

Cultural Pragmatics in the Classroom: The Role of Local Markers in Indonesian EFL Discourse

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the interactional functions of local pragmatic markers (PMs) in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. While pragmatic markers such as okay and so are widely documented in global academic discourse, local markers like kan, dong, and sih remain underexplored. The objective of this research is to analyze how these culturally embedded markers support pedagogical interaction and contribute to classroom discourse management. Data were taken from transcripts of six Indonesian EFL classes. A corpus-based approach was applied using the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) model and function-based coding. Marker frequency was normalized per 1,000 words and categorized by speaker role, turn position, and discourse function. To provide comparison, data from the MICASE and ELFA corpora were also analyzed. Results show that local PMs serve both textual and interpersonal functions. Teachers used kan to affirm responses, dong to encourage participation, and nah to mark procedural shifts. These markers enhanced Classroom Interactional Competence by facilitating smoother transitions, reducing student anxiety, and promoting learner engagement. Compared to MICASE and ELFA, which lack these markers, the Indonesian classrooms demonstrated a discourse style shaped by cultural values such as consensus and relational harmony. The findings highlight the pedagogical significance of integrating local pragmatic norms into EFL instruction. Recognizing and leveraging these markers can enhance communicative effectiveness and cultural inclusivity in language education. This study contributes to expanding models of pragmatic competence and affirms the importance of localized discourse analysis in multilingual educational contexts.

Keywords: Pragmatic Markers, Classroom Discourse, Indonesian EFL, Bilingual Interaction, Discourse Functions, Interactional Competence.



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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic markers (PMs) are an important part of spoken discourse, especially in education. Although syntactically optional, they serve key communicative functions: organizing speech, showing speaker attitude, managing the flow of interaction, and guiding listener interpretation.

Their importance has been well documented in pragmatic and discourse studies, with influential work by Schiffrrin (1987) and Fraser (1999). According to Schiffrrin, PMs act as multifunctional tools that help speakers organize ideas, connect meanings across utterances, and engage listeners appropriately. Fraser adds that PMs can be contrastive, elaborative, inferential, or topic-related, each signaling how ideas relate to broader discourse goals (Fatah & Ibrahim, 2020; Sharif et al., 2017).

In classroom discourse, PMs serve dual roles: they both structure the logical flow of instruction and facilitate interpersonal alignment between teachers and students. For instance, markers like “okay,” “so,” and “then” often function as transitional cues or framing devices, while others like “you know,” “I mean,” or “actually” operate interpersonally to soften instructions, express empathy, or indicate stance. This bifunctionality textual and interpersonal is key to understanding how language operates pedagogically. PMs support teachers in maintaining attention, managing turn taking, correcting errors, signaling shifts in topics or tasks, and providing feedback. At the same time, they create space for affective engagement and co construction of meaning. The communicative flexibility of PMs allows teachers to shift seamlessly between instructional content and relational work, ultimately promoting student engagement and deeper comprehension (Rustandi, 2017; Tanjung & Ashadi, 2019).

This study is anchored in the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) framework, a well established model for analyzing classroom discourse. In this triadic structure, the teacher initiates interaction, the student responds, and the teacher follows with feedback or evaluation. Despite criticisms that IRF can reinforce asymmetrical power relations or suppress student agency (Ginting & Dewi, 2023), it remains a valuable analytical tool for mapping turn taking, tracking learning sequences, and identifying instructional scaffolding. When examined in conjunction with PM usage, the IRF model helps reveal how specific markers are strategically employed at different discourse stages to facilitate learning, encourage participation, or signal instructional transitions (Li et al., 2018; Rustandi, 2017).

Complementing this structural approach is the notion of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), which refers to the ability of teachers and students to manage and sustain effective communication within pedagogical exchanges. CIC emphasizes interaction as a co constructed process requiring sensitivity to contextual norms, communicative cues, and social dynamics. Teachers who exhibit high CIC are adept at using PMs to open space for dialogue, validate student responses, manage misunderstanding, and regulate pacing. In multilingual environments such as Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students' language repertoires include local dialects and vernaculars, CIC also entails the ability to draw upon culturally resonant pragmatic markers. These include particles like *kan*, *dong*, and *sih*, which serve to align speaker listener orientation, encourage compliance, soften disagreement, and reinforce shared knowledge (Fatah & Ibrahim, 2020; Ginting & Dewi, 2023; Kessler et al., 2020).

The importance of these local PMs has been increasingly acknowledged in studies of bilingual or non Western classrooms. Research indicates that local markers are not simply linguistic ornaments, but rather essential communicative tools that embody cultural expectations and pedagogical strategies. Studies conducted by Cancino & Diaz (2020), and Pranoto & Suprayogi (2021),

demonstrate how local PMs enhance the clarity and relevance of teacher discourse, especially when integrated with code switching strategies that reflect students' lived linguistic realities. Such markers facilitate inclusive instruction by reducing social distance, affirming cultural identity, and adapting discourse to student comprehension levels. In turn, they promote more robust engagement, increased learner autonomy, and improved educational outcomes (Fatah & Ibrahim, 2020).

However, global corpora of classroom discourse such as MICASE and ELFA rarely capture the presence or function of these local markers, suggesting a gap in current descriptive frameworks and analytical tools. This absence highlights the importance of localized discourse analysis that foregrounds the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of classroom interaction. By incorporating context sensitive categories and culturally specific markers into analysis, researchers and educators can more accurately represent the complexity of multilingual education. Such approaches also align with contemporary goals in applied linguistics to decolonize pedagogical discourse and validate diverse communicative practices.

This study seeks to examine how local pragmatic markers function in Indonesian EFL classroom interactions, focusing specifically on their placement within the IRF structure and their contribution to CIC. By bridging global theoretical models with locally grounded empirical data, the research offers a nuanced perspective on classroom discourse. It illustrates how seemingly minor linguistic elements carry major pedagogical significance, contributing to the effective management of interaction, the co construction of knowledge, and the cultivation of culturally inclusive teaching practices.

METHOD

This study employed a corpus based qualitative approach to investigate the interactional functions of local pragmatic markers (PMs) in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The methodology integrates discourse analysis, IRF structural tagging, and normalized frequency comparison, framed within a classroom interactional competence (CIC) perspective. The combination of local classroom data and established theoretical models enables a robust analysis of how markers such as *kan*, *dong*, and *sih* contribute to pedagogical communication.

Data Collection and Corpus Description

Primary data were drawn from six classroom sessions involving senior high school English teachers in Surakarta, Indonesia, originally documented and transcribed by Karlina et al. (2018). Each session varied in length, yielding sufficient turn by turn transcription for detailed interactional analysis. Supplementary comparative insights were derived from large academic spoken corpora, including MICASE (University of Michigan), ELFA (University of Helsinki), and TalkBank ClassBank, allowing for a contextual understanding of pragmatic marker usage across native and non native English settings.

Unit of Analysis and IRF Operationalization

The core analytical unit was the classroom discourse turn, segmented and tagged according to the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model, originally introduced by Sinclair and Coulthard and widely adopted in educational discourse research (Putri et al., 2021). Each turn was classified as an initiation (teacher question or task), a student response, or teacher feedback. This tripartite tagging enabled the systematic mapping of PM usage across different stages of instructional interaction. The IRF model provided a scaffold to trace pedagogic functions, participation structure, and the flow of teacher student engagement, particularly within bilingual exchanges (Wolk et al., 2020).

Coding Scheme for Pragmatic Markers

A multi-level coding scheme was applied to identify and classify pragmatic markers by their position (initial, medial, final) and function. Functions included confirmation, politeness, repair, emphasis, sequencing, and topic shift, adapted from earlier studies to suit the Indonesian EFL classroom context. Following Chou et al. (2023), markers were further distinguished as interactional (e.g., *kan*, *dong*) or organizational (e.g., *jadi*, *nah*), allowing for nuanced interpretation of their discourse functions.

Qualitative coding was supported by corpus analysis software, including AntConc, which facilitated the identification of frequency patterns and collocational contexts (Soleimani & Mohammadkhah, 2020). This integration of manual and software assisted analysis improved both reliability and replicability.

Normalization Strategy and Cross Corpus Comparison

To make results comparable across sessions and datasets, marker frequencies were normalized per 1,000 words. This standardization reduced the effect of corpus size and allowed cross-class and cross-corpus comparisons. Following corpus linguistics conventions, this approach made it possible to identify genuine usage patterns across different roles and contexts (Gil, 2018; Jones et al., 2019).

In comparative analysis involving ELFA and MICASE corpora, this study adhered to normalization conventions and, where appropriate, supplemented raw frequency counts with relative percentages. More advanced statistical comparisons were explored using basic probabilistic modeling techniques as outlined by Bao and Liu (2022), further reinforcing the validity of the findings.

Analytical Focus

The analysis prioritized three key aspects: (1) frequency and distribution of local PMs across IRF stages, (2) turn level functional categorization of markers within teacher and student utterances, and (3) comparative presence or absence of these markers in global academic corpora. This

structure supported the study's overarching goal of elucidating the interactional value of local PMs in shaping discourse, managing pedagogical flow, and supporting culturally sensitive instruction.

Overall, the study's methodological framework reflects current best practices in discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, combining qualitative depth with quantitative rigor. By aligning its analytical procedures with established models and incorporating culturally situated coding schemes, the study contributes both methodologically and substantively to the field of EFL classroom interaction research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Marker Frequency by Session

In Indonesian EFL classrooms, a diverse array of pragmatic markers (PMs) is employed, reflecting both instructional intent and cultural interactional norms. Notable among these are *kan*, *dong*, and *loh*, which have been documented in multiple studies as frequent and contextually loaded discourse tools (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2020; Kaderli & Razi, 2023). *Kan* often seeks affirmation or shared understanding, while *dong* softens requests, contributing to cooperative tone and affective alignment. These markers contribute significantly to the flow and coherence of classroom discourse and to the implicit negotiation of social relationships within the instructional environment.

Table 1 below illustrates the frequency of select PMs per 1,000 words across six Indonesian EFL classroom sessions. The data demonstrate a clear predominance of *okay* and *kan*, with substantial variation across contexts.

Table 1. Frequency of Local Pragmatic Markers per Class (per 1,000 words)

Mark er	XI Acc.1	XI (1)	Acc.2	XI (2)	Acc.2	XI IPA 1	XI IPA 2	XI IPS 4
okay	72	41		68		35	43	39
kan	12	10		13		8	7	9
dong	6	8		5		4	3	5
sih	4	3		4		3	2	3

The distribution of PMs also differs by role. Teachers often use markers such as *okay* or *let's move on* to organize tasks and transitions, while students use forms like *you know* or *like* to manage uncertainty or ask for clarification (Chen & Ren, 2023; Rahman et al., 2023). This contrast reflects the teacher's authority in structuring discourse and the students' more cautious style of participation. It also highlights how PMs index power dynamics and interactional positioning in the classroom.

Frequency analysis offers insights into patterns of engagement and instructional pacing. An increase in disfluency markers like *um* or *uh*, for example, may reflect student hesitation, suggesting moments of conceptual difficulty (Gómez-Laich, 2016). Such data can help inform responsive pedagogical strategies.

Cross corpus comparison reveals distinct cultural preferences in marker usage. MICASE and ELFA corpora show high frequency of general discourse markers like *um* and *so*, but virtually no occurrence of culture specific items such as *kan* or *dong* (Shleykina, 2019). This highlights how local sociolinguistic norms shape interactional preferences and affect instructional discourse (Yu & Zeng, 2023).

Functional Roles by IRF Position

Pragmatic markers serve distinct roles within the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) structure. During initiation, teachers deploy markers like *okay* or *you know* to frame upcoming tasks, direct attention, and check readiness (Rahman et al., 2023). In the response phase, students frequently rely on *like* or *I mean* to formulate or negotiate meaning (Talebzadeh & Khazraie, 2021).

Table 2. Functions of Local Markers by IRF Role and Turn Position

Marker	IRF Role	Turn Position	Function	Frequency
kan	Feedback	Final	Confirmation	15
dong	Initiation	Initial	Polite insistence	10
sih	Response	Medial	Focus/Softening	9
nah	Feedback	Initial	Summary/Shift	12

These markers fulfill both interpersonal and textual functions. Interpersonally, they assist in maintaining rapport, managing politeness, and softening evaluative content (Ogi, 2017). Textually, they organize sequences, mark transitions, and signal conclusions. For example, *nah* is commonly used to signal summary or procedural transition, while *kan* often serves to elicit alignment or shared understanding (Kaderli & Razi, 2023).

Frameworks for classification consider both discourse position and pragmatic intent, distinguishing between organizing, emphasizing, repairing, or relational functions (Rahman et al., 2023). This dual coding system strengthens the analysis of PMs by situating their usage within specific instructional contexts.

Cross Corpus Comparison

Comparative analysis of ELF and native English classroom corpora underscores the culturally embedded nature of PMs. In ELF contexts, PMs tend to exhibit hybridized forms that reflect multilingual negotiation and accommodation (Alenazi, 2022; Soler, 2017). Markers such as *you know* and *like* are employed flexibly to manage interpersonal dynamics, while native English contexts show more regulated use constrained by formality or standardization (Tseng, 2016).

In Indonesian classrooms, PMs such as *kan* and *dong* convey nuanced social roles. *Kan* often affirms shared knowledge or seeks confirmation; *dong* softens commands or requests, thus maintaining classroom harmony (Kaderli & Razi, 2023). These uses contrast with English PMs, which may prioritize assertiveness or clarity over interpersonal negotiation.

Cross corpus comparisons face methodological challenges, including inconsistent marker definitions, varied corpus sizes, and diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Chen & Ren, 2023; Soler,

2017). The absence of standard parameters complicates direct comparison, making context specific analysis essential (Alenazi, 2022; Talebzadeh & Khazraie, 2021).

Although English equivalents to markers like *kan* or *dong* are rare, items like *you know* or *right* may function similarly in guiding alignment or softening discourse (Rahman et al., 2023; Kaderli & Razi, 2023). Identifying these parallels enhances understanding of how language adapts culturally in instructional contexts.

In sum, examining the frequency, function, and cross contextual presence of PMs sheds light on the role these markers play in classroom discourse. Through both local analysis and cross corpus comparison, this study illustrates how PMs operate as essential tools for interaction, instructional coherence, and cultural alignment in EFL education.

The use of local pragmatic markers (PMs) in Indonesian EFL classroom discourse reveals the intricate relationship between language, culture, and pedagogy. These markers *kan*, *dong*, *sib*, among others are not incidental linguistic artifacts but culturally embedded resources that shape how meaning, authority, and interpersonal alignment are constructed within educational settings. They reflect core cultural values such as mutual respect, harmony, and collaborative engagement, which are especially prominent in Southeast Asian communicative traditions (Unuabonah & Oladipupo, 2020). By embedding these values into everyday discourse, local PMs function as vehicles of cultural transmission, reinforcing social norms while facilitating comprehension and interaction in pedagogical environments. Their presence in classroom dialogue signifies the adaptation of instructional language to local cultural frameworks, making education both more effective and more contextually relevant.

These markers go beyond surface-level cohesion. They help negotiate meaning, manage turn-taking, and signal agreement or disagreement in teacher–student exchanges. When teachers use *kan* to check for shared understanding or *dong* to encourage cooperation, they strengthen Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) and sustain more responsive and dialogic interaction. Rather than delivering content unilaterally, such teachers engage in dialogic interaction, where language is co constructed and tailored to the evolving context of the classroom. This flexibility is particularly valuable in EFL environments, where students may grapple with linguistic insecurity. PMs offer emotional scaffolding softening directives, inviting participation, and signaling understanding which helps reduce communicative anxiety and empowers learners to contribute (Vickov & Jakupčević, 2017).

The effective deployment of PMs also underscores the inherently social nature of classroom discourse. When PMs are used to affirm student input or transition smoothly between instructional phases, they do more than organize speech they sustain the affective fabric of the classroom. In multicultural and multilingual classrooms, such as those in Indonesia, PMs serve to humanize instruction, enabling teachers to meet students not only cognitively but also relationally. This interactional nuance is a defining feature of CIC, which views effective teaching as contingent on the ability to engage with students' sociocultural frames of reference. In this regard, PMs are not stylistic embellishments but pedagogical necessities that contribute to both instructional clarity and interpersonal connection.

However, this crucial function of local PMs is frequently overlooked in global discourse research and teacher education models. Dominant corpora like MICASE and ELFA, while foundational in mapping academic spoken English, tend to exclude context specific markers that carry socio cultural salience. The absence of localized PMs in such resources contributes to a form of linguistic erasure, whereby classroom discourse is interpreted through a narrowly global or native English centric lens. This marginalization can distort understandings of how interaction unfolds in real classrooms and risks promoting pedagogical frameworks that are insufficiently sensitive to linguistic diversity. As a result, teachers may feel pressured to suppress their own communicative instincts in favor of prescriptive norms that may not align with their students' communicative needs or cultural expectations.

Bilingual teachers play a critical mediating role in navigating this complex terrain. Positioned at the intersection of global educational standards and local linguistic realities, they act as pragmatic brokers who can translate and integrate norms from both worlds. Their capacity to code switch not merely between languages but between communicative frameworks enables them to adapt pedagogy in culturally responsive ways. This adaptability enhances not only language learning but also student inclusion, allowing learners to see their linguistic identities reflected and validated in classroom discourse. When bilingual educators are supported in leveraging local PMs, the classroom becomes a site of cultural affirmation as well as academic development, fostering deeper student investment and participation.

These findings suggest that pragmatic competence in EFL should be seen more broadly. It includes not only fluency in standard forms but also awareness of cultural cues and interactional norms. Instead of viewing local PMs as deviations from a standard, teacher training can frame them as useful tools for managing classroom discourse and enhancing communication. Reflective pedagogical practices that value linguistic hybridity and encourage flexible communicative approaches can help teachers align their methods with the real world communicative practices of their students. Integrating these insights into curriculum design, classroom management strategies, and language assessment frameworks can significantly enrich EFL instruction.

In conclusion, the study of local pragmatic markers offers a compelling entry point into understanding how language, culture, and pedagogy intersect. These markers function as micro level indicators of macro level cultural patterns, shaping not only what is said in the classroom but how it is understood and received. Recognizing their role within educational discourse enhances our appreciation for the complexity of communication in multilingual settings and calls for pedagogical models that are inclusive, adaptive, and culturally grounded. Ultimately, acknowledging the value of local PMs affirms the legitimacy of diverse linguistic practices in the classroom and empowers educators to create learning spaces where all students can thrive.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that local pragmatic markers such as *kan*, *dong*, *sih*, and *nah* play a crucial role in Indonesian EFL classrooms. They are not merely optional linguistic features but function as tools for managing discourse, supporting Classroom Interactional Competence, and creating culturally responsive interaction. By confirming responses, encouraging participation, and easing

transitions, these markers enhance both the clarity of instruction and the affective quality of teacher–student communication.

The findings highlight the need to recognize local pragmatic practices in teacher education, curriculum design, and classroom discourse analysis. Including these markers in pedagogical frameworks can promote more inclusive and context-sensitive language teaching. Future studies may further explore how students respond to such markers and examine similar phenomena in other multilingual settings, thereby strengthening the understanding of pragmatic competence in diverse educational contexts.

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