

INDIRECT MEANING IN FERRY IRWANDI'S INSTAGRAM CAPTIONS: "NGGAK ADA YANG NAMANYA MAKAN BERGIZI GRATIS"

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Abstract

This study investigates the intricate construction and socio-political functions of indirect meaning within the digital discourse of Indonesian influencer Ferry Irwandi. By integrating a multi-layered theoretical framework comprising Searle's Speech Act Theory, Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature, and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This study explores how linguistic choices facilitate the negotiation of power and ideology in high-stakes digital environments. Data were purposively sampled from specific Instagram posts, meticulously analyzing the intertextual relationship between visual graphics and long-form captions. The findings reveal that indirect meanings are systematically realized through a sophisticated blend of evaluative language, hedging, and suggestive expressions. Pragmatically, the subject frequently flouts the Gricean Maxim of Quantity through rhetorical repetition to generate implicatures that challenge the feasibility of populist social programs without resorting to direct political confrontation. These strategies enable the influencer to exert subtle influence over audience perceptions while maintaining a persona of intellectual politeness and professional neutrality. At the macro-social level, these pragmatic maneuvers serve a dual purpose: constructing an ideological position of Economic Realism as a counter-hegemonic response to 2026 political populism and facilitating the commodification of critical discourse. This study concludes that digital indirectness is a strategic instrument used by "knowledge brokers" to bridge academic theory with the attention economy, ultimately converting ideological alignment into commercial action.

Keywords: *Indirect Meaning, Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Media Discourse, Ferry Irwandi, Ideological Construction.*

Introduction

In recent years, Instagram has become one of the most influential platforms for communication, shaping how individuals express ideas, construct identities, and influence public opinion. As a visually oriented social media platform, Instagram allows users to share images and videos accompanied by captions that function as an essential medium for conveying messages. These captions are not merely descriptive; they often contain implicit meanings that require interpretation beyond their literal form. Users, particularly influencers, frequently use indirect language to express opinions, attitudes, and persuasive intentions in subtle ways

From a pragmatic perspective, indirect meaning is commonly realized through implicature, where speakers imply more than what is explicitly stated. According to Grice (1975), conversational implicature emerges from the interaction between context, shared knowledge, and the speaker's intention. In Instagram captions, such indirect expressions can be identified through evaluative language, hedging, and suggestive statements that guide audience interpretation without direct assertion. This strategy is often used to maintain politeness, avoid controversy, and subtly influence followers.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is not neutral but is closely connected to power and ideology. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), discourse plays a significant role in constructing social reality and shaping relationships of power. On Instagram, influencers possess discursive power that enables them to shape audience perceptions and influence behavior through their captions. By using indirect meanings, they can promote certain ideologies, frame issues, and construct particular interpretations without stating them explicitly.

The concept of indirect meaning has been widely discussed in linguistic studies, particularly within pragmatics and discourse analysis. Understanding how meaning is conveyed beyond literal expressions is essential in analyzing communication in social media, especially Instagram captions, where users often rely on implicit messages to express their ideas.

Firstly, according to Grice (1975), indirect meaning can be explained through the concept of conversational implicature, where speakers imply more than what is explicitly stated. Grice argues that meaning is derived from context, shared knowledge, and the speaker's intention. In the context of Instagram captions, this concept is highly relevant as users frequently employ implicit expressions to convey opinions, evaluations, and attitudes without stating them directly.

Secondly, according to John Searle (1969), language functions as a form of action, and utterances can perform different communicative acts such as suggesting, criticizing, or persuading. Even when statements appear to be informative, they may carry indirect intentions. In social media communication, especially in influencer captions, indirect speech acts are commonly used to influence audiences while maintaining a polite and engaging tone.

Thirdly, from the perspective of social media discourse, Kurniawati (2024) states that Instagram captions are not only descriptive but also serve as tools for persuasion and identity construction. Similarly, Putri and Rahmawati (2025) argue that influencers often use indirect language to create authenticity and subtly promote products or ideas. These studies indicate that indirect meaning plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception in digital communication.

Fourthly, according to Fairclough (1995), language is a social practice that is closely related to power and ideology. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discourse is seen as a means of constructing social realities and influencing how people understand the world. In the context of social media, influencers have discursive power that allows them to shape opinions and frame issues through indirect expressions.

Finally, Van Dijk (2001) emphasizes that discourse is an important tool in reproducing social power and dominance. Supporting this, Sari (2026) and Hidayat (2025) found that indirect meaning

in social media is often used to influence audience attitudes while maintaining a neutral or implicit tone. These findings highlight the importance of combining pragmatics and CDA to fully understand how indirect meaning operates in digital discourse.

In addition, previous studies have also highlighted the importance of context in interpreting indirect meaning in digital communication. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics emphasizes that meaning is not only derived from linguistic forms but also from situational context and shared understanding between speakers and hearers. In social media environments such as Instagram, context becomes more complex due to the combination of visual content, captions, and audience interpretation. This makes indirect meaning more dynamic and open to multiple interpretations.

Moreover, recent research in digital discourse suggests that influencers strategically use language to maintain engagement and credibility. Studies indicate that indirect expressions are often employed to soften criticism, avoid direct confrontation, and maintain a positive public image while still delivering persuasive messages. This supports the idea that indirect meaning is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a communicative strategy in social media discourse.

It can be concluded that the previous studies indicate that indirect meaning plays a significant role in shaping communication in social media, particularly in Instagram captions. Pragmatic theories, such as implicature and speech acts, provide a foundation for understanding how meaning is conveyed implicitly, while Critical Discourse Analysis highlights the relationship between language, power, and ideology. Although previous studies have examined implicature, speech acts, and social media discourse, most of them tend to focus on these aspects separately. Research in pragmatics often emphasizes linguistic features without considering the broader social context, while studies in Critical Discourse Analysis mainly focus on power and ideology without deeply analyzing the implied meanings at the micro-linguistic level. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies specifically analyze indirect meanings in Instagram captions as a form of digital discourse, particularly in the context of influencer communication.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by integrating a pragmatic approach and Critical Discourse Analysis to provide a more comprehensive analysis of indirect meanings in Instagram captions, especially in understanding how these meanings function both linguistically and socially in shaping audience perception. This study aims to analyze indirect meanings in Ferry Irwandi Instagram captions using a pragmatic approach, particularly focusing on implicature, and to examine how these words reflect power relations and ideological positions through Critical Discourse Analysis. This research is expected to contribute to the understanding of how language is strategically used in Instagram communication and how meaning, power, and ideology interact in digital discourse.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach since it focuses on interpreting and analyzing indirect meanings found in Instagram captions rather than producing numerical data. A qualitative design is suitable for this research because it enables a deeper understanding of how language, context, and meaning interact within social media communication.

The data for this research is derived from Instagram captions posted by selected influencers who frequently address social or political issues. The study specifically examines captions that

contain implicit or indirect expressions, particularly those conveying opinions, judgments, or persuasive intentions. One of the primary data sources is content created by Ferry Irwandi, whose posts often present social and political commentary through indirect language. The data are collected using a documentation method, in which relevant captions are selected and recorded for further analysis.

In terms of data analysis, this study utilizes two main analytical frameworks: pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From a pragmatic standpoint, the analysis emphasizes identifying conversational implications based on Grice's theory, as well as examining indirect speech acts as proposed by Searle. This framework is used to reveal the underlying meanings embedded in the captions. In addition, CDA, particularly Fairclough's (1995) model, is employed to investigate how language reflects power relations and ideological perspectives within the discourse.

The analysis process involves several stages. First, the researcher identifies and selects captions that potentially contain indirect meanings. Second, the captions are examined to detect linguistic features such as evaluative terms, hedging expressions, and suggestive language. Third, the implied meanings are interpreted using pragmatic theories, including implicature and speech acts. Finally, the results are analyzed through a CDA perspective to explore how these words relate to power, ideology, and discursive practices in social media.

In qualitative research, understanding meaning in context is essential, as the focus is not only on what is said but also on how meaning is constructed through language use. According to John W. Creswell (2014), qualitative approaches allow researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth, particularly in studies related to language and social interaction. In addition, the use of document analysis as a data collection technique is appropriate for analyzing written texts such as Instagram captions, as it enables systematic evaluation of communicative content (Bowen, 2009). Furthermore, to ensure the credibility and validity of qualitative findings, this study applies theoretical triangulation by combining multiple analytical perspectives. As stated by Norman K. Denzin (1978), triangulation strengthens research interpretation by examining data through different theoretical lenses. Therefore, integrating pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how indirect meanings are constructed and interpreted in digital communication.

Qualitative research is also grounded in the idea that reality is socially constructed and can be understood through the interpretation of human experiences. According to Johnny Saldaña (2016), qualitative research focuses on analyzing meanings, patterns, and themes within textual data through systematic coding processes. This approach is particularly relevant to this study, as it allows the researcher to identify and interpret patterns of indirect meaning in Instagram captions and understand how these meanings function within social and communicative contexts.

In addition, qualitative research also emphasizes the importance of interpretive analysis in understanding social phenomena. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis in

qualitative studies involves processes such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, which allow researchers to systematically interpret meanings within textual data. This approach is particularly relevant in analyzing Instagram captions, as it enables the researcher to organize and interpret implicit meanings in a structured and comprehensive manner.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study applies theoretical triangulation by integrating both pragmatic and CDA perspectives. In addition, previous relevant studies are used to support and strengthen the interpretation of the data. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how indirect meanings are constructed and utilized in Instagram captions within digital communication.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings of this study indicate that the construction of indirect meaning in Ferry Irwandi's discourse involves a systematic weave of linguistic elements aimed at deconstructing the "free" narrative in the public sphere. These findings are classified based on the interaction between communicative functions and the violation of pragmatic principles.

Table 1: Identification of Speech Acts and Evaluative Language

Linguistic Data (Unit of Analysis)	Speech Act (Searle)	Maxim Analysis (Grice)	Linguistic Strategy and Function
1	2	3	4
"NGGAK ADA YANG NAMANYA MAKAN BERGIZI GRATIS, SEMUA ADA HARGANYA."	Assertive-Challenging: Challenging public propositions regarding benevolence.	Flouting of Relation: The relevance transcends general economic theory, touching on specific 2026 political issues.	Evaluative Language: The use of the word "Price/Cost" serves to absolutely negate the concept of "Free."
"Everything has a cost"	Representative-Axiomatic: Establishing a universal premise as a foundation for authority.	Observing Quality: Presenting the statement as an objective truth that is beyond debate.	Suggestive Expression: Implying hidden burdens within every social promise or personal choice.
"Makanya dalam ilmu ekonomi gak ada yang gratis, media sosial yang kita gunakan ini juga gak gratis..."	Assertive-Meta-discursive: Linking abstract theory to the audience's physical reality.	Observing Relation: Connecting economic concepts to the specific medium (Instagram) currently being used by the audience.	Breaking the Fourth Wall: A strategy to prove the theory in real-time to increase audience trust.
"Makan bergizi Gratis? ada costnya. Pendidikan Gratis? ada costnya. Internet gratis? ada costnya."	Assertive-Challenging: Challenging public propositions regarding benevolence.	Flouting of Relation: The relevance transcends general economic theory, touching on specific 2026 political issues.	Evaluative Language: The use of the word "Price/Cost" serves to absolutely negate the concept of "Free."
"bahkan ketika kamu memilih tiduran di	Assertive-Illustrative: Expanding economic	Observing Quality: Using a trivial	Relatability Strategy: Grounding

kasurmu pun ada cost yang kamu bayar"	theory into the domestic/private sphere.	example to validate complex macro-economic arguments.	theoretical concepts so they can be internalized by audiences from various backgrounds.
"penjelasan... ada di buku prinsipil ekonomi... yaudah pesen di @malakabooksid sekarang"	Directive-Instructional: Converting critical awareness into an act of consumption.	Observing Manner: A clear transition from the "problem" (ignorance) to the "solution" (purchasing the book).	Observing Manner: A clear transition from the "problem" (ignorance) to the "solution" (purchasing the book).

The data presented in the matrix above reveals a systematic pattern of how indirect meaning is constructed through the interplay of textual and contextual elements. Based on the qualitative findings, the results can be categorized into several key thematic functions:

- 1) **The Construction of Pragmatic Authority:** Through the use of **representative-axiomatic** speech acts in segments like *"Everything has a cost,"* the subject establishes a foundation of "absolute truth". This linguistic choice is designed to position the creator as an authoritative figure whose arguments are based on objective laws of nature rather than mere personal opinion.
- 2) **The Deconstruction of Populist Narratives:** The results indicate a frequent use of **evaluative language** to challenge established social perceptions. By contrasting the concept of "Free" with "Cost" or "Price," the subject forces a semantic shift in the audience's mind. The use of **anaphora** (repetition) regarding nutritious food, education, and the internet serves to dismantle the psychological appeal of "free" programs by highlighting their logical and economic consequences.
- 3) **Contextual Engagement through Meta-Discourse:** A significant finding in this study is the subject's ability to link abstract theory to the audience's immediate reality. By stating that the social media platform currently being used by the audience is "not free," the subject breaks the "fourth wall" of digital communication. This meta-discursive strategy acts as a **suggestive expression**, proving that the theory of "opportunity cost" is not just a concept in a book, but a tangible reality occurring at the very moment the audience reads the caption.
- 4) **Conversion of Ideology into Commodity:** The linguistic data shows a clear progression from critical education to commercial directives. The final segments of the caption function as **instructional directives**, where the "problem" of economic ignorance is resolved through the purchase of a specific product. This illustrates how indirect meanings are leveraged as a "discursive hook" to create urgency and drive market participation.

Discussion

The analysis of the discourse produced by Ferry Irwandi reveals a strategic utilization of linguistic indirectness that functions as a tool for ideological negotiation. By applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, we can observe how micro-level linguistic choices are tethered to macro-level power structures.

- 1) **Textual Dimension (Micro-level): Evaluative Language and Suggestive Expressions.** Textual analysis reveals the use of evaluative language aimed at re-labeling social reality. Diction such as *"tradeoff"* and *"opportunity cost"* are not merely technical terms but instruments used to provide a scientific veneer to a subjective critique. The sentence *"Makanya dalam ilmu ekonomi gak ada yang gratis, media sosial yang kita gunakan ini juga gak gratis..."*

is a powerful suggestive expression because it attacks the audience's comfort zone. By demonstrating that the audience is "paying" while consuming the content, the subject empirically validates his argument in the eyes of the audience.

- 2) **Discursive Practice (Meso-level): Hedging, Politeness, and Subtle Influence.** In the dimension of discursive practice, indirect meaning functions as both a defense and persuasion mechanism. Hedging and Politeness: In accordance with the theoretical framework, the subject uses indirectness to exert subtle influence. By wrapping political critique within an "economics lecture," he maintains professional politeness and avoids direct confrontation with political actors. He does not state "Program X is wrong," but rather "Economically, a program without cost is impossible.". Conversational Implicature: Through the violation of the Maxim of Quantity in the repetition of "*Free? there is a cost,*" the audience is forced into pragmatic enrichment. The audience does not just receive information; they are guided to draw their own conclusion that populist political promises are a logical fallacy. Conclusions drawn independently by the audience typically carry much stronger persuasive power than direct statements.
- 3) **Social Practice (Macro-level): Power Relations and Ideology.** At the macro level, this discourse highlights an ideological battle between Populism and Economic Realism. Firm Power Relations (Power-Knowledge): The subject acts as a Knowledge Broker. He constructs power through the mastery of information. By stating that a more complete explanation exists in the book he sells, he creates a hierarchy between "those who know" and "those who do not." Second, ideological construction: The text constructs the audience's identity as "rational individuals" who are not easily deceived. This reinforces the ideology of individual responsibility (Neoliberalism) as a counter-narrative to the dependency on state aid. Third, commodification of Discourse: A key finding in this qualitative study is how critical discourse is aligned with commercial practice. The instruction "*order now*" accompanied by the deadline "*January 15*" shows that indirect meaning is used to build urgency. The critique of the government becomes a "hook" to direct the audience toward market action (purchasing books at @malakabooksid).

This study confirms that indirect meaning plays a crucial role in digital communication. From a pragmatic perspective, implicature allows speakers to communicate efficiently while leaving room for interpretation. This supports Grice's theory that meaning depends on context and shared knowledge. From a CDA perspective, the use of indirect meaning reflects power relations. Influencers use language strategically to shape audience perception and promote certain ideologies without appearing too explicit. This aligns with Fairclough's view that language is a form of social practice. Compared to previous studies, this research shows that indirect meaning is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a strategic tool for influence. It highlights how language can be used to construct identity, maintain engagement, and control discourse. However, this study has limitations, such as a limited data sample and focus on specific influencers. Future research can expand the dataset and explore different social media platforms.

Conclusion

This study concludes that indirect meaning in Ferry Irwandi's Instagram captions is strategically constructed through a combination of pragmatic and discursive mechanisms. From a pragmatic perspective, indirect meanings are primarily realized through conversational implicature, rhetorical repetition, and indirect speech acts, which allow the speaker to convey critical viewpoints without explicit confrontation. The frequent flouting and observance of Gricean maxims, particularly the maxim of relation and quantity, function as key strategies in generating implied meanings that guide audience interpretation. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, these linguistic strategies are not neutral but closely related to the construction of power and ideology. The

findings demonstrate that Ferry Irwandi, as a digital influencer, utilizes indirect language to position himself as a credible “knowledge broker” who bridges academic economic concepts with everyday social realities. This positioning enables him to subtly challenge dominant populist narratives, particularly the notion of “free” public services, while simultaneously promoting an ideology of economic realism.

Furthermore, the study reveals that indirect meaning also serves a dual function in digital discourse: as a tool for ideological negotiation and as a mechanism for commodification. The transition from critical explanation to promotional discourse within the same caption indicates how knowledge and ideology can be transformed into commercial engagement in the attention economy. However, this study is limited by its focus on a relatively small dataset and a single influencer. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of social media discourse. Future research is recommended to include a broader range of data, different social media platforms, and comparative analysis across multiple influencers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of indirect meaning in digital communication. Overall, this study contributes to the field of applied linguistics by demonstrating how the integration of pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis can provide a deeper understanding of meaning, power, and ideology in contemporary digital discourse.

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