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"CHEAP PRICE, MISTER": ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN INFORMAL LOCAL TRADERS AND FOREIGN TOURISTS AT AMED, KARANGASEM, BALI

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Abstract: Informal traders in emerging coastal destinations of the Global South must communicate with foreign tourists in English without the benefit of formal instruction, yet research on tourism English remains concentrated on hotel and travel professionals in established destinations rather than on this population. This study examines the English communication patterns that develop between informal local traders and foreign tourists at Amed, an emerging destination in Karangasem Regency, Bali, Indonesia, and identifies the factors that support and inhibit their cross-cultural communication. Adopting a descriptive qualitative design informed by an English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspective, the study combined naturalistic non-participant observation of trader–tourist service encounters with semi-structured interviews with eighteen purposively selected traders, and analysed the data using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing and verification, with credibility strengthened by methods triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The findings show that traders enact a consistent two-stage pattern: interactions are initiated non-verbally through smiles, waves, eye contact, and handshakes, and then sustained through short, formulaic English expressions that prioritise transactional success over grammatical accuracy. Hospitality-oriented Balinese cultural dispositions and economic necessity emerged as the principal supporting factors, whereas limited vocabulary and grammar, difficulty comprehending diverse tourist accents, and limited knowledge of service-excellence conventions constituted the main barriers. The study extends ELF scholarship into the informal tourism economy, showing that traders achieve intelligibility by combining a narrow verbal repertoire with multimodal resources even under conditions of minimal proficiency, and it offers an empirical basis for community-based English for specific purposes training in emerging destinations.
Keywords: *English as a lingua franca; intercultural communication; tourism English; informal economy; service encounters; Bali*

INTRODUCTION

Whenever hosts and guests lack a shared first language, every service encounter requires meaning to be negotiated across linguistic and cultural lines (Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Dann, 1996). Since Cohen and Cooper's (1986) foundational analysis of "language brokers," tourism research has recognised that this linguistic burden falls asymmetrically on hosts, who must accommodate to visitors' languages to capture economic value, while Dann (1996) showed that the persuasive registers of tourism discourse—greeting, offering, praising, bargaining—constitute the pragmatic core of service encounters. In most such encounters, English functions as the default contact language, not because interlocutors are native speakers—typically neither party is—but because it operates as a lingua franca of global mobility (Seidlhofer, 2011; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Applied studies in the English for specific purposes (ESP) tradition have documented the specific communicative tasks this requires of tourism workers—giving information, offering help, describing products and

prices, and handling complaints (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012)—and converge on the finding that oral interaction skills, rather than written accuracy, are the decisive competence in tourism work (Abdul Zalil & Lim, 2022; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017), with recent scholarship broadening the construct from language proficiency alone to intercultural communicative competence as a core hospitality capability (Liu et al., 2022; Trang & Phuong, 2023). A growing body of evidence shows that language barriers remain among the most consequential frictions in the global visitor economy (Ahmad et al., 2024), and that destination-language proficiency shapes tourists' satisfaction and their behavioural intentions toward a destination (Li et al., 2023). How hosts with very limited formal instruction in English nevertheless manage to accomplish successful transactions with linguistically diverse visitors is therefore a question of both theoretical and practical significance for tourism-dependent economies.

Bali illustrates this question with particular clarity. The island's economy is structured around international tourism, and its labour market absorbs large numbers of workers in the informal sector—street and beach vendors, warung owners, boat operators, and souvenir traders—whose direct, unmediated contact with foreign visitors is a daily condition of their livelihood (Hitchcock & Putra, 2007). Because their participants are typically drawn from hotels, agencies, and hospitality schools, however, the conclusions of most ESP studies cannot simply be transferred to these informal traders, who operate outside institutional training structures; studies of local tourism workers in Balinese villages report generally positive attitudes toward English alongside persistent formal limitations (Murdana & Paramita, 2023; Widhiastuty & Murdana, 2024), and community attitudes in eastern Indonesia frame English as a communal economic asset (Basri et al., 2022). Amed, a string of coastal villages in the easternmost regency of Karangasem, exemplifies an emerging destination in transition. Formerly a traditional salt-farming area, Amed has been reconfigured over the past two decades around diving, snorkelling, and coastal tourism, and Karangasem's coastal villages more broadly have become a priority frontier of destination development in eastern Bali (Putra, 2023). According to statistics compiled by the Karangasem Culture and Tourism Office, combined foreign and domestic arrivals to the regency rose from 758,102 in 2022 to 1,307,058 in 2023—an increase of approximately 72%—and reached 1,370,309 in 2024, a further increase of approximately 5% (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Karangasem, 2025). These regency-wide figures combine foreign and domestic arrivals and are not disaggregated for Amed specifically; they are reported here only as the best available proxy for the destination's recent visitor growth, a limitation taken up in the final section of this article.

For Amed's local traders, this growth translates into daily face-to-face encounters with tourists from a wide range of first-language backgrounds. Most traders possess only basic formal education and have never received instruction in English; whatever English they command has been acquired autodidactically through the encounters themselves. Field observations preliminary to this study recorded expressions such as "Hello Mister, you want buy sarong?", "Cheap, cheap, only one hundred thousand money", and code-mixed appeals such as "cheap, cheap, cheap Mister!". Such utterances deviate from standard English grammar and lexis, yet they frequently succeed in opening, sustaining, and closing commercial transactions. At the same time, communication breakdowns do occur, and friction between traders and tourists—over price negotiation, perceived pushiness, or divergent norms of politeness—is regularly reported and can erode both visitor satisfaction and the destination's reputation.

These everyday transactions are a natural object for research on English as a lingua franca (ELF), which treats English used among speakers of different first languages as a legitimate communicative practice in its own right rather than a deficient approximation of native-speaker English (Seidlhofer, 2011). Empirical ELF work has repeatedly shown that such interaction is characterised by a pragmatics of cooperation: interlocutors deploy the "let-it-pass" principle, tolerating non-standard forms so long as intelligibility is preserved, and actively accommodate to one another to secure understanding (Firth, 1996; Mauranen, 2012), a pattern recently confirmed directly in tourism service encounters, including instances of communication breakdown and service recovery (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Watanabe & Miyamoto, 2026). Kecskes (2019) demonstrates that ELF speakers rely heavily on situationally salient, formulaic language and on the immediate context to construct shared meaning, while Canagarajah (2013) argues that such speakers draw on translingual repertoires—mixing codes, gestures,

and objects—as integrated meaning-making resources, a pattern also documented among Balinese tourism actors more broadly (Sinaga & Marbun, 2025). A catalogue of pragmatic strategies—repetition, explication, self-reformulation, and "explaining"—has been documented across business and institutional ELF settings (Kaur & Birlik, 2021; Taguchi & Caprario, 2025), and Thongphut and Kaur (2023) show that Thai front-desk staff deploy precisely such explicitness strategies to deliver service to linguistically diverse tourists. Most ELF research, however, still examines relatively proficient users in academic, business, or institutional settings, or front-desk staff who have received some service training; informal, unschooled traders such as those in Amed represent a more exacting test of the theory, since the multimodal and accommodative mechanisms ELF research proposes should be especially visible when lexico-grammatical resources are minimal.

Host–guest encounters are simultaneously intercultural encounters (Baker, 2024), in which communicators must manage the uncertainty and anxiety that cultural difference generates through mindfulness and adaptability (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) and negotiate identity and face (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Culture also shapes the channel mix of communication: in high-context cultures such as those of Indonesia, meaning is carried substantially by non-verbal and situational cues (Hall, 1976), and non-verbal behaviours—smiling, gaze, gesture, proxemics—perform crucial relational work in first encounters (Burgoon et al., 2016) and, in service settings specifically, a genuine smile has been shown to shape customer affect through emotional contagion (Hofmann et al., 2024), while frontline workers themselves regard non-verbal behaviour as central to service impressions (Malate et al., 2023). Evidence closer to the present setting corroborates this pattern: in a discourse-based study of Balinese tourism workers interacting with Australian and English tourists in Canggu, Bali, Sari et al. (2024) found that positive-politeness and off-record strategies predominated, and that polite interaction was constructed not only through word choice but through smiling, eye contact, and other body language that helped compensate for limited verbal elaboration. For hosts with limited verbal English, non-verbal communication may therefore be expected to carry a disproportionate share of the rapport-building load.

Finally, the traders in question are not classroom learners but adults acquiring English incidentally through economically consequential interaction. Norton's (2013) construct of investment—a sociological account of learners' commitment to language practices that grant access to material and symbolic resources, elaborated through the notions of identity, capital, and ideology (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023)—captures the way informal traders commit to English: every successfully negotiated sale is both the purpose and the pedagogy of their English. Indonesian evidence confirms that informal tourism workers such as traditional transport drivers develop functional English repertoires through exactly this experiential route (Naimah, 2022), and a recent application of the investment construct to Balinese tourism corroborates this picture: using Darvin and Norton's (2015) model, Ramadhani and Vaughan (2025) found that Balinese tour guides who acquired English mainly through informal means nevertheless demonstrated resilience and adaptability, leveraging social and cultural capital to compensate for limited formal instruction. These perspectives frame the supporting and inhibiting factors investigated in the second research question: cultural openness and economic need on the one hand, and restricted proficiency and limited service knowledge on the other.

Two gaps motivate the present study. Empirically and geographically, research on English in Indonesian, and more broadly Southeast Asian, tourism has concentrated predominantly on formal-sector personnel—hotel staff, guides, and travel agents—whose language needs are typically analysed for curriculum purposes (Abdul Zalil & Lim, 2022; Prachanant, 2012; Trang & Phuong, 2023; Zahedpisheh et al., 2017), leaving the informal traders who constitute the most numerous host–guest interface comparatively under-researched. The small number of existing Indonesian studies point in the same direction: accounts of traditional transport drivers (Naimah, 2022) and of street vendors elsewhere in Indonesia (Habiburrahman et al., 2024; Marzuki et al., 2024) document functional but non-standard English use, and even recent grassroots-focused work on Balinese tour guides' investment in English (Ramadhani & Vaughan, 2025) concentrates on guides rather than on traders who transact directly and repeatedly with tourists. Within Bali itself, scholarly attention has also clustered on the mature destinations of Kuta, Sanur, Ubud, and Nusa Dua and on institutionalised tourism villages (Murdana & Paramita, 2023; Rastitiati & Suprastayasa, 2022; Rastitiati et al., 2024; Widhiastuty & Murdana,

2024), whereas emerging peripheral destinations such as Amed, where service infrastructure and human-resource development lag behind visitor growth, remain comparatively under-researched.

Theoretically, the apparatus of ELF research—with its emphasis on intelligibility, accommodation, and the co-construction of meaning rather than conformity to native-speaker norms (Firth, 1996; Mauranen, 2012)—has only recently begun to be applied to tourism service encounters (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023; Watanabe & Miyamoto, 2026), and has rarely been brought to bear on the grassroots tourism economy, where proficiency levels are markedly lower than in the academic, business, and front-desk settings that dominate the existing ELF literature (Kaur & Birlik, 2021; Taguchi & Caprario, 2025). This study adopts ELF as its primary analytic lens, with Norton's (2013) construct of investment as a secondary lens for interpreting traders' motivation to acquire and use English; the remaining constructs introduced above—anxiety/uncertainty management, intercultural face-work, and high-context communication—are treated as interpretive context for the findings rather than as separate frameworks to be tested in their own right.

Addressing these gaps, this study asks two research questions: (1) What verbal and non-verbal communication patterns characterise interactions in English between informal local traders and foreign tourists at the Amed destination? (2) What linguistic, cultural, and economic factors support and inhibit cross-cultural communication between these traders and foreign tourists? In answering these questions, the study makes three contributions. Empirically, it documents host–guest communication in an emerging destination that has received little prior research attention. Theoretically, it extends ELF and investment scholarship to minimally proficient users in the informal economy, showing how multimodal resources compensate for restricted linguistic repertoires. Practically, it provides an evidence base for designing community-based English for specific purposes (ESP) and hospitality training appropriate to traders' actual communicative needs.

METHOD

The study employed a descriptive qualitative design with a naturalistic orientation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), appropriate for capturing communicative behaviour as it unfolds in its ordinary ecological setting without researcher manipulation. Qualitative procedures were chosen because the object of inquiry—situated communication patterns and the meanings traders attach to them—requires descriptive data in the form of participants' spoken words and observable behaviour (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The unit of analysis was the trader–tourist service encounter, examined from the traders' perspective.

Fieldwork was conducted along the coastal trading strip of the Amed destination area, Karangasem Regency, Bali, which comprises beachfront stalls, souvenir and sarong vendors, warung operators, and snorkelling-equipment renters. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) against three criteria: (a) working as an informal trader in the Amed destination area for at least two years; (b) engaging in direct, daily interaction with foreign tourists; and (c) having acquired English outside formal instruction. Recruitment proceeded iteratively, with field notes and interview summaries reviewed after each new informant. Saturation was considered to have been reached when three consecutive interviews produced no substantively new codes, communicative patterns, or supporting/inhibiting factors, and subsequent interviews served primarily to confirm and elaborate the categories already identified. This criterion was considered across the three main trade types to ensure that emerging patterns were not restricted to a single occupational group; the three-trade-type stratification itself was established a priori, as a sampling-frame decision made before recruitment began, and saturation was then assessed within that pre-established frame rather than used to determine the number of trade types sampled. The recruitment process yielded eighteen trader informants (11 female, 7 male; ages 27–56), comprising six souvenir and sarong vendors, six warung operators, and six snorkelling-equipment renters. Observational data additionally encompassed the foreign tourists with whom informants interacted during the observed encounters; these tourists were not interviewed, and no identifying information about them is reported. Systematic counts of the number of encounters observed, their distribution across trading hours and locations, and the number of distinct trader–tourist pairs involved were not tabulated during fieldwork; this is acknowledged as a limitation below. The composition of the sample is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. *Composition of the informant sample*

Trade type	n	Principal goods or services
Souvenir and sarong vendors	6	Souvenirs, sarongs, and beachwear sold from stalls and stands
Warung operators	6	Food and drink sold from small roadside and beachfront eateries
Snorkelling-equipment renters	6	Hire of masks, fins, and related equipment to visitors
Total	18	11 women and 7 men; aged 27–56; each with at least two years of trading in Amed

Note. Informants are described at the level of trade type and in aggregate; individual-level characteristics are not tabulated because, in a small and closely connected trading community, a pseudonym combined with age, gender, and years of trading could allow individual traders to be recognised.

Two complementary techniques were used. First, non-participant naturalistic observation of trader–tourist encounters was carried out across repeated visits at different times of day, with communicative behaviour—verbal expressions, gesture, gaze, proxemics, and transaction outcomes—documented in structured field notes and, where informants consented, photographs. Because the encounters occurred spontaneously in a public commercial setting and were not arranged by the researchers, the observational record reflects naturally occurring communication. Second, semi-structured interviews of approximately 30–45 minutes were conducted with each trader informant in Indonesian or Balinese, covering how they initiate contact with tourists, the English expressions they rely on, how they learned them, experiences of misunderstanding, and their perceptions of what helps and hinders communication. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for reporting, with translations checked by a bilingual colleague. The full semi-structured interview guide is provided as Appendix A.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification as concurrent, iterative activities. Field notes and interview transcripts were first coded inductively, line by line, by the first and second authors independently, following established coding procedures (Saldaña, 2021); field notes were coded using the same inductive scheme as the interview transcripts, with observational categories (e.g., non-verbal opening moves, transaction outcomes) coded alongside the verbal content. Coding consistency was checked through independent coding of six interview transcripts, representing one-third of the interview dataset; the two coders then compared their assigned codes, discussed discrepancies, and refined code definitions until consensus was reached. A quantitative inter-coder agreement statistic (e.g., Cohen's kappa) was not computed, consistent with the study's reflexive, consensus-based approach to coding rather than a quantitative-reliability approach; this is noted as a limitation below. The agreed coding framework was then applied to the remaining transcripts, with further discussion between the coders when ambiguities arose. Codes were then condensed into categories corresponding to (a) communicative patterns (non-verbal initiation, formulaic verbal expressions, deviations from standard English) and (b) contextual factors (supporting, inhibiting); because these categories were organised, in a second analytic pass, under the study's two a priori research questions, the overall analytic approach is best described as hybrid, combining inductive, data-driven coding with a deductive organisational frame rather than as purely inductive (cf. Saldaña, 2021). Matrix displays juxtaposing observational and interview evidence for each category (reported as Table 2 and Table 3) were constructed to support systematic cross-source comparison. Instances that appeared to diverge from the dominant pattern were examined specifically to test and refine the emerging categories, although no case amounted to a clear counter-example in the final data set. Illustrative trader utterances were analysed at the levels of grammar, lexis, and pragmatic function, drawing loosely on the catalogue of ELF pragmatic strategies described above (e.g., repetition, explication, self-reformulation; Kaur & Birlik, 2021) as an interpretive lens rather than as a formal coding scheme; a dedicated multimodal annotation framework for gesture, gaze, and proxemics was not applied, which is also noted as a limitation.

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of methods (observation and interview) and of sources (multiple traders across trade types); member checking, conducted with all eighteen informants after the initial coding and development of preliminary categories, in which each informant was provided with a brief Indonesian-language summary of the main points derived from his or her interview and was invited

to confirm, clarify, correct, or elaborate on the summary, with informants' feedback subsequently compared with the original interview transcripts and incorporated into the analysis where relevant; and peer debriefing with two colleagues in applied linguistics; dependability and confirmability were supported by an audit trail of field notes, codebooks, and analytic memos, and transferability by thick description of the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All informants gave informed consent after being briefed in Indonesian on the study's purpose and their right to withdraw; pseudonyms are used throughout, and no data permitting identification of individual traders or tourists are reported. Foreign tourists who featured incidentally in observed encounters were not interviewed and, in most cases, could not practicably be asked for individual consent in the course of a brief, unplanned commercial exchange; where photographs were taken, this was done with the trader's consent, and no photograph or other data permitting identification of an individual tourist is reported. The study was not submitted for formal review by an institutional ethics committee. It was a low-risk, non-interventional inquiry into everyday commercial talk in a public setting, with adult informants who participated voluntarily, and it was conducted in line with accepted research-ethics principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis yielded five interlocking findings, summarised in Table 2 and elaborated below: a two-stage communication model in which non-verbal initiation precedes verbal exchange; a formulaic, transaction-oriented verbal repertoire; systematic but non-fatal deviations from standard English; and distinct sets of supporting and inhibiting factors.

Table 2. *Summary of findings on English communication patterns between local traders and foreign tourists at the Amed destination*

Research objective	Findings from observation	Findings from interviews	Interpretation
Communication model used by local traders	Traders initiated interaction through non-verbal communication such as smiling, waving, eye contact, and handshakes before offering products.	In interviews, traders explained that opening the encounter this way lowers the stakes of the imperfect English that follows.	Non-verbal communication functions as an effective strategy to establish initial rapport despite language limitations.
Verbal communication pattern	Traders used short and simple English expressions such as "Hello Mister", "Cheap price", "Look please", and "Buy one".	Most traders described picking up these expressions informally, through repeated exposure to tourists rather than any classroom instruction.	English communication is functional rather than grammatically accurate, focusing on successful transactions.
English language competence	Numerous grammatical, vocabulary, and pronunciation inaccuracies were observed during interactions.	Traders acknowledged limited English proficiency and vocabulary, making it difficult to explain products or answer complex questions.	Limited English narrows what can be communicated without generally preventing the sale itself.
Supporting factors	Traders demonstrated friendly attitudes, openness, and confidence when approaching tourists.	Informants explained that hospitality culture and economic motivation encouraged them to communicate actively with foreign visitors.	Cultural openness and economic necessity are the primary driving forces supporting intercultural communication.
Inhibiting factors	Misunderstandings occasionally occurred because of limited English proficiency and differences in communication style.	Traders reported difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and understanding tourists' accents.	Limited communicative competence and lack of customer-service knowledge remain the major barriers to effective communication.

Note. Compiled from field observations and interviews conducted for this study.

Non-verbal initiation as the gateway to interaction

Across the observed encounters, traders consistently opened interaction non-verbally before any English was spoken. A smile directed at an approaching tourist, a raised hand or wave, sustained but friendly eye contact, and—once a tourist stopped—a handshake formed a recurrent opening sequence. In interviews, traders were explicit that this ordering is strategic rather than incidental: they described non-verbal gestures as the easiest way to attract tourists' attention before speaking English. Non-verbal behaviour thus performs the relational work of establishing approachability and goodwill, lowering the stakes of the imperfect verbal exchange that follows—a division of labour that allows traders to open the encounter in a channel in which they are fully competent.

A formulaic, transaction-oriented verbal repertoire

Once contact was established, traders drew on a compact stock of short, formulaic English expressions—"Hello Mister", "Cheap price", "Look please", "Buy one"—mapped onto the stages of the sales encounter: greeting, offering, pricing, persuading, and closing. Table 3 presents representative expressions recorded in observation, together with their standard-English counterparts and a linguistic analysis.

Table 3. *Examples of English expressions used by local traders*

Communication situation	Expression used by traders	Standard English expression	Analysis
Greeting	Hello Mister	Hello Sir / Hello Ma'am	Informal greeting used as a default form of address, applied regardless of the tourist's actual gender even though "Mister" is itself masculine-marked.
Offering products	You want buy sarong?	Would you like to buy a sarong?	Omission of auxiliary and infinitive marker; message remains fully understandable.
Explaining price	Cheap, cheap, only one hundred thousand money.	It is only one hundred thousand rupiah.	Lexical substitution of the general term "money" for the specific currency denomination "rupiah"; tentatively interpreted as colloquial transfer from Indonesian usage, in which transaction amounts are often referenced generically as uang ("money") rather than by naming the currency, though this interpretation was not directly probed in interviews; repetition used for emphasis.
Persuading customers	Look please, good quality.	Please have a look. It is good quality.	Communication prioritises persuasive force over grammatical accuracy.
Closing transaction	Thank you Mister.	Thank you. Have a nice day.	Closing expressions are simple but consistently polite.

Note. Compiled from field observations conducted for this study.

Three properties of this repertoire stand out. First, it is functionally complete: the five formulae cover the entire arc of a transaction, so that a trader commanding perhaps a few dozen English words can nonetheless conduct business from greeting to farewell. Second, it is acquired entirely through use: most interviewed traders reported that they learned English independently through daily interaction with tourists rather than through formal education, retaining whichever formulations proved to be understood. Third, it is oriented to outcome rather than form. Traders showed little concern with grammatical correctness as such; the operative criterion was whether the tourist responded appropriately.

Deviations from standard English and their communicative consequences

Observation recorded systematic deviations at three levels. Grammatically, auxiliaries, articles, and inflections were routinely omitted ("You want buy sarong?"). Lexically, traders sometimes substituted the general term "money" for the specific currency denomination, producing choices such as "one hundred thousand money" for "one hundred thousand rupiah"—a pattern tentatively attributed to colloquial transfer from Indonesian rather than confirmed directly in interviews. At the discourse level, code-mixing and emphatic repetition ("cheap, cheap, cheap Mister!") imported Indonesian persuasive conventions into English. Crucially, these deviations rarely caused transactional failure: tourists generally responded

co-operatively, inferring intended meaning from context, gesture, and displayed goods. Breakdowns clustered instead around comprehension: in interviews, traders acknowledged that limited proficiency and vocabulary made it difficult to explain products or answer more complex questions, and they reported particular difficulty in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and understanding tourists' accents. Observation corroborated this, recording occasional misunderstandings attributable to limited English proficiency and to differences in communication style between traders and tourists. Language limitations thus reduced communicative effectiveness at the margins without completely hindering commercial interaction.

Supporting factors: hospitality culture and economic necessity

Two factors consistently emerged as enabling this communication. The first is cultural: informants and observations alike pointed to the open, friendly disposition cultivated in Balinese hospitality culture, which predisposes traders to approach strangers warmly and to persist good-humouredly through communicative difficulty. The second is economic: because household income depends directly on completed sales, informants explained that economic motivation—alongside hospitality culture—encouraged them to communicate actively with foreign visitors despite their limited competence. Observation was consistent with these accounts, recording friendly attitudes, openness, and confidence as traders approached tourists. Economic necessity thus supplies the motivational engine, and cultural openness the interactional style, of traders' English use.

Inhibiting factors: restricted proficiency and limited service knowledge

On the inhibiting side, the analysis identified two clusters. The first is linguistic: restricted vocabulary and grammar, non-standard pronunciation, and above all limited listening comprehension of the varied tourist accents encountered—whose specific linguistic backgrounds were not systematically recorded—constrain traders to the transactional script and leave them unable to handle elaboration, complaints, or negotiation beyond price. The second is service-related: traders showed limited understanding of excellent-service principles, and differing cultural expectations between traders and tourists sometimes created misunderstandings—so that, while local culture facilitates interpersonal communication, the same persistence intended as friendliness could be experienced by tourists as pressure. A related economic dimension of the inhibiting side is that traders described feeling obliged to keep communicating even when a particular exchange was going badly, because household income depended on completing the sale; this pressure to persist despite limited competence is best understood not as a separate inhibiting factor but as the same economic necessity identified above as a supporting force, cutting in the opposite direction once an encounter has turned difficult. The study did not systematically compare these patterns across the three trade types, between women and men, or by years of trading experience, which is noted as a limitation below.

The first research question concerned the communication patterns characterising trader–tourist interaction. The findings reveal a two-stage multimodal pattern—non-verbal initiation followed by formulaic verbal transaction—that is best understood through the lens of ELF theory. The traders' outcome-oriented, form-indifferent use of English instantiates the pragmatics documented in ELF research: interlocutors privilege intelligibility over correctness, and tourists' co-operative tolerance of non-standard forms is consistent with the "let-it-pass" principle first described by Firth (1996) and confirmed directly in recent tourism-ELF research on communication breakdown and service recovery (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Watanabe & Miyamoto, 2026). The heavy reliance on a small stock of situationally bound formulae accords with Kecskes's (2019) finding that ELF meaning-construction leans on formulaic language and immediate context, while the integration of gesture, gaze, displayed goods, and code-mixing into the communicative act is consistent with the translingual, multimodal repertoires theorised by Canagarajah (2013) and documented among Balinese tourism actors more broadly by Sinaga and Marbun (2025). Where Thongphut and Kaur (2023) found that institutionally trained Thai front-desk staff achieve understanding through elaborated explicitness strategies—repetition, explication, self-reformulation—the Amed traders appear, from the present data, to achieve broadly similar transactional outcomes with far leaner verbal resources, relying more heavily on context and displayed goods to carry meaning; because the two studies did not apply a common measure of transactional success, this comparison is offered as a qualitative observation rather than as evidence of

equivalent effectiveness. A similar reliance on non-standard, context-supported English has also been documented among street vendors elsewhere in Indonesia (Habiburrahman et al., 2024; Marzuki et al., 2024), suggesting that the pattern observed in Amed is not idiosyncratic to this one destination. What the Amed data add to this literature is a boundary case: they suggest that the co-operative machinery of ELF can continue to function even when one party's lexico-grammatical resources are minimal, provided that the interaction type is highly conventionalised and richly supported by physical context. Non-standard English of the kind traders produce is, on this reading, not a deficient approximation of a target form but a repertoire fitted to the demands of the transaction at hand.

The prominence of non-verbal initiation is equally interpretable within intercultural-communication theory. Consistent with Hall's (1976) characterisation of high-context communication and with evidence on the relational functions of non-verbal behaviour (Burgoon et al., 2016), traders hand the work of building rapport to smiles, waves, and handshakes, which they use fluently, and save their limited English for the sale itself. This is a plausible allocation of communicative effort: research in hospitality shows that a genuine smile transmits positive affect to customers through emotional contagion (Hofmann et al., 2024), that frontline workers themselves treat non-verbal display as a fast route to a favourable service impression (Malate et al., 2023), and that non-verbal skills are trainable assets with direct customer-value payoffs in tourism micro-enterprises (Tusell-Rey et al., 2021). The pattern also converges with Sari et al.'s (2024) discourse analysis of Balinese tourism workers in Canggu, who likewise relied on smiling, eye contact, and positive-politeness moves—rather than elaborated verbal politeness—to build rapport with foreign tourists, suggesting that offloading relational work onto non-verbal channels is a recurrent adaptation among Balinese hosts serving linguistically diverse visitors, not a feature unique to Amed; recorded, two-sided interactional data from both settings would be needed to establish this as more than a parallel between the two studies' trader-side accounts. The sequencing is also consistent with an intuitive uncertainty-management strategy in Gudykunst and Kim's (2003) sense, in which signalling warmth and approachability before speaking may reduce traders' own anxiety about producing imperfect English and the tourist's uncertainty about the stranger addressing them, although this mechanism was not tested directly. The finding refines needs-analytic accounts of tourism English (Blue & Harun, 2003; Prachanant, 2012) by suggesting that, at the informal end of the industry, communicative competence may be distributed across modalities rather than concentrated in verbal proficiency—a pattern that resembles, in degree if not in kind, the communicative difficulties reported among undergraduate tourism students preparing to enter the formal sector (Trang & Phuong, 2023).

The second research question concerned supporting and inhibiting factors. The twin drivers identified—hospitality-cultural openness and economic necessity—are consistent with the construct of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2023; Norton, 2013): traders invest in English because it converts directly into material resources, and each transaction functions simultaneously as income and as informal pedagogy. This dynamic is mirrored in Indonesian evidence on informal tourism workers (Naimah, 2022), on Balinese tour guides' resilient, capital-driven investment in informally acquired English (Ramadhani & Vaughan, 2025), and on Balinese village tourism workers' positive English attitudes (Murdana & Paramita, 2023); it also resembles, more loosely, the gradual expansion of communicative capacity that Kim's (2001) stress–adaptation–growth model associates with repeated intercultural contact under necessity, and the attitudinal openness that Byram (2021) treats as a precondition for intercultural competence, though neither model was tested as such here. The inhibiting factors, by contrast, expose the ceiling of purely incidental acquisition. Listening comprehension of varied accents, elaborated product explanation, and complaint handling all lie beyond the transactional script that interaction alone has taught, and the mismatch between Balinese persistence-as-friendliness and international expectations of non-pressuring service is consistent with Ting-Toomey and Dorjee's (2018) observation that intercultural friction often arises not from language error but from divergent face and politeness norms. Left unaddressed, these limitations may carry destination-level consequences: service encounters more generally have been shown to shape tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intentions toward a destination (Li et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), and persistent language-related friction between vendors and visitors could plausibly feed into the overall service image of an emerging destination such as Amed, consistent with broader evidence that language barriers remain a recurrent

friction in the global visitor economy (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Taken together, the findings suggest that the appropriate policy response is not to remediate traders toward native-like English—an unrealistic and, from an ELF standpoint, unnecessary goal—but to build outward from the functional repertoire they already possess. Community-based ESP micro-training could prioritise the competencies the data suggest may be missing: high-frequency listening practice with varied accents, an expanded stock of formulae for product description and complaint handling, explicit instruction in international service conventions, and proactive customer-service behaviour of the kind that hospitality research links to employees' self-efficacy and sense of organisational support (Abuelhassan & AlGassim, 2022), together with the integrated intercultural-competence components now advocated for hospitality workforces more broadly (Liu et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023), delivered in situ and anchored to the transactional stages traders already master. Because the training needs traders themselves articulated were not separately reported in the Findings above, any such programme should be developed together with traders, drawing directly on their own stated preferences, rather than designed solely from the researchers' interpretation of the data presented here. Such a design would honour the ELF principle of intelligibility-first while directly targeting the inhibiting factors documented.

Six limitations qualify these findings. First, the study is confined to a single emerging destination; although thick description supports analytic transferability, the patterns documented here should be compared with informal-trader communication at other coastal and inland destinations. Second, the perspective is trader-centred: tourists were observed but not interviewed, so their interpretations of the encounters—including of behaviours traders intend as friendly—remain inferential, and claims about multimodally achieved intelligibility should accordingly be read as describing traders' reported and observed behaviour rather than as evidence of two-sided interactional co-construction; a complementary guest-side study is warranted. Third, the analysis rests on field notes rather than systematic audio–video recording of encounters, so the turn-by-turn micro-mechanics of accommodation and repair could only be inferred; future conversation-analytic work with audio- or video-recorded encounters could specify these mechanics directly. Fourth, the design is cross-sectional, whereas the investment and adaptation dynamics identified are inherently longitudinal; tracking traders' repertoires over time, or before and after a community-based training intervention, would test the developmental claims advanced above. Fifth, the sample of eighteen traders, while consistent with guidance on saturation in homogeneous purposive samples (Guest et al., 2006), is small and drawn from a single destination, so the specific formulae and factor weightings reported here should be treated as illustrative of a broader pattern rather than as generalisable population estimates; the study also did not systematically compare communicative patterns across the three trade types, between women and men, or by years of trading experience, each a plausible source of variation left for future analysis. Sixth, several aspects of the data remain under-quantified: inter-coder consistency was established through discussion to consensus rather than a computed agreement statistic, the number and distribution of observed encounters were not systematically tallied, and the linguistic and national backgrounds of the tourists involved were not recorded, so claims about the diversity of accents encountered could not be independently verified; closing these gaps is a priority for subsequent, more structured data collection in this setting.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to characterise the English communication patterns between informal local traders and foreign tourists at Amed, Karangasem, Bali, and to identify the factors that support and inhibit their cross-cultural communication. The analysis shows, first, that traders enact a consistent two-stage multimodal model in which non-verbal resources—smiles, waves, eye contact, handshakes—establish rapport before a compact repertoire of short, formulaic English expressions carries the transaction from greeting to closing; this English is systematically non-standard yet functionally adequate, exemplifying lingua franca communication under conditions of minimal proficiency. Second, cross-cultural communication is propelled by the openness of Balinese hospitality culture and by economic necessity, and is constrained by restricted lexico-grammatical and listening resources and by limited familiarity with international service-excellence conventions. The study thereby extends ELF and intercultural-communication scholarship into the informal tourism economy and identifies concrete,

evidence-based priorities—accent-varied listening practice, an enlarged transactional formula stock, and service-culture training—for community-based English programmes in emerging destinations. For destinations such as Amed, whose growth depends on the quality of exactly these grassroots encounters, investing in traders' communicative capacity is inseparable from investing in the destination itself.

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Ni Putu Oka Agustini, **Luh Nyoman Tri Lilasari**, **I Gusti Ayu Niken Launingtia**, **Teguh Hadi Sukarno**
"Cheap price, mister": English as a lingua franca in encounters between informal local traders and foreign tourists at Amed, Karangasem, Bali