on paralinguistic clues to discern inferred meaning.

The significance of classroom practice is equally important: role plays, dialogues, and exposure to films or genuine discussions were often identified as beneficial resources. Students observed that cultural knowledge influences their interpretation of indirectness, as what may be seen as courteous in one culture could be perceived differently in another. In instances of misunderstanding, students typically employ clarification tactics (such as requesting repetition or elucidation) or use guessing strategies, although some choose to maintain politeness to avoid confrontation. Confidence develops gradually as a result of consistent exposure and practice.

The results demonstrate that senior high school students employ various strategies to comprehend conversational implicatures in speaking, showcasing both pragmatic awareness and communication repair abilities. Students frequently depend on paralinguistic signals, including vocal tone, facial expressions, and contextual circumstances, to discern suggested meanings, especially in instances of sarcasm or indirectness. This illustrates their instinctive effort to identify instances of flouting conversational maxims, particularly those of quality and manner. Simultaneously, clarification methods, such as soliciting repetition or elaboration, demonstrate that pupils are inclined to negotiate meaning rather than risk total misunderstanding actively. Classroom practices, including role-plays and exposure to authentic materials such as films, are essential for enhancing students' capacity to identify and react to implicatures, indicating that systematic exposure cultivates pragmatic competence.

Moreover, cultural awareness is crucial, as students recognize that directness or indirectness varies across cultural contexts, influencing their interpretation of statements. Interestingly, while numerous students employ guesswork and inference to bridge comprehension gaps, others choose politeness tactics to circumvent potential offense, even in the face of uncertainty over the intended meaning. This inclination demonstrates a preference for social peace over linguistic precision, aligning with the overarching cultural standards of politeness in Indonesian discourse. These findings indicate that students are not passive recipients of meaning; instead, they are active participants who employ various cognitive, social, and cultural techniques to navigate the complexities of conversational implicatures. The significant dependence on politeness and inference suggests that their pragmatic competence is still evolving and necessitates further structured instructional assistance.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study examine the pragmatic challenges encountered by senior high school students in both speaking activities. It provides valuable insights into the difficulties students face in understanding and producing implied meanings, particularly conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts, as framed by pragmatic theories such as Searle (1976). In analyzing students' struggles with assertive and directive speech acts, this study highlights how limitations in pragmatic awareness, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge hinder effective communication. The discussion further explores how these challenges manifest in real-life classroom interactions, shedding light on the intersection of language learning, communicative competence, and cultural understanding. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how pragmatic competence influences students' ability to communicate successfully and how targeted

pedagogical strategies can support the development of their speaking skills.

### **Challenges in Comprehending Conversational Implicatures in Speaking**

The findings of this study indicate that senior high school students often rely heavily on literal interpretation, which restricts their ability to grasp implied meanings in spoken interaction. Within Searle's (1976) framework of speech acts, this reflects a limited ability to recognize the illocutionary force of utterances beyond their locutionary form. Students' tendency to focus only on surface-level content constrains their sensitivity to indirectness and contributes to frequent misinterpretation of speakers' intended meanings. This difficulty is consistent with Retnowati's (2017) study on Indonesian EFL learners, which similarly found that learners struggle to respond appropriately to indirect utterances due to a lack of pragmatic awareness and contextual sensitivity.

A recurring challenge observed in the data is students' difficulty in processing sarcasm, irony, and indirect criticism. For instance, utterances such as "Nice job" were often interpreted as genuine praise rather than sarcastic criticism, illustrating their inability to detect shifts in illocutionary force when irony is present. In terms of Searle's categories, students failed to distinguish between assertives intended to state facts and those intended to mock or criticize indirectly. This observation aligns with Taguchi's (2025) findings, which indicate that irony and indirect criticism pose the most significant difficulty for L2 learners, while more transparent relevance-based implicatures are comparatively easier to process. Such evidence suggests that learners' pragmatic challenges are not homogeneous but vary by speech act type and degree of indirectness.

Another significant difficulty lies in interpreting politeness strategies and indirect directives. Students frequently interpreted utterances such as "It is cold" literally, without recognizing their

illocutionary force as an indirect request. According to Searle (1976), such utterances exemplify classification, which indirectly performs directives to soften imposition. The students' failure to recognize these pragmatic moves highlights a gap in their ability to apply the felicity conditions necessary for understanding softened or hedged requests. These findings also align with Grice's maxim of manner, where ambiguity and indirectness obstruct accurate comprehension. Wang and Carlson (2011) similarly argue that explicit instruction on conversational principles can enhance learners' ability to decode implicit directives and interpret them appropriately.

The findings further emphasize the critical role of cultural and contextual knowledge in pragmatic comprehension. Expressions such as "What is up?" or "Thanks a lot" were often misunderstood depending on tone, familiarity, and cultural background. This demonstrates how learners struggle with perlocutionary effects, as their interpretations often diverge from the intended social meaning. Retnowati (2017) emphasizes that pragmatic competence encompasses not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness, which enables learners to interpret speech acts appropriately within specific sociocultural contexts. Without such awareness, students risk pragmatic failure even when they comprehend the lexical meaning of the utterance.

Moreover, the study reveals that limited classroom exposure to pragmatics constrains students' ability to interpret implicatures effectively. Instruction was reported to focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary, with minimal emphasis on illocutionary force or authentic communicative practice. This observation supports Shu's (2021) argument that listening comprehension failures are often rooted not in linguistic deficits but in pragmatic unawareness. From the perspective of Searle's theory, this lack of exposure restricts students' capacity to map utterances to their appropriate illocutionary categories and recognize the

conditions under which they are felicitously performed.

Finally, the issues of low confidence and the avoidance of repair strategies also emerged as central challenges. Many students refrained from asking for clarification when faced with ambiguous utterances, thereby missing opportunities to negotiate meaning. In terms of speech act theory, this indicates a reluctance to engage in metapragmatic speech acts (e.g., clarification requests), which are essential for sustaining communication and preventing breakdowns. This avoidance behavior aligns with Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, which emphasizes the significance of negotiation in second language learning. The findings, therefore, suggest that pragmatic competence is not solely a cognitive ability but is also shaped by affective factors such as confidence, willingness to communicate, and perceptions of social risk. The study aligns with the previous research by Robah and Anggrisia (2023), which explored challenges and strategies in English speaking among Indonesian university students. The findings revealed that students encountered both linguistic and psychological challenges when speaking the English language. Linguistic problems included confusion in tense usage, a lack of grammar understanding, and difficulty in selecting appropriate vocabulary. Psychological issues encompassed feelings of nervousness, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being ridiculed or laughed at. Furthermore, insufficient practice emerged as an environmental factor contributing to speaking difficulties. To address these challenges, students adopted various learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990), including memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

These findings demonstrate that senior high school students' pragmatic challenges in Speaking can be meaningfully explained through Searle's theory of speech acts. Their struggles with irony, indirect requests, and

culturally specific expressions underscore the challenge of discerning illocutionary force and fulfilling felicity conditions. At the same time, their reluctance to use repair strategies underscores the importance of perlocutionary awareness in communication. This study suggests the need for explicit pedagogical attention to pragmatic competence, integrating speech act theory into classroom practice to help learners bridge the gap between linguistic form and communicative function.

### **Discussion of Strategies and Interventions in Comprehending Conversational Implicatures in Speaking**

The findings reveal that students employ multiple strategies to overcome challenges in comprehending conversational implicatures during speaking. Among the most common clarification strategies are asking for repetition, requesting an explanation, or confirming meaning with the speaker. From the perspective of Searle (1976), speech act theory, these strategies represent metapragmatic acts that help learners verify the illocutionary force of an utterance when it is not immediately apparent from its locutionary form. By engaging in clarification, learners attempt to satisfy felicity conditions and ensure that the intended meaning is recognized correctly. This aligns with Trosborg's (1995) assertion that clarification requests serve as pragmatic repair mechanisms, reducing miscommunication in intercultural contexts. Another prominent strategy is reliance on paralinguistic and contextual cues, such as tone of voice, facial expression, and situational context. Students reported that these cues often guided them in recognizing indirect meanings, such as sarcasm, hints, or implicit criticism. Within Searle's framework, such reliance reflects an attempt to interpret indirect speech acts by drawing on extralinguistic resources to infer the speaker's illocutionary intention. However, while this reliance facilitates comprehension, it also reveals the fragility of students' pragmatic competence, as their

interpretation depends heavily on contextual clues that may be absent or culturally unfamiliar.

Role-play and classroom practice emerged as effective pedagogical interventions that enhance students' pragmatic awareness in speaking. When learners participated in simulated conversations involving indirect requests or disagreements, they developed greater confidence in recognizing speech acts and their illocutionary force. This finding supports Kasper and Rose's (2002) argument that pragmatics instruction, including role-play and awareness-raising tasks, fosters interlanguage pragmatic competence. According to Searle's theory, repeated practice with indirect speech acts enables students to learn how felicity conditions operate in interaction and how speakers achieve perlocutionary effects through the use of softened or hedged language.

In addition, some students reported using inference strategies, "guessing" the speaker's intended meaning when the literal interpretation seemed insufficient. This reflects learners' attempt to move beyond the locutionary level and engage in pragmatic reasoning about illocutionary intent. However, inference without sufficient cultural or linguistic background knowledge risks misidentifying the speech act type or misattributing the intended perlocutionary effect. This reinforces Carrell's (1989) view that inference-making is a core but risky component of pragmatic comprehension, particularly when implicatures rely on culturally specific knowledge.

Politeness strategies also played a crucial role in how students addressed implicatures in their Speaking. When unsure of meaning, many learners preferred responses that avoided potential offense, even if this meant not fully addressing the speaker's intent. From a speech act perspective, such responses reflect an orientation to the perlocutionary effects of utterances, where preserving social harmony takes precedence over accuracy in recognizing illocutionary

force. This corresponds with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which emphasizes that maintaining face is often prioritized in intercultural communication. While this strategy protects students from pragmatic failure, it may also inhibit development, as learners avoid directly negotiating meaning and thus limit their learning opportunities.

Technology-based interventions also appeared significant in supporting students' pragmatic development. Learners noted that exposure to English through movies, series, and online conversations with peers provided more natural examples of indirect speech acts and the use of implicature. As Taguchi (2011) argues, pragmatic competence requires rich input from authentic discourse. Searle's model helps explain why this input matters: authentic discourse exposes learners to a wide variety of indirect speech acts and the pragmatic conventions that govern their felicity conditions, which cannot be fully captured in decontextualized classroom materials. The study, in line with the previous study by Dawangga and Baskara (2023), shows that many EFL learners struggle to understand conversational implicatures in speaking because they often interpret messages literally. Researchers found that teaching students explicitly about implied meaning, using examples and role-plays, helps them become more aware of how context affects communication. Studies also reveal that task-based speaking activities, such as dialogues and problem-solving tasks, allow students to practice inferring intentions in realistic situations.

Additionally, learners employ strategies such as focusing on context, predicting speaker intentions, and asking for clarification; however, these strategies become more effective when supported by pragmatic instruction. Some studies also highlight that cultural knowledge and exposure to authentic conversations—such as videos or real-life dialogues—improve students' ability to interpret indirect messages. Overall, previous research

suggests that a combination of explicit teaching, contextual practice, and awareness-raising activities can significantly enhance students' comprehension of conversational implicatures in speaking.

Taken together, the findings highlight that students use a combination of clarification, contextual reliance, inference, politeness, and practice-based strategies to comprehend conversational implicatures in speaking. When viewed through the lens of Searle's speech act theory, these strategies reflect learners' efforts to move from surface locutionary meaning toward recognizing illocutionary force and anticipating perlocutionary outcomes. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on how well learners strike a balance between accuracy and social appropriateness. Clarification and role-play foster deeper pragmatic growth by making illocutionary intentions explicit, whereas reliance on inference and politeness primarily ensures conversational smoothness. Therefore, systematic integration of role-play, awareness-raising activities, and authentic discourse exposure into classroom practice would strengthen students' ability to comprehend conversational implicatures in speaking and improve their overall pragmatic competence.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a summary of the study's results on the Pragmatics Challenges Faced by Senior High School Students in Speaking at SMA Negeri 4 Semarang. The conclusions highlight the main challenges students face in comprehending conversational implicatures, while the implications and suggestions offer directions for enhancing pragmatic competence in the EFL classroom. The first students encountered challenges in generating suitable conversational implicatures owing to restricted pragmatic awareness, inadequate vocabulary, and difficulties in identifying indirect speech acts. A multitude of students often

responded literally to enquiries or assertions, leading to communication failures and misinterpretation of intentions. Third, concerning techniques, students utilised explanation enquiries, repetition, and contextual inference when faced with pragmatic difficulties in speaking. Although these tactics facilitated communication, they were frequently constrained by insufficient confidence and pragmatic ability. The study suggests that pragmatic issues faced by senior high school pupils are primarily due to linguistic restrictions, cultural unfamiliarity, and insufficient explicit training on conversational implicatures. Although students endeavoured to utilise compensating measures, their efficacy was limited by deficiencies in pragmatic knowledge and practice.

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