

## **Pragmatic Interpretation of Emotional Utterances in Acehese: Evidence from Students at Universitas Bumi Persada**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to interpret the pragmatic meanings of emotional utterances in Acehese used by students at Universitas Bumi Persada during informal communication. The emotional categories examined include happiness, anger, sadness, disappointment, fear, embarrassment, and surprise/confusion. The study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. The data consisted of 36 emotional utterances collected through participant observation, audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations, and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle. The findings reveal that emotional utterances in Acehese are not always expressed explicitly but are frequently conveyed through conversational implicatures, indirect expressions, and politeness strategies such as humility, reassurance, and avoidance. The pragmatic meanings of these utterances are constructed through inferential processes that rely on communicative context, interpersonal relationships, and shared knowledge. These findings demonstrate that Acehese functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for expressing emotions and maintaining social harmony in students' interactions.

**Keywords:** Acehese, emotional utterances, politeness, pragmatics, speech acts

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginterpretasikan makna pragmatik ujaran emosional bahasa Aceh yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa Universitas Bumi Persada dalam komunikasi informal. Emosi yang dianalisis meliputi senang, marah, sedih, kecewa, takut, malu, dan terkejut/bingung. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Data penelitian berjumlah 36 ujaran yang diperoleh melalui observasi, perekaman percakapan, dan pencatatan lapangan. Analisis data dilakukan dengan mengacu pada teori tindak tutur Searle (1969), implikatur percakapan Grice (1975), Teori Relevansi Sperber dan Wilson (1995), serta teori kesantunan Leech (1983). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ujaran emosional bahasa Aceh tidak selalu disampaikan secara eksplisit, tetapi banyak direalisasikan melalui implikatur, ekspresi tidak langsung, serta strategi kesantunan seperti kerendahan hati, penenangan, dan penghindaran. Makna ujaran dibangun melalui proses inferensi yang bergantung pada konteks sosial, hubungan antarpenerutan, dan pengetahuan bersama. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa bahasa Aceh tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai sarana ekspresi emosi dan penjaga harmoni sosial dalam interaksi mahasiswa.

**Kata kunci:** pragmatik, ujaran emosional, bahasa Aceh, tindak tutur, kesantunan

#### A. Introduction

Beyond transmitting information, language also enables speakers to share emotions and build social bonds. From a pragmatic perspective, the meaning of an utterance is determined not merely by its lexical content but also by the communicative context, the speaker's intention, and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Consequently, interpreting emotional utterances requires an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which they are produced.

Emotions such as happiness, anger, sadness, disappointment, embarrassment, fear, and surprise are not always expressed explicitly. Instead, speakers frequently employ various pragmatic strategies including expressive speech acts, conversational implicatures, silence, and euphemisms to communicate their intentions while maintaining politeness and interpersonal harmony. Emotional utterances, therefore, reflect not only the speaker's psychological state but also the culturally appropriate ways in which emotions are communicated within a particular speech community.

Previous studies have demonstrated that emotional expression in Acehnese is

strongly influenced by communicative context and cultural norms. Taib and Mulyadi (2022) found that the interjection *omma* conveys different emotional meanings depending on contextual factors and intonation. Similarly, Khaira and Mulyadi (2024) reported that lexical expressions of anger in Acehnese are realized through a range of verbs reflecting different levels of emotional intensity. Meanwhile, Husna and Khodijah (2024) demonstrated that euphemisms function as politeness strategies in interpersonal communication, whereas Amalia et al. (2023) argued that euphemistic expressions also minimize interpersonal conflict and reinforce the cultural norms of Acehnese society.

Research on silence likewise suggests that silence should not be interpreted merely as the absence of speech; rather, it functions as a pragmatic strategy for conveying implicit meanings and maintaining social harmony (Jaworski, 2021). This finding is consistent with the study of Raihana et al. (2018), which revealed that silence in Acehnese conversations commonly serves as a politeness strategy and as a means of concealing emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, and anger. Collectively, these studies

indicate that the interpretation of silence is highly dependent upon its social and cultural context, highlighting its significance as a form of non-verbal communication with important pragmatic functions. Overall, previous research confirms that the interpretation of emotional utterances cannot be separated from the sociocultural context in which they occur.

Despite these contributions, previous studies have generally examined interjections, emotion verbs, euphemisms, and silence as separate phenomena. Few studies have integrated these pragmatic strategies to explain the interpretation of emotional utterances in naturally occurring Acehnese interaction, particularly among university students. Furthermore, existing research has largely focused on linguistic forms, while relatively little attention has been devoted to the inferential processes through which emotional meanings are constructed in context.

Students at Universitas Bumi Persada were selected as the participants in this study because they communicate within a multilingual environment in which Indonesian is predominantly used in formal settings, whereas Acehnese is commonly employed in informal interactions. This linguistic environment encourages the spontaneous production of emotional utterances, providing an appropriate context for examining how pragmatic meaning is constructed through language choice, communicative context, and shared cultural values.

Against this background, the present study aims to interpret the pragmatic meanings of Acehnese emotional utterances produced by students of Universitas Bumi Persada in informal communication.

The study adopts four complementary pragmatic frameworks to analyze the meanings of emotional utterances in Acehnese. First, Speech Act Theory proposed by Searle (1969) argues that utterances perform actions in addition to conveying information. In the present study, this framework is employed to identify the illocutionary functions of emotional utterances, such as expressing happiness, assigning blame, complaining, praising, apologizing, or conveying disappointment. Accordingly, the analysis focuses not only on what is said but also on what the speaker intends to accomplish through the utterance.

Second, Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature explains that speakers often communicate meanings implicitly rather than explicitly. Such meanings are inferred from contextual information and guided by the Cooperative Principle. In emotional communication, speakers frequently express criticism, complaints, praise, or sarcasm indirectly, making the intended meaning accessible only through conversational implicature. This framework therefore provides an analytical basis for uncovering the implicit meanings embedded in emotional utterances.

The study also adopts Relevance Theory developed by Sperber and Wilson (1995) as its principal framework for interpreting pragmatic meaning. According to this theory, hearers interpret utterances through inferential processes that combine linguistic information with contextual assumptions. An utterance is considered relevant when it produces optimal cognitive effects while requiring minimal processing effort. Within this study, Relevance Theory is used to explain how emotional meanings are derived from communicative context, interpersonal relationships, situational

factors, and the shared knowledge possessed by speakers and hearers.

In addition, Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle is employed to explain why speakers choose particular linguistic strategies to maintain harmonious social relationships. Through politeness maxims such as tact, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy, this framework helps explain why speakers employ euphemistic expressions, indirect criticism, or silence when expressing emotions. Consequently, the theory provides a valuable perspective on the relationship between language choice, emotional expression, and the cultural values of Acehese society.

These four theoretical frameworks are integrated because each addresses a different dimension of pragmatic analysis while complementing one another. Speech Act Theory accounts for the communicative function of an utterance, Conversational Implicature reveals its implicit meaning, Relevance Theory explains the inferential process through which meaning is interpreted in context, and the Politeness Principle accounts for the linguistic strategies employed to maintain interpersonal harmony. Their integration enables a more comprehensive interpretation of the pragmatic meanings of emotional utterances by incorporating linguistic, contextual, and cultural dimensions simultaneously.

## **B. Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design to interpret the pragmatic meanings of emotional utterances in Acehese based on their contextual use. The research was conducted at Universitas Bumi Persada and involved 25 undergraduate students from the Indonesian Language Education and English

Language Education study programs. The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion that they were active speakers of Acehese who regularly used the language in informal communication within the university environment.

The data consisted of emotional utterances representing seven emotional categories: happiness, anger, sadness, disappointment, embarrassment, fear, and surprise. Although all collected utterances were included in the analysis, only the most representative examples from each category are presented in the Results and Discussion section to facilitate a more in-depth analysis.

Data were collected through participant observation, audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations, and field notes. The data were analyzed following the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis integrated Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle to interpret the communicative functions of the utterances, their implied meanings, inferential processes, and politeness strategies. The trustworthiness of the findings was established through methodological triangulation by comparing data obtained from observations, audio recordings, and field notes.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

The study identified 36 emotional utterances in Acehese, which were classified into seven emotional categories: happiness (9 utterances), anger (7 utterances), sadness (6 utterances), disappointment (6 utterances),

embarrassment (6 utterances), fear (5 utterances), and surprise (3 utterances). All utterances were analyzed to identify their illocutionary functions, conversational implicatures, context-based inferential processes, and politeness strategies employed by the speakers. However, only the most representative examples from each emotional category are presented in this section to allow for a more detailed and focused discussion.

## 1. Happiness

### Data 1

**A:** *Kiban nilai kah?*

(How were your exam results?)

**B:** *Alhamdulillah, hasil jih get nyoe.*

(Alhamdulillah, the results are very good.)

This utterance was produced by a student after receiving satisfactory examination results. According to Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, the utterance constitutes an expressive speech act because it conveys gratitude and happiness. From the perspective of Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, the utterance not only provides information about the examination outcome but also implies satisfaction with the effort invested in achieving the result.

Based on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, the hearer is able to interpret the speaker's happiness through the shared contextual knowledge that the examination results had recently been announced. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the use of the expression *Alhamdulillah* reflects a politeness strategy that conveys humility, thereby preventing the speaker from expressing happiness in an excessively self-congratulatory manner.

This strategy reflects the cultural values of Acehnese society, in which

humility is regarded as an essential component of communicative etiquette. From a pragmatic perspective, the hearer interprets not only the information concerning the examination results but also the speaker's feelings of gratitude and satisfaction through context-based inference. These findings indicate that expressions of happiness in Acehnese are not always conveyed explicitly; instead, they are communicated through linguistic choices carrying both social and religious significance. This finding supports the view that pragmatic interpretation depends on the interaction between linguistic form, communicative context, and the shared knowledge of speakers and hearers (Yule, 2020; Cutting, 2021).

## 2. Sadness

### Data 2

**A:** *Pakon kah hanjeut dihubung?*

(Why can't you be contacted?)

**B:** *Lon hana meupike jeut lagee nyoe hai.*

*Hom lah bek tanyeung ile.*

(I never expected something like this to happen. Let's wait and avoid asking too many questions for now.)

**C:** *Lon pih sedeh that uroe nyoe. Wueh hate hai, inteuk ta cerita beh.*

(I'm also very sad today. I'm truly devastated; let's talk about it later.)

**Context:** A conversation among students after one of their friends could not be contacted, creating a disappointing and worrying situation.

The utterance represents an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) that conveys the speaker's sadness and disappointment regarding the situation. From the perspective of Conversational Implicature (Grice, 1975), the utterance expresses not only sadness but also implies

emotional distress and the speaker's need for social support from the interlocutor. According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), the emotional meaning is inferred from the preceding conversational context, enabling the hearer to recognize the speaker's emotional state without requiring explicit explanation. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the invitation *inteuk ta cerita beh* ("let's talk about it later") functions as a politeness strategy that reinforces social solidarity and interpersonal relationships through empathy.

From a pragmatic perspective, sadness in this example is expressed not only through explicit emotional word but also through an invitation to share personal feelings as a form of emotional support. This finding suggests that sadness in Acehnese communication is constructed as a socially negotiated emotion rather than merely an individual psychological experience.

### 3. Disappointment

#### Data 3

**A:** *Lon kecewa menyoe lage nyoe.*  
(I'm disappointed that things turned out this way.)

**B:** *Bek meunan hai, intek lon peugeot cit beuh.*  
(Don't feel that way. I'll create it later as well.)

**Context:** A conversation between students in which one of them feels disappointed because the outcome does not meet expectations.

The utterance constitutes an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) that communicates the speaker's disappointment. From the perspective of Conversational Implicature (Grice, 1975), the utterance implies not only dissatisfaction but also unfulfilled expectations and a desire for

emotional reassurance from the interlocutor. According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), the hearer is able to infer the speaker's emotional condition directly from the conversational context without requiring additional explanation. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the response *Bek meunan hai* ("Don't feel that way") functions as a mitigating strategy intended to reduce negative emotions while preserving interpersonal harmony.

Pragmatically, this example demonstrates that disappointment is not expressed merely as a complaint but is responded to through emotional support that helps maintain social relationships. This finding indicates that negative emotions in Acehnese communication are generally managed within a framework of social solidarity.

### 4. Fear

#### Data 4

**A:** *Kiban jih ile, dihubung pih payah. Sapue hana haba.*

(How is he today? It's difficult to contact him, and there has been no news from him.)

**B:** *Hana jeuet lagee nyan! Ta digeu ile peu ipugah.*

(Don't think like that! Let's wait and see what he says.)

**Context:** A conversation among students after one of their friends becomes difficult to contact and fails to provide any information about their whereabouts.

The utterance represents an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) reflecting the speaker's anxiety and concern about someone who cannot be contacted. From the perspective of Conversational Implicature (Grice, 1975), the utterance implies concern about the possibility of an adverse situation, although this concern is

not explicitly stated. According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), the emotion of fear or anxiety is inferred from the absence of information, prompting the hearer to interpret the situation as unusual. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, Speaker B's response functions as a reassurance strategy aimed at alleviating the speaker's emotional tension while maintaining the stability of the social interaction.

From a pragmatic perspective, fear in this example is conveyed indirectly through uncertainty and the interlocutor's reassuring response rather than through explicit statements of anxiety. This finding suggests that in Acehnese communication, negative emotions are frequently managed through interpersonal support and cooperative interaction.

## 5. Anger

### Data 5

**A:** *"Nyo sit salah kah, hana ka bi haba"*  
(This is clearly your fault; you did not provide any information.)

**B:** *"Ka lom salah tanyo"*  
(And now I'm the one who's being blamed.)

**Context:** A conversation between students following a misunderstanding or disagreement regarding previously communicated information. The utterances were delivered in a raised tone of voice, reflecting annoyance and frustration.

The utterance represents an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) through which the speaker conveys anger and frustration arising from a communicative misunderstanding. Speaker A evaluates the information provided by the interlocutor as inaccurate, whereas Speaker B responds by rejecting the accusation while simultaneously defending his or her

position. From the perspective of Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, Speaker B's response serves not only as a clarification but also implies disagreement with the assumption that he or she was responsible for the misunderstanding.

According to Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, the hearer interprets the intended meaning by drawing inferences from the conversational context, recognizing that the response functions as an attempt to defend the speaker's viewpoint rather than merely denying the accusation. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the use of direct correction reflects a reduction in politeness strategies resulting from the expression of negative emotion. Nevertheless, the speakers remain oriented toward resolving the misunderstanding, thereby preventing the interaction from escalating into a more serious interpersonal conflict.

From a pragmatic perspective, this example demonstrates that anger in Acehnese is expressed through acts of denial and correction rather than through abusive or offensive language. The emotional meaning emerges from the interaction between contextual information, lexical choice, and prosodic features such as intonation and emphatic stress, all of which reinforce the speaker's emotional stance.

## 6. Embarrassment

### Data 6

**A:** *Hai nyan peu ka peugot?*  
(What have you done?)

**B:** *Bek karu.*  
(Be quiet, please.)

**Context:** A conversation between students in which one speaker feels uncomfortable or reluctant to explain an issue considered

sensitive or inappropriate for further discussion.

The utterance constitutes an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) that reflects a polite refusal in response to a socially sensitive situation. From the perspective of Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, the brief reply *Bek karu* ("Be quiet, please.") implies the speaker's unwillingness to continue the conversation because the topic is regarded as sensitive or unnecessary to discuss further.

Within the framework of Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, the intended meaning is inferred from the preceding conversational context, allowing the hearer to recognize that the speaker deliberately avoids elaborating on the topic. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the utterance exemplifies an avoidance strategy employed to preserve interpersonal comfort and minimize potential social discomfort.

Pragmatically, embarrassment in this example is conveyed implicitly rather than explicitly. Instead of directly expressing feelings of embarrassment, the speaker communicates the emotion through a brief refusal that functions to maintain appropriate social boundaries. This finding indicates that emotional expression in Acehese is frequently realized through indirect communicative strategies that preserve interpersonal harmony.

## 7. Surprise/confusion

### Data 7

**A:** *Uro nyo kumpoi nyang betoi?*  
(Is it really being submitted today?)

**B:** *Tanyeng bak ibuk nyan hana ka pateh.*  
(If you don't believe me, ask the lecturer)

**Context:** A conversation between students discussing assignment that was due for submission or other information that remains unclear, resulting in confusion and surprise.

The utterance represents an expressive speech act (Searle, 1969) that conveys surprise and uncertainty regarding information that has not yet been confirmed. From the perspective of Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature Theory, Speaker A's question implies uncertainty, whereas Speaker B's response indicates that no definitive confirmation has been obtained and that the available information remains inconclusive.

According to Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, the emotional meaning is derived from the conversational context, in which the lack of shared information requires the hearer to engage in further inferential processing. From the perspective of Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, the indirect response functions as a politeness strategy that preserves conversational harmony by avoiding an overly definitive statement in the absence of reliable information.

From a pragmatic perspective, surprise and confusion in this example are expressed through questions and tentative responses that reflect informational uncertainty rather than explicit emotional statements. This finding reinforces the view that emotional meaning in Acehese is often constructed through contextual inference, with uncertainty itself serving as a meaningful communicative resource.

## Synthesis of the Findings

The findings demonstrate that the pragmatic interpretation of emotional utterances in Acehese produced by students at Universitas Bumi Persada is determined not only by the lexical meaning of the utterances but also by communicative

context, interpersonal relationships, and shared knowledge. The analysis identified seven emotional categories; happiness, sadness, disappointment, fear, anger, embarrassment, and surprise; which are realized through distinct pragmatic strategies corresponding to the speakers' communicative intentions.

From the perspective of Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, all emotional utterances function as expressive speech acts that reveal the speakers' psychological states. However, emotional meanings are rarely expressed explicitly. Instead, they are primarily conveyed through conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975), requiring hearers to infer the intended meanings from contextual information, as explained by Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory. These findings highlight the central role of context in interpreting emotional utterances.

The findings are consistent with Yule (2020) and Cutting (2021), who argue that pragmatic meaning emerges from the interaction between linguistic forms, communicative context, and shared knowledge. In this study, emotional meanings were communicated implicitly, making successful interpretation dependent on the hearers' ability to draw contextual inferences.

From the perspective of politeness, both positive and negative emotions are shaped by social norms. When expressing sadness, disappointment, fear, embarrassment, and anger, speakers frequently employ mitigation, avoidance, clarification, and supportive responses to preserve interpersonal harmony. These findings support Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, which emphasizes minimizing conflict while maintaining social solidarity.

The findings also support Jaworski's (2021) view that silence functions as a pragmatic strategy for conveying implicit meanings and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Although this study focuses on emotional utterances rather than silence itself, speakers frequently employ brief responses, avoidance strategies, and indirect emotional expressions, particularly when expressing embarrassment, fear, and disappointment. These strategies facilitate contextual inference, minimize threats to the interlocutor's face, and preserve interpersonal harmony, demonstrating that emotional expression in Acehnese is shaped by culturally embedded norms of politeness and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the findings extend those of Raihana et al. (2018), who reported that silence in Acehnese conversations functions as both a politeness strategy and a means of concealing emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, and anger. The present study demonstrates that similar pragmatic functions are achieved not only through silence but also through brief, indirect utterances containing emotional implicatures. This finding suggests that emotional regulation in Acehnese communication is realized through both silence and implicit linguistic expressions.

Overall, the findings confirm that emotional utterances in Acehnese reflect the interaction of linguistic forms, pragmatic strategies, and cultural values. Emotional expression serves not only to communicate psychological states but also to maintain interpersonal harmony through conversational implicatures, contextual inference, and politeness strategies. These findings contribute to pragmatic studies by demonstrating that the interpretation of emotional utterances among Acehnese University students is shaped by the

integration of speech acts, conversational implicatures, contextual relevance, politeness, and local cultural values, which encourage emotions to be expressed implicitly rather than explicitly.

#### D. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study demonstrates that the pragmatic meaning of emotional utterances in Acehese produced by students at Universitas Bumi Persada is constructed through the interaction of linguistic expressions, communicative context, shared knowledge, and the cultural values underlying social interaction. Analysis of 36 emotional utterances identified seven emotional categories: happiness, sadness, disappointment, fear, anger, embarrassment, and surprise. Each category is realized through distinct pragmatic strategies, indicating that emotional meaning is often conveyed implicitly through conversational implicatures, contextual inference, and situational context rather than through explicit statements.

The findings further reveal that Acehese-speaking students tend to express emotions indirectly through clarification, avoidance, social support, and other indirect responses. These communicative patterns reflect the strong influence of politeness norms and the cultural emphasis on maintaining interpersonal harmony. Consequently, emotional expressions serve not only to communicate psychological states but also to preserve social relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches pragmatic scholarship by demonstrating that the interpretation of emotional utterances in a regional language result from the interaction of speech acts, conversational implicatures, contextual relevance, politeness strategies, and local

cultural values. Unlike previous studies, which have examined silence, euphemism, or lexical expressions of emotion separately, the present study integrates multiple pragmatic perspectives to explain how emotional meanings are constructed in naturally occurring communication. This integrative approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of emotional communication in Acehese and contributes to broader pragmatic research on regional languages.

Future studies are encouraged to incorporate prosodic features, including intonation, stress, pitch, and speech duration, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional meanings are expressed and interpreted in Acehese communication.

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