



Context Effects and the Manifestation of Grice's Maxims in Wolio Proverbs: A Pragmatic Study

Firman Alamsyah Mansyur

Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton, Baubau, Indonesia

fir_buton@mail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the influence of situational, social, and cultural contexts on the interpretation of Wolio proverbs and explain the manifestation of Grice's cooperative principle through the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner of use. This study uses a pragmatic approach with a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through literature review, in-depth interviews with native speakers, and observation of the use of proverbs in real communication. The analysis was conducted by interpreting the meaning of proverbs based on the surrounding context, then mapping the realization of Grice's maxims in the structure of the utterance and the strategy of using the proverb. The results of the study indicate that context has a direct and determining influence, as the meaning and function of proverbs can only be understood correctly when the speech situation, social relations, and cultural values are taken into account. In addition, Grice's principle of cooperation is reflected in the proverb as an effective, polite, and culturally normative communication strategy. These findings confirm the contribution of Wolio proverbs to the study of pragmatics and cultural linguistics and have the potential to be used as educational material to strengthen cultural literacy and communication values.

Keywords: *Context; Cooperative Principles; Grice's Maxims; Pragmatics; Wolio Proverbs*

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INTRODUCTION

Proverbs function as a communication tool that summarizes collective experiences while conveying moral values, thereby serving as an ethical reference for maintaining social harmony (Mieder, 2004; Mansyur & Suherman, 2020a). In speech communities, proverbs are used to advise, reprimand, assess, and mediate without escalating conflict, and serve as a medium for socializing values across generations in the family, education, and broader social spheres (Mieder, 2004; Mansyur & Suherman, 2020a; ÇetİN, 2025; Murati & Hysa, 2025; Dosmagambetova et al., 2025). Several recent studies also position proverbs as a social tool that influences decision-making and relationship negotiations through concise yet persuasive speech (Mekân & TekİN, 2025; Pham et al., 2025). This framework emphasizes that proverbs are an oral tradition that needs to be understood

as a communication practice, not merely a linguistic product read through its literal meaning, and not only can be read as a language structure (Agyekum, 2025), but also contains character values and ecological wisdom rooted in the socio-cultural relations of the community (Oktaviani et al., 2025).

The meaning of proverbs is essentially inferential, as messages are often conveyed through implication, figuration, and indirection, which require context-based interpretation. Therefore, the study of proverbs requires a pragmatic perspective that links utterances to the speaker's intentions and the conditions of their use in the speech event, including the speech situation, the social relations of the participants, and the cultural norms of the community (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Within this framework, Grice's cooperative principle is relevant because it explains how implicatures are naturally derived from cooperative contributions in conversation, a mechanism that is often a key to understanding proverbs (Grice, 1975). Thus, presenting proverbs without context risks reducing their social function and obscuring the nuances of meaning that can change according to the situation of use (Mieder, 2004).

Recent studies reinforce the position of context as a prerequisite for interpreting proverbs, while also demonstrating a variety of approaches to explaining the function of proverbs as communicative acts. A study of speech acts in Jordanian Arabic proverbs shows that proverbs can function as different illocutionary acts, the choice of which depends on the context of the speech event (Alshorafat & Hassi, 2025). A pragmatic analysis of Setswana proverbs confirms that participant identity, social relations, physical context, and cultural beliefs determine their understanding, as a single utterance can shift in nuance depending on the situation (Aiseng & Group, 2025). Furthermore, cross-linguistic research reveals systematic conceptual and rhetorical patterns: proverbial metaphors relate to socio-ecological realities (Iskandar et al., 2025), proverbs contain traditional ecological knowledge (Mekân & Tekîn, 2025), shared lexical elements form different cultural-meaning configurations (Golda et al., 2025), and syntactic-semantic parallelism enhances effectiveness and memorability (Pham et al., 2025). This map suggests that proverb research ideally integrates the context of use, inference mechanisms, and linguistic patterns that support communicative power.

In the context of Eastern Indonesia, particularly in Southeast Sulawesi Province, the *Wolio* proverb is a living expression in the collective memory of its speakers in Baubau City and surrounding areas and is used in family, education, economics, community interactions, and even traditional rituals. Previous studies have positioned the *Wolio* proverb as a language-culture-cognition link through metaphor and metonymy analysis (Mansyur & Said, 2020) and have emphasized its function as a medium for education and behavioral control in accordance with community norms (Mansyur & Suherman, 2020b). However, a detailed mapping of the context of use in actual speech events and operational proof of how the principle of cooperation manifests in the use of the *Wolio* proverb have not yet been demonstrated.

In light of the reviewed studies, two interrelated gaps remain underexplored. First, the influence of context is often stated as important, but has not been operationally mapped across the three dimensions of context (situational, social, cultural) based on actual usage data, rather than simply compilations of proverbial texts (Mieder, 2004); (Aiseng & Group, 2025). Second, studies of the pragmatics of proverbs tend to focus on general functions or speech acts, while the mechanisms of conversational contribution quality through maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner have not been widely demonstrated as something embodied in the structure and use of local proverbs

(Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). However, cross-cultural studies suggest that proverbs contribute to establishing acceptable communication standards within a community (Aiseng & Group, 2025); (Alshorafat & Hassi, 2025).

Based on this gap, this study examines how the context of use shapes the interpretation of Wolio proverbs and how the principle of cooperation is manifested in their use as a communication strategy for the community of speakers. This study aims to (1) describe the influence of situational, social, and cultural contexts on the interpretation and function of Wolio proverbs and (2) identify the manifestation of Grice's maxims (quantity, quality, relevance, and manner) in the use of Wolio proverbs.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in contextual pragmatics, which views the meaning of utterances as the result of the interaction among linguistic form, speaker intention, and the conditions of use in the speech event. Therefore, interpretation must consider the speech situation, the social relations of the participants, and the surrounding cultural norms (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). To explain the inference mechanism that allows proverbs to be understood even indirectly, this research draws on Grice's cooperative principle, specifically the cooperative assumption in conversation, operationalized through four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner (Grice, 1975). This combined framework allows for a more precise mapping of how Wolio proverbs produce implicit meanings, direct interlocutors' inferences, and maintain effective communication in accordance with the cultural acceptability of the speaking community.

The novelty of this research lies in the operational mapping of the context of Wolio proverb use, integrating situational, social, and cultural dimensions based on actual usage data rather than textual interpretation alone. Furthermore, this research empirically demonstrates that Grice's cooperative principle is not only theoretically relevant but also manifested in the structure and use of proverbs as a culturally acceptable communication strategy. Thus, Wolio proverbs are not only expressions of local wisdom but also evaluative devices that regulate the quality of speech contributions in everyday interactions. This approach expands the study of pragmatics and paremiology by presenting a model of proverb analysis that is contextual, inferential, and rooted in the social practices of its speakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatic Theory

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language signs and their use in certain communication contexts (Levinson, 1983). In this study, pragmatic theory is used to analyze how the meaning of Wolio proverbs depends not only on linguistic structure but also on situational, social, and cultural contexts. This theory is relevant because it allows the expression of the moral message implied in the proverb Wolio. Rosenberg et al. (2022) emphasized that "principles and maxims are vital tools in the preservation of cultural wisdom, allowing complex moral and social messages to be conveyed succinctly and effectively".

This approach is reinforced by Grice's (1975) maxim theory, which includes four main principles in communication: (1) Maxim of Quantity: the information provided should be sufficient, not too little or excessive, (2) Maxim of Quality: the information must be true and trustworthy, (3) Maxim of Relevance: the information must be relevant

to the situation or context of the conversation, (4) Maxim of manner: Information must be conveyed clearly, organized, and free from ambiguity. In Wolio, the principles of quality, relevance, and manner are also applied in various proverbs to ensure the effective delivery of moral values.

Context

Halliday (1985) emphasized that context plays an important role in language interpretation. In a pragmatic context, Rosenberg et al. (2022) show that "context shapes the interpretation and application of conversational maxims, ensuring that messages are both relevant and impactful in varying social settings". Halliday (1985) explains the division of context into three types, namely: (1) Situational Context: The environment or circumstances in which speech is used, (2) Social Context: The relationship between the speaker and the listener, including social roles and applicable norms, (3) Cultural Context: Values, traditions, and norms that form the basis of the meaning of speech.

METHOD

Study Site/Location and/or materials

This research was conducted in the Wolio-speaking community in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Data collection was conducted from March to September 2025, covering downtown and suburban areas to ensure diversity in the use of proverbs. The main material of the research is Wolio proverbs collected through oral traditions, written sources, and direct interviews with native speakers. The equipment used includes: a) Audio Recorder used to record interviews and conversations, b) Field Notebook used to record contextual observations, c) Transcription Software: used to transcribe audio interviews into text.

Research Approach

This study used a pragmatic approach and a qualitative descriptive method to explain how proverbs function as utterances with implicit meanings that depend on their context of use. This approach is based on the character of proverbs, which require analysis in terms of speech events, including the purpose of the utterance, the social relations among participants, and the surrounding cultural norms (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996; Masboogh et al., 2025). Methodologically, a qualitative approach allows for the exploration of the meaning, social function, and usage patterns of proverbs through naturalistic data and the perspectives of speakers (Creswell, 2010; Masboogh et al., 2025).

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and literature/documentation studies. Interviews were used to explore the living forms of proverbs, the interpretations of their meanings by speakers, the contexts of use considered appropriate, and the pragmatic reasons for their use. All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and supported by field notes (Creswell, 2010). Participant observation was conducted at community meetings, traditional activities, and informal interactions to record the use of proverbs in real communication, considering that not all speech practices emerge in interview situations (Mansyur & Suherman, 2020c). Secondary data were used to verify the forms of proverbs, enrich the cultural context, and triangulate interpretations. Research equipment included an audio

recorder, field notebooks, and transcription software to transcribe the recordings verbatim.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in three steps. First, all interview data were transcribed verbatim, then selected and organized into groups based on the type of proverb and the context of use (situational, social, cultural). Proverbs must be understood through data grouping and meaning analysis that considers the cultural context, because proverbs represent the collective experience of their speakers (Wijana, 2024). Second, the organized data were coded thematically to identify recurring themes related to pragmatic functions and indicators of contextual influence (Creswell, 2010). Third, each data point was interpreted pragmatically and contextually based on the speech event, then mapped to Grice's cooperative principle through four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). The validity of the findings was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and secondary data, and ensuring that interpretations were consistent with the observed context of use and the speakers' statements (Creswell, 2010).

RESULTS

The results of this study reveal two things, namely: (1) the influence of context in the Wolio Proverb, (2) the use of the Maxim Grice Principle in the Wolio Proverb. The results of this study can be presented as follows.

The Influence of Context on the Wolio Proverb

Research findings indicate that the interpretation of *Wolio* proverbs is pragmatic-contextual, meaning that the meaning and function of an utterance cannot be determined solely from its literal meaning, but rather are constructed through the relationship between linguistic form, the speaker's intention, and the conditions of use in the speech event. This framework places context as a determining factor because a single utterance can produce different nuances of meaning when the speech situation and participant relationships change. Furthermore, accurate interpretation requires consideration of situational, social, and cultural contexts as inferential clues that guide the interlocutor in understanding the speaker's intention (Aiseng & Group, 2025). Analytically, these findings confirm that proverbs operate as an indirect communication strategy: moral messages and social evaluations are conveyed through implicatures supported by contextual clues. In paremiology, separating proverbs from their context of use risks reducing their social function and obscuring the nuanced variations of meaning that emerge in practice (Mieder, 2004). Therefore, mapping the context of *Wolio* proverbs not only explains "what they mean," but also "how meaning is activated" and "why indirect forms are chosen" to maintain socio-cultural acceptability in interactions (Levinson, 1983); (Yule, 1996).

Situational context

Situational context serves as a trigger for the emergence of proverbs and determines which pragmatic function is activated at a given moment. Proverbs tend to be used when speakers need to frame priorities for action or regulate the communication process in situations that have the potential to give rise to misunderstandings, harm, or tension.

Table 1 . Wolio Proverb Data in Situational Context

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Situational context	Speech situation	Pragmatic meaning/function
<i>Ayinda-yindamo arataa, somanamo karo.</i>	“Not-not is wealth, as long as the self.”	Economy/crisis	Weighing the risk of losing material	Prioritize personal safety over wealth
<i>Boli atingara, boli alalo ganta!</i>	“Do not be reduced a little, do not go beyond the measure.”	Communication/ message delivery	Advice when conveying information	The message must be proportional, not reduced/added

Table 1 above shows that the expression *Ayinda-yindamo arataa, somanamo karo* reframes priorities in risky situations by placing personal safety as the reference point for decisions, allowing the speaker to convey direction without directly forcing. Meanwhile, the expression *Boli atingara, boli alalo ganta* controls the process of conveying information to prevent distortion, as subtracting or adding messages can shift meaning and trigger further social consequences. This pattern confirms that the situational context determines whether proverbs function as decision-structuring or as corrections to communication practices.

Pragmatically, findings in situational contexts indicate that Wolio proverbs function as framing devices that stabilize judgments in certain situations, for example, by placing safety as the standard for decision-making or accuracy as the standard for information delivery. This pattern emphasizes that utterance meaning is not identical to lexical meaning, but rather is constructed through reasoning based on the purpose of communication and the conditions of the speech event (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Thus, proverbs are effective because they provide a “brief guide” that is mutually acceptable without the need for lengthy argumentation (Mieder, 2004; Masboogh et al., 2025).

Social context

Social context determines the appropriateness, assertiveness, and safety of correction in interactions, especially when speakers need to convey judgment without damaging the relationship. Proverbs serve as a strategy to protect the interlocutor's face, as the message is conveyed as a general principle rather than a personal accusation.

Table 2. Wolio Proverb Data in Social Context

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Situational context	Speech situation	Pragmatic meaning/function
<i>Binci-binciki kuli!</i>	“Pinch a little skin!”	Fellow community members	Rebuke actions that hurt people	Empathy/reciprocity: don't hurt if you don't want to be hurt
<i>Boli dikai bukuna yinca!</i>	“Do not keep bones in the heart.”	Interpersonal	Relieve conflict/tension	Prohibition of holding grudges

Table 2 above shows that the expression *Binci-binciki kuli!* It is used as a reprimand based on the principle of reciprocity, namely, refraining from hurting others by placing

empathy as the basis for judgment. In this context, the reprimand becomes more acceptable because it is not directed as a personal attack. Meanwhile, "Boli dikai bukuna yinca!" is used to defuse interpersonal tension by encouraging the cessation of resentment, thereby directing the conversation toward restoring relationships and stabilizing interactions.

Pragmatically, proverbs in social contexts function as a safe correction mechanism: criticism and advice are delivered indirectly, thus reducing the threat to the interlocutor's face and reducing the risk of conflict escalation (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). In the Wolio context, this function aligns with findings that proverbs work as a medium for value education and behavioral control within a network of community norms (Mansyur & Suherman, 2020c). Thus, proverbs not only convey moral messages but also organize social relations to maintain harmony (Mieder, 2004). Social context also influences the maintenance of the mother tongue in everyday communication practices, so that aspects of context and social relations are important variables in understanding the function of language in society (Utami, E. S., & Suryadi, 2025)

Cultural Context

Cultural context provides the legitimacy of values that enable proverbs to function as collective moral references, especially when conversations touch on shared interests and value hierarchies. In this context, proverbs not only convey the speaker's opinion but also present a collective voice that narrows the scope for personal debate.

Table 3. Wolio Proverb Data in Cultural Context

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Situational context	Speech situation	Pragmatic meaning/function
<i>Ayinda-yindamo karo, somanamo lipu!</i>	"Not-not the self, as long as the region."	Collective loyalty	A call for solidarity	Public interest takes precedence over personal interests.
<i>Bolimo sara, somanamo agama!</i>	"Do not custom, as long as religion."	Hierarchy of values	Emphasizing the priority of norms	Religion is positioned as the highest value reference.

Table 3 above shows that the expression "Ayinda-yindamo karo, somanamo lipu!" is used as a call for solidarity that prioritizes public interests over personal interests, thereby laying the foundation for collective norms. Meanwhile, "Bolimo sara, somanamo agama!" emphasizes value priorities by placing religion as the highest reference point, which, in certain contexts, can end debates and stabilize conversations. These two data points emphasize that cultural references are not passive backdrops but interpretive devices that shape how the proverb's message is understood and received.

From a cultural-pragmatic perspective, proverbs can be understood as having symbolic authority because speakers borrow the legitimacy of collective values to strengthen their persuasive power. This aligns with the view that understanding proverbs requires consideration of the socio-cultural context, as a single expression can shift in nuance depending on the context of the utterance (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Therefore, the documentation and teaching of proverbs need to maintain their accompanying cultural context so that their social function and normative power are not reduced (Mieder, 2004; Murati & Hysa, 2025; Mansyur & Suherman, 2020b).

Manifestation of Grice's Principle of Cooperation in Wolio's Proverb

The findings in this section indicate that Wolio proverbs not only function as cultural expressions but also embody the principle of cooperation in conversation through controlling the quality of speech contributions. The data show that Wolio proverbs contain evaluative standards for communication quality that align with Grice's cooperative principle. Four maxims, namely quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, emerge as operational patterns that assess the adequacy of information, the trustworthiness of the message, the relevance of the contribution to the conversational goal, and the clarity and regularity of delivery (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983); (Tajabadi et al., 2014). This mapping confirms that figurative speech is not incompatible with conversational cooperation but rather often serves to maintain social safety. Proverbs allow corrections to the quality of communication without confrontation, thus maintaining cooperation and harmony in interaction. Thus, Wolio proverbs can be understood as "metapragmatic rules" that assess and guide standards of good communication within a community (Mieder, 2004; Masboogh et al., 2025).

Maxim of quantity

The Maxim of Quantity is evident when proverbs are used to control the sufficiency of information to prevent the message from being altered by unnecessary omissions or additions. In communication practice, controlling quantity is crucial because insufficient or excessive information can shift focus, create bias, and undermine trust.

Table 4. Wolio Proverbs that Reflect the Maxim of Quantity

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Context of use	Pragmatic explanation
<i>Boli atingara, boli alalo ganta!</i>	"Do not reduce even a little, do not exceed the measure!"	Advice on conveying messages/stories to others	Emphasizes the sufficiency of information: neither reducing nor adding
<i>Pogauna mboomo santana gula.</i>	"He/she speaks like coconut milk and sugar."	Criticism of excessive/embellished speech	Reminds that information is sufficient and does not bias the message

Table 4 shows that *Boli atingara, Boli alalo ganta!* explicitly demands that messages be conveyed without underestimating or exceeding the required amount, ensuring that information remains proportional. Meanwhile, *Pogauna Mboomo Santana Gula* criticizes excessive speech and "embellishment" of messages, which can potentially shift focus and create bias in interpretation. Thus, proverbs function as social control to ensure that speech contributions are adequate and do not deviate from the core message. Within the cooperative principle, quantity is not about the number of words, but rather the sufficiency of the contribution to guide the interlocutors' inferences without producing erroneous interpretive consequences (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Therefore, proverbs serve as an effective corrective tool because they identify information distortion as a social risk that can damage trust and disrupt relationships (Mieder, 2004).

Maxim of quality

The Maxim of Quality is realized when a proverb is used to correct a questionable, inconsistent, or hyperbolic claim, but without being overtly accusatory. In a community, a speaker's credibility constitutes social capital; therefore, quality correction is often carried out through figurative expressions that convey evaluative signals.

Table 5. Wolio Proverbs that Reflect the Maxim of Quality

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Context of use	Pragmatic explanation
<i>Mboomo wulelu.</i>	"Like an eel."	Warning against saying things that are hard to believe	Demanding trustworthiness, rejecting questionable messages
<i>Pogauna lanto winto.</i>	"His/her words make a whetstone float."	Criticism of exaggerated/unrealistic statements	Emphasizing the importance of accountable claims

Table 5 shows that *Mboomo Wulelu* identifies slippery and unreliable speech as a problem of contribution quality. Meanwhile, *Pogauna lanto winto* criticizes speech that is not in line with reality by metaphorically presenting impossibilities, thus rendering the message unreliable. Thus, proverbs are used to stabilize standards of trustworthiness without directly confronting the interlocutor.

In cooperative conversation, quality relates to the requirement that speakers refrain from stating something they believe to be false or without sufficient basis (Grice, 1975). Proverbs indirectly help maintain this standard, allowing the evaluation of the truth or reasonableness of a message to be conveyed as a more acceptable form of social learning (Levinson, 1983; Mieder, 2004).

Maxim of relevance

The Maxim of Relevance is realized when proverbs are used to direct spoken contributions so that they are relevant to the issue being discussed and contribute to the interaction's purpose. Disjointed contributions are not only seen as a digression from the topic but also as a disruption to the process of understanding and resolving the conversation.

Table 6. Wolio Proverbs that Reflect the Maxim of Relevance

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Context of use	Pragmatic explanation
<i>Malanga uwe tee kabulu.</i>	"The water is higher than the bamboo gutter."	Warnings for incoherent/difficult to interpret speech	Demanding relevance so that the message can be understood
<i>Pogauna lanto winto.</i>	"His/her words make a whetstone float."	Reminders to stay within the context of the conversation	Directing contributions so that they do not deviate/make things difficult

Table 6 show that "Malanga uwe tee kabulu" is used to reprimand incoherent or difficult-to-interpret utterances that hinder understanding. Meanwhile, "Pogauna lanto winto" also serves as a reminder to keep contributions relevant to the conversation and avoid complicating conclusions. Thus, proverbs are used as a guiding tool to ensure the message remains on target.

In the cooperative principle, relevance demands that contributions relate to the purpose of the conversation and facilitate understanding (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Proverbs fulfill this function by organizing the interaction's focus through concise expressions that are readily understood inferentially, allowing the conversation to return to stability without lengthy debate (Mieder, 2004).

Maxim of manner

The maxim of manner is evident when proverbs are used to correct messages that are disorganized, unclear, too fast, or too long without pauses, making information processing difficult. In this context, proverbs not only assess the content of the message but also the manner in which it is delivered as part of communication ethics.

Table 7. Wolio Proverbs that Reflect the Maxim of Manner

Wolio Proverb	Literal translation	Context of use	Pragmatic explanation
<i>Yapai bhaa, yapai lenci?</i>	"Which is the head, which is the tail?"	Criticism of unclear/unstructured speech	Demanding clarity and order
<i>Apogau mboomo katatana poo.</i>	"He/she speaks like a chopping mango."	Criticism of speaking too quickly/too long without pauses	Directing speech to be concise, orderly, and easy to follow

Table 7 shows that "Yapai bhaa, yapai lenci?" criticizes unstructured speech, making it difficult for listeners to grasp the message's sequence and essence. Meanwhile, "Apogau mboomo katatana poo" criticizes speech that is too fast or too long, without pauses, making communication feel "constrained" and lacking processing space. Thus, proverbs are used to regulate speech style, making it easier to follow and preventing it from dominating the interaction.

Within the maxim of manner, clarity and order are prerequisites for cooperative processing of speech contributions (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Proverbs serve as a subtle yet effective corrective mechanism for regulating speech without creating conflict, thus maintaining communication quality and social harmony (Yule, 1996; Mieder, 2004).

DISCUSSION

This section confirms two main findings, namely that (1) situational, social, and cultural contexts are the foundation of the interpretation of Wolio proverbs, and (2) Grice's cooperative principle is implicitly manifested in the structure and use of Wolio proverbs as a communication strategy. Thus, Wolio proverbs can be understood as inferential communication practices that work through context and are oriented towards the quality of conversational contributions, rather than as traditional expressions with fixed meanings independent of the situation of use (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983); (Yule, 1996).

The results of this study confirm that interpreting Wolio proverbs is an inferential process that depends on situational, social, and cultural contexts. Within a pragmatic framework, the meaning of an utterance is not identical to its lexical-literal meaning, but rather is constructed through reasoning based on shared knowledge, the purpose of communication, and the conditions of the speech event (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Therefore, proverbs cannot be treated as independent and stable semantic units; their

interpretation shifts according to who is speaking, to whom, in what social relationship, and in a particular cultural situation (Aiseng & Group, 2025); (Mieder, 2004).

These findings align with criticisms in paremiology that documentation of proverbs often stops at collecting texts, while scientific understanding demands explanations of their function and use within social contexts (Mieder, 2004). In the Wolio proverb data, situational contexts trigger the type of communicative act (e.g., advice, warning, or sarcasm), social contexts regulate the appropriateness and level of assertiveness of utterances based on age and status relations, while cultural contexts provide a framework of values that make the proverb's message read as dignified advice rather than harsh rebuke. This pattern is consistent with findings from cross-cultural pragmatics that emphasize that the meaning of proverbs depends on contextual parameters, including participant relations, cultural beliefs, and communication goals (Aiseng & Group, 2025). Studies of speech acts in Jordanian Arabic proverbs also indicate that the illocutionary function of proverbs can be understood only in the context of use and can vary according to the speech situation (Alshorafat & Hassi, 2025).

Locally, these findings reinforce the position of Wolio proverbs as a living social practice. Previous anthropological linguistic studies have shown that Wolio proverbs function as a medium for social education, encompassing the internalization of wisdom, behavioral control, and the formation of life principles, operating within a network of community norms and social relations (Mansyur & Suherman, 2020b). The findings of this study reaffirm that context is not merely a setting, but rather the primary mechanism that activates the moral and social functions of Wolio proverbs (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996).

This research also demonstrates that Wolio proverbs can be understood as a communication strategy operating under the cooperative principle and Grice's four maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). It is important to note that, in proverb practice, maxim fulfillment does not always manifest as literal adherence, but rather as a means of generating implicatures that interlocutors grasp through inference. Thus, proverbs serve as an effective tool for conveying sensitive messages without directly stating them, while maintaining social acceptability in interactions (Mieder, 2004).

The maxim of quantity is reflected in the tendency of proverbs to convey information concisely yet sufficiently to guide inference without excessive elaboration. In oral traditions, this conciseness is not simply a matter of efficiency, but rather a form of "speech economy" that supports memorization and repetition within a community (Mieder, 2004; Pham et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the maxim of quality in Wolio proverbs operates as a "normative truth" rooted in collective experience and cultural legitimacy, rather than as a factual-literal claim; in this context, metaphor and metonymy facilitate the transition from concrete experience to more abstract moral judgments (Mansyur & Said, 2020; Mieder, 2004). The maxim of relevance is evident through the selection of appropriate proverbs, so that the message is immediately connected to the situation and does not require lengthy explicit explanation (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). The maxim of manner is manifested through indirect, figurative, and symbolic forms. In pragmatics, indirectness functions as a strategy for managing social relations, such as preserving face, avoiding conflict, and maintaining harmony. This finding aligns with cross-cultural pragmatic studies showing that indirect forms facilitate social adaptation and flexible meaning (Aiseng & Group, 2025).

The findings of this study support the view that proverbs are the nexus between language, culture, and cognition. Cognitive semantic studies of Wolio proverbs show that metaphorical and metonymic mappings produce a spectrum of meanings that reflect social judgments (Mansyur & Said, 2020). Cross-linguistic studies also demonstrate that the same image or theme can construct different value configurations across cultures, thus requiring cultural sensitivity to interpret proverbs (Golda et al., 2025). Research on metaphors in Indonesian–Acehnese proverbs also confirms the relationship between the choice of metaphorical source domain and the socio-ecological realities of the speakers, which is relevant to interpreting Wolio proverbs as local knowledge grounded in community experience (Iskandar et al., 2025).

From a social function perspective, Wolio proverbs serve as both educational and normative tools. This finding is in line with research that places proverbs as a reservoir of wisdom and an instrument for transmitting values in family and social education (Murati & Hysa, 2025), as well as with the finding that Wolio proverbs train speaking performance, instill wisdom, and control behavior according to norms (Mansyur & Suherman, 2020b). Thus, proverbs not only convey values but also teach how to convey these values appropriately in a social context (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996).

However, this study extends previous research by choosing a different theoretical framework. Unlike studies that focus on the categorization of speech acts, this study positions Grice's cooperative principle as a pragmatic mechanism that explains how the quality of conversational contributions is constructed and assessed, namely, as sufficient, correct, relevant, and clear (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983). Thus, the Wolio proverb is understood not only as a means of conveying a moral message, but also as a metapragmatic rule that teaches good communication standards within the community (Mieder, 2004).

Theoretically, these findings extend the application of classical pragmatics to local cultural data by demonstrating the principle of productive cooperation in reading proverbs as communication strategies rather than simply traditional expressions. Practically, the results of this study support the use of Wolio proverbs as teaching materials for cultural literacy and communication ethics, especially when positioned as exercises in pragmatic inference and contextual reasoning to foster communication values such as honesty, information sufficiency, relevance, and clarity (Murati & Hysa, 2025; Mieder, 2004).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the interpretation of Wolio proverbs is pragmatic and contextual, so that the meaning and function of utterances cannot be adequately determined by literal translation alone. Situational context triggers the use of proverbs in response to specific communication needs; social context determines the appropriateness and safety of corrections to avoid damaging relationships; and cultural context provides value legitimacy, making proverbs work as collective moral references in interactions among Wolio speakers. This study also shows that Grice's cooperative principle is manifested in Wolio proverbs through four maxims. The maxims of quantity and quality are evident in the control of information sufficiency and message trustworthiness, while the maxims of relevance and manner serve to maintain the message's relevance to the conversational purpose and the clarity and regularity of its delivery. Thus, Wolio proverbs can be understood as cultural tools that simultaneously

serve the function of communication ethics, namely, organizing speech to be effective and acceptable within community norms. Practically, these findings recommend context-based documentation of Wolio proverbs so that preservation does not stop at collecting texts, but also maintains their social function. In addition, Wolio proverbs have the potential to be developed as cultural literacy materials and communication ethics education to train pragmatic competencies, particularly the ability to draw appropriate inferences, maintain relevance, and build clarity and trustworthiness in speech.

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