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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION UNDER LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINT: ENGLISH COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF STREET VENDORS IN THE SEMBALUN TOURIST AREA, EAST LOMBOK

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Abstrak

Pedagang kaki lima di kawasan wisata berinteraksi langsung dengan wisatawan mancanegara meskipun umumnya tidak pernah mengikuti pendidikan atau pelatihan bahasa Inggris formal. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi strategi komunikasi berbahasa Inggris yang digunakan pedagang kaki lima saat berinteraksi dengan wisatawan asing serta menganalisis efektivitas strategi tersebut di kawasan wisata Kedai Sawah, Sembalun Bumbung, Lombok Timur. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan lima pedagang yang dipilih secara purposif karena sering melayani wisatawan internasional dan telah berdagang selama 6–15 tahun (rerata 10,2 tahun). Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semiterstruktur, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis dengan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan simpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pedagang memanfaatkan lima strategi dalam taksonomi Tarone (1980), yaitu parafrase, peminjaman, permintaan bantuan, mime, dan penghindaran. Parafrase berupa penyederhanaan bahasa merupakan strategi paling dominan, yakni sekitar 35% dari seluruh strategi yang teridentifikasi, karena memungkinkan pedagang menyampaikan makna tanpa bergantung pada ketepatan tata bahasa. Pedagang juga memakai pengulangan, bahasa tubuh, alih kode, dan demonstrasi produk. Strategi tersebut umumnya efektif menciptakan saling pengertian dan menunjang transaksi, walaupun keterbatasan kosakata, perbedaan aksen, dan perbedaan budaya tetap menjadi hambatan. Simpulannya, strategi komunikasi merupakan sumber daya penting bagi penutur dengan kemampuan bahasa Inggris terbatas untuk berpartisipasi dalam interaksi lintas budaya di sektor pariwisata. Temuan bersifat deskriptif dan tidak dimaksudkan untuk generalisasi statistik.

Kata kunci: strategi komunikasi; bahasa Inggris; pedagang kaki lima; wisatawan mancanegara; *kawasan wisata*

Abstract

Street vendors in tourist destinations interact directly with international visitors even though most have never received formal English instruction. This study aimed to identify the English communication strategies that street vendors use when serving foreign tourists and to analyse how effectively those strategies support communication at the Kedai Sawah tourist area in Sembalun

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Bumbung, East Lombok. A descriptive qualitative design was employed. Five vendors, purposively selected because they frequently served international tourists and had traded for 6–15 years (mean = 10.2 years), participated. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analysed using the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that vendors drew on all five categories of Tarone's (1980) taxonomy: paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance. Paraphrase, realised mainly as language simplification, was the dominant strategy, accounting for approximately 35% of all strategies identified, because it allowed vendors to convey meaning without grammatical accuracy. Vendors also relied on repetition, body language, code-switching, and product demonstration. These strategies were generally effective in producing mutual understanding and completing transactions, although limited vocabulary, accent differences, and cultural differences remained obstacles. The study concludes that communication strategies are an essential resource enabling speakers with limited English proficiency to take part in cross-cultural service encounters in tourism. The evidence is descriptive and is not intended for statistical generalisation.

***Keywords**: communication strategies; English; street vendors; international tourists; tourist area*

Introduction

English has become a principal medium through which people from different linguistic backgrounds negotiate meaning in education, business, diplomacy, and tourism. In the era of regional economic integration and increasing human mobility, individuals are no longer limited to interacting within their own national or linguistic community; they are expected to exchange information with speakers of many first languages, most of whom also use English as an additional language. Speaking is the most immediate form of this exchange because it allows speakers not only to convey ideas but also to receive feedback and new information in real time (Eni Susilowati et al., 2022). Competent speaking, however, requires the coordinated use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and intonation, and a limited command of any of these resources can constrain participation in conversation even when the speaker understands the basic rules of the language.

Tourism is one of the sectors in which this constraint is most visible. Popular destinations bring together visitors and residents who do not share a first language, and English frequently becomes the default medium of contact. The people who meet tourists most often are not necessarily trained guides or hotel employees but small-scale traders who sell food, produce, and souvenirs in open public spaces. Street vendors belong to the informal economy and have traditionally been described as survival entrepreneurs: they trade primarily to secure a daily income for themselves and their families, often with limited access to formal education, capital, or business training (Abdullah, 2022; Supriatna, 2019). Despite these limitations, they contribute to local economies and to the visitor experience (Eni Susilowati et al., 2022). Their ability to communicate with foreign tourists is therefore not merely a matter of language proficiency. It shapes whether prices can be negotiated, whether products can be explained,

whether tourists feel comfortable enough to buy, and ultimately how the destination is perceived.

The case of Sembalun, East Lombok, illustrates this situation clearly. Sembalun lies at the foot of Mount Rinjani and receives domestic and international visitors, particularly during holidays, weekends, and the climbing season. Kedai Sawah, a rest area combining rice-field scenery, culinary offerings, and stalls selling local products, serves as a stopover for tourists before and after they visit the area's attractions. Vendors there sell strawberries, vegetables, snacks, fried food, coffee, and souvenirs, and they serve visitors from Southeast Asia, Australia, and Europe. Most of these vendors have never attended formal English training. Their daily trading nevertheless requires them to offer goods, state prices, answer questions, and negotiate in a language they command only partially. How they accomplish this, and whether their solutions actually work, is an empirical question that has received little attention.

Theoretically, the question belongs to the study of communication strategies. Canale and Swain (1980) included strategic competence, the ability to compensate for breakdowns in communication caused by limited competence, as a component of communicative competence. Communication strategies are the observable realisation of this ability. Tarone (1980) described them as mutual attempts by two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where the requisite meaning structures do not appear to be shared, and she proposed a typology that distinguishes paraphrase (including approximation and word coinage), borrowing (including literal translation and language switch), appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance (including topic avoidance and message abandonment). Faerch and Kasper (1983) approached the same phenomenon from a psycholinguistic perspective, treating strategies as plans that speakers adopt when they face a problem in reaching a communicative goal, while Dörnyei and Scott (1997) later reviewed and consolidated the many competing definitions and taxonomies. Across these accounts, a consistent point emerges: strategies are not signs of failure but evidence of resourcefulness, because they allow speakers to remain in the interaction and to keep the message moving.

Previous research in Indonesian tourism settings has applied this perspective mainly to professional guides. Umrah (2018) examined communication strategies for English guides in tourism areas of Lombok, Jumadil and Siswana (2023) studied the strategies of tourist guides at Benang Stokel in Central Lombok, and Wahyuni et al. (2025) reported strategies such as paraphrasing, code-switching, and gestures among tour guides serving tourists. Research on vendors has concentrated on other aspects. Habiburrahman et al. (2024) analysed the linguistic barriers affecting street vendors at the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, Hakim et al. (2024) described the relations between hawkers and tourists in the same region, and Nurhandini and Sulistyowati (2024) examined language games in the English used by hawkers on Kuta Beach, Lombok. Triyogo et al. (2025) discussed the establishment of an English-speaking market area and education for local vendors, and Zourgui and Melouk (2018) showed that front-line service employees use English as a lingua franca primarily for functional purposes. Together, these studies establish that limited vocabulary, accent, and culture create barriers for service workers, and that guides rely on a recognisable set of strategies. What remains less documented is a systematic account of which strategies vendors in a specific, high-traffic tourist site actually use, how these strategies map onto an established taxonomy, and how effective they are in achieving transactional goals.

This study addresses that gap by examining the English communication strategies of street vendors at Kedai Sawah in Sembalun Bumbung. It is expected to enrich the study of English use by non-native speakers in informal settings, and to offer a realistic empirical basis

for designing training that builds on what vendors already do rather than on what formal instruction assumes they lack. The study aims (1) to identify the English communication strategies used by street vendors when interacting with foreign tourists, and (2) to analyse the effectiveness of those strategies in helping vendors convey messages and complete transactions, including the obstacles they encounter.

Research Method

Research design and setting

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The design was selected because the aim was to describe, in rich and systematic terms, how communication strategies are used in natural, everyday trading encounters, without manipulating the setting or reducing the phenomenon to numerical measures (Sandelowski, 2000). The research was carried out at the Kedai Sawah tourist area, also known as the Sembalun rest area, in Sembalun Bumbung Village, Sembalun District, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The site was chosen for three reasons: it has a high intensity of interaction between vendors and international tourists, vendors there use English in practice despite limited proficiency, and it was accessible for direct and repeated observation.

Participants

The participants were five street vendors who sold goods directly to tourists in the area. They were selected purposively on the criterion that they frequently served international visitors, particularly during holiday periods, weekends, and the Mount Rinjani climbing season. Their goods included strawberries, vegetables, traditional snacks, and fried food. All participants reported that they had never received formal English education or training after completing school; they had acquired English through direct contact with tourists, social media and online videos, and help from friends or fellow vendors with better English. To protect their identity, participants are referred to by codes (V1–V5) in this article. Table 1 summarises their profiles.

Table 1. Profile of research participants

Code	Goods sold	Trading experience (years)
V1	Strawberries and snacks	15
V2	Vegetables	10
V3	Snacks and fried food	8
V4	Vegetables	6
V5	Strawberries and vegetables	12
Mean		**10.2**

Data collection and instruments

Three techniques were combined. Observation captured the verbal behaviour (spoken English) and non-verbal behaviour (gestures, facial expressions, body language, and product

demonstrations) of vendors during interactions with foreign tourists. Semi-structured interviews explored vendors' experiences of using English, the strategies they relied on, and the obstacles they met. Documentation, comprising photographs, interview recordings, and field notes, supported and corroborated the other two sources. As is usual in qualitative inquiry, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, supported by an observation sheet for recording strategy types, a semi-structured interview guide, and documentation records. Because these instruments are interpretive guides rather than scored tests, psychometric validity and reliability coefficients were not computed. Their appropriateness was instead ensured by aligning each instrument with the research objectives and by drawing on three complementary sources of evidence, so that a strategy seen in observation could be checked against vendors' own accounts and against documentation.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which proceeds through three concurrent activities. In data reduction, observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentation were selected, simplified, and coded for the type of communication strategy used. In data display, the reduced data were organised into narrative descriptions, excerpts, and tables grouped by strategy category. In conclusion drawing and verification, patterns were interpreted against Tarone's (1980) taxonomy and checked across sources. The relative prominence of strategies is reported descriptively, as a share of the strategies identified, and no inferential tests were applied; the analysis therefore describes this case rather than estimating population parameters.

Results and Discussion

Results

English communication strategies used by street vendors

Observation and interview data showed that vendors compensated for limited English proficiency through a repertoire of strategies that corresponds to Tarone's (1980) taxonomy: paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance. Table 2 relates the practices observed in the field to these categories. Paraphrase, realised as language simplification, was the most dominant strategy, accounting for approximately 35% of all strategies identified. Percentages for the other strategies were not recorded, so the analysis of those strategies is descriptive.

Table 2. Observed practices, their position in Tarone's (1980) taxonomy, and illustrative excerpts

Observed practice	Tarone category	Illustrative excerpt or description	Communicative function
Language simplification	Paraphrase	"Fresh strawberry. Sweet. Good price." (V1); "Fresh today. From Sembalun." (V5)	Conveys key product information with minimal vocabulary and no complex grammar

Observed practice	Tarone category	Illustrative excerpt or description	Communicative function
Repetition	Supplementary (not a distinct Tarone category)	Tourist: "How much?" Vendor: "Fifty thousand… fifty thousand rupiah."	Reinforces prices, product names, and directions
Code-switching	Borrowing (language switch)	"Good coffee, Sembalun coffee." "You try it first."	Fills lexical gaps and keeps the conversation moving
Body movement and gestures	Mime	Pointing at goods, demonstrating use, smiling, nodding, hand gestures	Replaces or clarifies words the vendor does not know
Showing goods directly	Mime (ostensive demonstration)	Letting tourists see, hold, or taste the product	Reduces misunderstanding and builds confidence in the product
Seeking help from others and tools	Appeal for assistance	Asking fellow vendors with better English; using translation apps; asking tourists to speak slowly	Resolves breakdowns the vendor cannot repair alone
Reducing or dropping the message	Avoidance	Identified in the findings; no extended excerpt available	Avoids breakdown by narrowing or dropping the message

Simplification was visible in vendors' offers of goods. When a tourist seemed not to understand an explanation, vendors typically adjusted by choosing even simpler words while pointing to the item in question. Repetition was used most often for numerical and referential information, namely prices, product names, and directions. Code-switching occurred when vendors lacked a suitable English word and inserted Indonesian or retained an Indonesian phrase within an English utterance. Non-verbal strategies were pervasive: vendors pointed, nodded, smiled, demonstrated how a product is used, and invited tourists to see, hold, or taste the goods before purchase. Appeals for assistance took the form of asking fellow vendors with better English to help, using translation applications on mobile phones, and asking tourists to repeat or speak more slowly. Avoidance was identified among the strategies but is not illustrated by extended excerpts in the data, so it is reported here only in outline.

Effectiveness of the strategies

The strategies were generally effective. Most tourists understood the vendors' intentions despite grammatical errors and a limited vocabulary, and transactions proceeded smoothly because both parties combined spoken English with gestures, pointing, and visual aids such as price displays, pictures, and calculators. Some participants also reported that foreign tourists appreciated their effort to use English even when their proficiency was modest. Effectiveness in this study is therefore judged by the achievement of mutual understanding and the completion of the transaction, as observed in the field and reported by vendors, rather than by an independent measure of language accuracy or of sales volume.

Communication barriers and coping responses

Although communication usually succeeded, three barriers recurred (Table 3). Limited vocabulary was the main obstacle, particularly when vendors tried to explain product ingredients, quality, or local culture. Differences in pronunciation were the second: some tourists spoke quickly or with unfamiliar accents, so vendors struggled to understand them. Cultural differences were the third, because some expressions and ways of communicating were not immediately intelligible to vendors.

Table 3. Communication barriers and vendors' coping responses

Barrier	Manifestation in the field	Coping response
Limited vocabulary	Difficulty explaining ingredients, quality, and local culture	Simplification, gestures, demonstration, translation apps
Accent and speech rate	Tourists spoke too quickly to be followed	Repeating questions; asking tourists to speak more slowly
Cultural differences	Expressions or communication styles not immediately understood	Asking fellow vendors with better English for help; rephrasing

Discussion

Why simplification dominates

The prominence of paraphrase in the form of simplification is best understood through the purpose of the encounters. Vendor–tourist exchanges are short, transactional, and focused on a small set of recurrent functions: offering goods, stating prices, answering questions, and closing a sale. For such functions the information that must pass is concentrated in a few content words (product, quality, price), while grammatical accuracy adds little to the transaction. Vendors accordingly invest their limited linguistic resources where they matter most. This is the behaviour that Canale and Swain's (1980) notion of strategic competence anticipates: when grammatical and sociolinguistic resources are insufficient, speakers draw on strategies to compensate and to keep communication going. It also matches Faerch and Kasper's (1983) view of strategies as goal-oriented plans that speakers adopt when a problem blocks the route to a communicative goal. The vendors' goal, a successful sale, is unusually clear, and this clarity probably explains why message adjustment was favoured over message reduction. Choosing paraphrase over avoidance indicates that vendors preferred to maintain the message by approximating its meaning rather than to abandon it, which fits the observation that vendors kept trying to communicate despite their limited vocabulary.

This finding is also consistent with earlier work in Lombok. Umrah (2018) discussed simplification-type adjustments as part of the communication strategies of English guides in the island's tourism areas, and Wahyuni et al. (2025) likewise reported paraphrasing among tour guides. The convergence suggests that simplification is a general response of non-native service providers to tourist interaction rather than an idiosyncratic habit of vendors. The vendors' repertoire is, however, narrower in linguistic range than that of professional guides, whose role requires extended explanation of sites, history, and culture. In the vendors' case, simplification operates in short bursts attached to concrete goods, a difference that follows from the nature of their work and not from a difference in strategic ability.

Non-verbal and ostensive strategies as a response to a shared physical referent

The heavy use of gestures and product demonstration deserves separate comment, because vendors have a resource that many other service providers do not: the goods themselves. Strawberries, vegetables, snacks, and coffee can be pointed to, held, and tasted, so meaning can be established through a shared physical referent rather than through words. This explains why demonstration was reported to reduce misunderstanding and to increase tourists' confidence in the products: it turns an abstract negotiation into a perceptible one. The finding is in line with Jumadil and Siswana (2023), who reported that tourism operators in Lombok combine verbal and non-verbal communication to improve tourists' understanding, and with the participants' own accounts that gestures were most helpful precisely when the right English word was unknown. In Tarone's (1980) terms, such behaviour falls under mime, but it differs from the mime of speakers who must evoke an absent object. Vendors point to a present one, which makes the strategy more dependable and may partly explain why transactions generally proceeded smoothly.

Code-switching, repetition, and appeals for help

Code-switching between English and Indonesian, classified here as borrowing, functioned as a bridge when vocabulary failed and did not interrupt the transaction. Utterances such as "Good coffee, Sembalun coffee" and "You try it first" show that vendors rarely treated their first language as an obstacle to English; they used it as an additional resource within the same utterance. This agrees with the common observation that code-switching is a frequent strategy in tourism interactions. Repetition, although not a separate category in Tarone's (1980) typology, played a distinct role in the data. Because the information most likely to be misheard, namely prices and product names, is also the information on which a sale depends, vendors repeated precisely those items, as in the repeated "fifty thousand" in Table 2. Appeals for assistance, in turn, show that the repertoire extends beyond the individual: vendors treat fellow sellers with better English, tourists, and translation applications as a distributed pool of linguistic resources. This reflects the community character of the setting, in which English knowledge acquired informally from tourists, online media, and friends is shared among vendors.

Effectiveness: shared understanding over accuracy

The finding that strategies were generally effective should be read in light of how success is defined in these encounters. Tourists appeared to value the vendor's effort to communicate more than the grammatical perfection of the utterance, and the participants also stressed confidence, friendliness, and willingness to interact. Effectiveness therefore depended on attitude as well as on linguistic skill. This supports the view that in lingua franca encounters, where neither party is expected to meet a native-speaker norm, interlocutors give priority to functional success, a point also evident in Zourgui and Melouk's (2018) account of English as a lingua franca for front-line employees, in which spontaneous, experience-based communication served practical commercial needs. It also qualifies deficit views of vendors' English: their proficiency is limited, but their strategic competence is substantial, and it is this competence that makes their communication workable.

Barriers and what they imply

The persistence of limited vocabulary, accent differences, and cultural differences confirms the barriers documented by Habiburrahman et al. (2024) among street vendors in Mandalika. The present study adds an account of how vendors respond: by repeating questions, asking tourists to slow down, using translation applications, and seeking help from fellow

vendors. Two implications follow. First, because vocabulary is the principal bottleneck, training that concentrates on numbers, product descriptions, and frequent transactional expressions would address the problem directly and reduce reliance on avoidance. Second, because paraphrase is both the most frequent and the most protective strategy, training can build on it, for example by teaching vendors to rephrase a message in simpler words when a tourist does not understand. This is consistent with the rationale of English-speaking market initiatives for local vendors (Triyogo et al., 2025), and it suggests that such programmes should extend vendors' existing strategies instead of replacing them with formal grammar instruction.

Limitations

Several limits qualify these interpretations. The study involved five vendors at one site, so the 35% share of paraphrase describes this case and cannot be generalised statistically. The mapping of observed practices onto Tarone's (1980) categories is an analytic interpretation; other taxonomies might classify the same behaviour differently. Effectiveness was inferred from observed outcomes and participants' reports, not from tourists' perspectives or from sales records, and vendors' self-reports may overstate success. Future work that includes tourists' views and a larger and more varied sample would strengthen the evidence.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study set out to identify the English communication strategies used by street vendors at the Kedai Sawah tourist area and to analyse how effective those strategies are. In answer to the first research question, vendors used the five strategy types of an established communication-strategy taxonomy: paraphrase, borrowing, appeal for assistance, mime, and avoidance. Paraphrase, realised mainly as language simplification, was the most dominant. It was complemented by repetition of key information, body language and gestures, code-switching between English and Indonesian, and direct demonstration of goods. The choice of strategy was shaped by limited English proficiency, the urgency of completing a sale, and vendors' accumulated experience with foreign tourists.

In answer to the second question, the strategies were generally effective. They enabled vendors to convey messages, reach mutual understanding, and complete transactions despite grammatical errors and limited vocabulary. Effectiveness rested on shared understanding rather than on linguistic accuracy, and on vendors' confidence, friendliness, and willingness to interact. Limited vocabulary, accent differences, and cultural differences nevertheless continued to impede communication, and vendors responded by repeating, slowing the exchange, using translation applications, and asking other vendors for help. The strategies thus serve linguistic, practical, and economic functions at once, and they show that people with limited formal English can participate meaningfully in cross-cultural service encounters. Because the study is a small descriptive case, these conclusions describe the setting studied and should not be generalised to all tourist areas.

The findings carry practical implications. For street vendors, it is advisable to enrich basic vocabulary, especially numbers, product descriptions, and frequent transactional expressions, and to practise simple paraphrasing, which has proved the most protective way of keeping communication going. For local governments, tourism managers, and community organisations, basic English training should be designed around vendors' real transactional needs and should build on the strategies they already use, rather than on abstract grammar instruction. For future researchers, similar studies in other destinations would permit comparison, research that includes tourists' perspectives would test how well the strategies are

understood from the other side of the exchange, and mixed-methods designs that combine measures of communication effectiveness with qualitative analysis of strategy use would give a more complete picture.

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