

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – IV Issue - IV (July – August) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



Pragmatic Transfer in English Interactions: A Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Study of Torajanese EFL Learners

Elim Trika Sudarsi

Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja

| **Received:** 21.07.2026 | **Accepted:** 25.07.2026 | **Published:** 27.07.2026

***Corresponding author:** Elim Trika Sudarsi

Abstract

Pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in enabling English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to communicate appropriately across diverse sociocultural contexts. However, learners frequently transfer pragmatic norms from their first language and culture into English interactions, resulting in pragmatic transfer that may lead to misunderstanding or communication breakdown. While pragmatic transfer has been extensively investigated in various linguistic and cultural settings, little attention has been given to learners from the Torajanese cultural community of Indonesia, whose distinctive sociocultural values may shape their pragmatic behavior in English communication. This study aims to examine the forms of pragmatic transfer exhibited by Torajanese EFL learners in English interactions and to explore how Torajanese cultural values influence their pragmatic choices. Employing a qualitative cross-cultural pragmatic approach, the study collected data through Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), role-play interactions, and semi-structured interviews involving undergraduate EFL students from a university in Tana Toraja. The data were analyzed using the frameworks of interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics to identify both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer. The findings reveal that participants frequently transferred culturally grounded norms of politeness, indirectness, respect for social hierarchy, and communal harmony into English speech acts, particularly in requests, refusals, apologies, and expressions of disagreement. Although these strategies reflected positive cultural values, they occasionally diverged from native English pragmatic conventions and affected communicative appropriateness. The study highlights the importance of integrating culture-sensitive pragmatic instruction into EFL classrooms to foster learners' intercultural communicative competence while preserving their local cultural identity. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on interlanguage pragmatics by providing empirical evidence from the underrepresented Torajanese cultural context.

Keywords: pragmatic transfer; interlanguage pragmatics; cross-cultural pragmatics; Torajanese EFL learners; intercultural communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of English as a global lingua franca has shifted the focus of English language teaching from merely developing grammatical competence to fostering communicative and pragmatic competence. Successful communication in English requires learners not only to produce grammatically accurate utterances but also to use language appropriately according to the social, cultural, and situational contexts in which communication occurs. Consequently, pragmatic competence has become one of the essential components of communicative competence, enabling language users to perform speech acts appropriately, interpret implied meanings, and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships across cultures.

Despite achieving adequate linguistic proficiency, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to experience difficulties in pragmatic communication. These difficulties often arise because learners unconsciously transfer pragmatic norms from their first language (L1) and cultural background into the target language (L2), a phenomenon widely known as pragmatic transfer. Pragmatic transfer occurs when speakers rely on their native sociocultural conventions in performing speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, suggestions, and expressions of disagreement in another language. While such transfer may facilitate communication in familiar contexts, it may also lead to pragmatic failure, misunderstanding, or unintended impoliteness when the transferred norms differ from those expected by speakers of English.

Within the field of interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic transfer has been recognized as a complex interaction between linguistic knowledge, sociocultural norms, and communicative intentions. Previous studies have demonstrated that learners' cultural backgrounds significantly influence their pragmatic choices in English interactions. Research conducted in various Asian contexts has reported pragmatic transfer among Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Iranian, Arab, and Indonesian EFL learners, particularly in realizing speech acts involving politeness and interpersonal relationships. These studies consistently indicate that learners tend to preserve culturally embedded values while communicating in English, suggesting that pragmatic competence cannot be separated from the cultural system in which learners are socialized.

Indonesia provides a particularly rich context for cross-cultural pragmatic research because of its extensive cultural and linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, existing studies on Indonesian EFL learners have predominantly focused on major ethnic groups such as Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, and Bugis. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to learners from eastern Indonesia, particularly those belonging to the Torajanese cultural community. This represents an important research gap, considering that Torajanese society possesses distinctive sociocultural characteristics that shape interpersonal communication. Cultural values such as respect for elders and authority, collective solidarity, indirectness in sensitive situations, harmony preservation, and careful maintenance of social relationships are deeply embedded in everyday interactions. These values may influence how Torajanese learners perform speech acts in English and how they negotiate meaning in intercultural communication.

From the perspective of cross-cultural pragmatics, investigating Torajanese learners is academically significant because pragmatic behavior is inseparable from culturally shared beliefs, norms, and

social expectations. The transfer of Torajanese communicative norms into English interactions may manifest not only in linguistic forms but also in sociopragmatic judgments regarding politeness, appropriateness, and interpersonal distance. Understanding these culturally influenced pragmatic patterns is essential for explaining why learners with adequate grammatical knowledge may still encounter communicative challenges in authentic English interactions. Furthermore, examining pragmatic transfer among Torajanese EFL learners contributes to a broader understanding of how local cultural identities interact with global language use in multilingual societies.

Although previous research has established the existence of pragmatic transfer among Indonesian EFL learners, limited empirical evidence explains how the unique cultural values of Torajanese learners shape their English pragmatic performance. Most existing studies emphasize the identification of pragmatic errors or the realization of individual speech acts without sufficiently exploring the cultural motivations underlying learners' pragmatic choices. Consequently, the relationship between Torajanese cultural norms and pragmatic transfer remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is important not only for enriching the literature on interlanguage pragmatics but also for informing culturally responsive English language teaching practices in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the forms of pragmatic transfer exhibited by Torajanese EFL learners in English interactions and to examine how Torajanese cultural values influence their pragmatic choices. Drawing upon the frameworks of interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics, the study explores both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer across selected speech acts. By providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented cultural community, this study contributes to the growing body of research on pragmatic transfer, expands cross-cultural pragmatic scholarship within the Indonesian context, and offers pedagogical insights for integrating pragmatic and intercultural competence into EFL instruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative cross-cultural pragmatic approach to investigate pragmatic transfer in the English interactions of Torajanese EFL learners. The study focused on identifying how learners' cultural background influenced their pragmatic choices in English communication.

Participants

The participants were 30 undergraduate students from the English Education Study Program at a private university in Tana Toraja, Indonesia. They were selected purposively based on their Torajanese cultural background and English learning experience.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three instruments: (1) Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) to elicit speech acts, (2) role-play activities to capture authentic spoken interactions, and (3) semi-structured interviews to explore participants' cultural perspectives on language use.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed qualitatively using the frameworks of interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural pragmatics. The analysis involved identifying speech acts, classifying instances of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer, and interpreting how Torajanese cultural values influenced participants' pragmatic behavior in English interactions. Data from the three instruments were triangulated to enhance the credibility of the findings.

FINDINGS

Types of Pragmatic Transfer in English Interactions

The analysis of the Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), role-play interactions, and interview data revealed that Torajanese EFL learners exhibited both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer in their English interactions.

Pragmalinguistic transfer was evident in learners' direct translation of expressions from their first language into English. Several participants employed linguistic forms that reflected Torajanese and Indonesian communicative patterns rather than conventional English expressions. This tendency was particularly observed in requests, refusals, and apologies.

Sociopragmatic transfer appeared more frequently than pragmalinguistic transfer. Participants demonstrated culturally influenced perceptions of politeness, respect, and social hierarchy when interacting in English. They often selected communication strategies that emphasized deference and interpersonal harmony, even when more direct expressions would be acceptable in English-speaking contexts.

Pragmatic Transfer in Requests and Refusals

Requests and refusals emerged as the speech acts most strongly affected by pragmatic transfer. In request situations involving lecturers or older individuals, participants frequently used highly indirect expressions to demonstrate respect. Similarly, refusals were often accompanied by lengthy explanations and apologies to avoid threatening the interlocutor's face.

These strategies reflected the participants' preference for maintaining harmonious relationships and minimizing potential conflict. While such expressions were considered polite within their cultural framework, they occasionally resulted in overly indirect responses in English communication.

Influence of Torajanese Cultural Values

Interview data indicated that participants' pragmatic choices were closely associated with several Torajanese cultural values. Respect for elders and authority figures influenced the use of deferential language, particularly in situations involving unequal power relationships. In addition, the value of communal harmony encouraged learners to avoid direct disagreement and confrontation.

Participants also reported that maintaining good interpersonal relationships was an important consideration during communication. As a result, they frequently employed mitigating devices, indirect expressions, and supportive statements when expressing opinions, requests, or refusals.

Pragmalinguistic and Sociopragmatic Transfer

The findings further revealed that sociopragmatic transfer occurred more frequently than pragmalinguistic transfer. While learners generally possessed sufficient grammatical knowledge to construct English utterances, they often relied on culturally embedded norms when determining what constituted appropriate communication.

This suggests that cultural knowledge played a significant role in shaping learners' pragmatic behavior. The transfer of Torajanese sociocultural values into English interactions influenced not only the linguistic forms used but also learners' judgments of politeness, appropriateness, and interpersonal relationships.

Table: Types of Pragmatic Transfer Identified in Torajanese EFL Learners' English Interactions

Speech Act	Form of Transfer	Cultural Value Reflected
Requests	Indirect requests	Respect for authority
Refusals	Extensive explanations and apologies	Harmony maintenance
Apologies	Strong responsibility-taking	Social obligation
Disagreement	Mitigated disagreement	Avoidance of conflict
Suggestions	Indirect recommendation strategies	Politeness and solidarity

CONCLUSION

This study investigated pragmatic transfer in the English interactions of Torajanese EFL learners from a cross-cultural pragmatic perspective. The findings revealed that participants demonstrated both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer, reflecting the influence of Torajanese cultural values on their English communication. Cultural norms such as respect for elders, indirectness, social harmony, and collective orientation shaped learners' pragmatic choices across various speech acts, including requests, refusals, apologies, and disagreements. While these culturally grounded strategies promoted politeness within the Torajanese context, they occasionally differed from the pragmatic conventions of English, potentially leading to communicative misunderstandings.

The study contributes to the field of interlanguage pragmatics by providing empirical evidence from the underrepresented Torajanese cultural context and highlighting the close relationship between culture and pragmatic language use. The findings emphasize that developing grammatical competence alone is insufficient for effective intercultural communication. EFL instruction should therefore incorporate explicit pragmatic and intercultural competence training, enabling learners to communicate appropriately while maintaining their cultural identity.

Future research is recommended to include participants from different regions and educational levels, employ larger sample sizes, and investigate additional speech acts or authentic

communicative settings. Comparative studies involving learners from different Indonesian ethnic groups may also provide broader insights into the role of local culture in shaping pragmatic competence in English.

REFERENCES

- Alcón-Soler, E., & Martínez-Flor, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching and testing*. Multilingual Matters.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2013). Developing L2 pragmatics. *Language Learning*, 63(Suppl. 1), 68–86.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2018). L2 pragmatics. In J. I. Lontos (Ed.), *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. Wiley.
- Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics: Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context*. John Benjamins.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Ablex.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Haugh, M., Kádár, D. Z., & Mills, S. (Eds.). (2022). *The Cambridge handbook of sociopragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ifantidou, E. (2019). *Pragmatics and cognition*. John Benjamins.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2022). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kasper, G. (1992). Pragmatic transfer. *Second Language Research*, 8(3), 203–231.
- Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). *Interlanguage pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Leech, G. N. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford University Press.
- LoCastro, V. (2012). *Pragmatics for language educators*. Routledge.
- Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Ren, W., & Han, Z. (2016). The representation of pragmatic knowledge in English language teaching: A review. *Language Teaching Research*.
- Roevers, C. (2022). Assessing second language pragmatics. *Language Testing*.
- Schauer, G. A. (2009). *Interlanguage pragmatic development*. Continuum.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). *Culturally speaking: Culture, communication and politeness theory* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
- Sudarsi, E. T., Dollah, S., & Mahmud, M. (2025). Torajan local wisdom-based instruction in teaching cross-cultural understanding. *Pubmedia Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 2(4), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.47134/jpbi.v2i4.2025>
- Sudarsi, E. T., Mangoki', D., Wahyuni, S., Allo, M. D. G., & Irianto, T. U. (2025). Integrating local culture-based learning media in multilingual classrooms: An analytical study of implementation and educational impact. *Eduvelop: Journal of English Education and Development*, 9(1), 61–78. <https://doi.org/10.31605/eduvelop.v9i1.5228>
- Sudarsi, E. T., Taula'bi, N., & Allo, M. D. G. (2022). Representation of character education values in the tradition of Sikarume Toraja. *KEMBARA: Jurnal Keilmuan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya*, 8(1), 25–36.
- Sykes, J. M. (2018). Digital technologies and second language pragmatics. *Language Learning & Technology*.
- Taguchi, N. (2015). Instructed pragmatics at a glance: Where instructional studies were, are, and should be going. *Language Teaching*, 48(1), 1–50.
- Taguchi, N. (2019). *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and pragmatics*. Routledge.
- Taguchi, N., & Roevers, C. (2017). *Second language pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.