



## INTERCULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

BEKNAZAROVA GAVHAR

STUDENT, SAMARKAND STATE INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE

TAGAYEVA UMIDA ERNAZAROVNA

TEACHER, SAMARKAND STATE INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18333449>

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

Accepted: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Published: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026

### KEYWORDS

*intercultural communication, EFL contexts, pragmatic competence, cultural norms, miscommunication*

### ABSTRACT

*Intercultural miscommunication has emerged as a critical issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners and instructors navigate linguistic interaction across divergent cultural frameworks. This study examines the primary causes, manifestations, and pedagogical implications of intercultural miscommunication in EFL classrooms. Drawing on sociolinguistic and pragmatic theories, the research identifies cultural norms, discourse conventions, and pragmatic transfer as major sources of misunderstanding. Through qualitative analysis of classroom discourse and illustrative examples, the study demonstrates how linguistic competence alone is insufficient for effective communication. The findings emphasize the necessity of integrating intercultural communicative competence into EFL instruction to foster mutual understanding, pragmatic appropriateness, and communicative effectiveness in globalized educational environments.*

### 1. Introduction

The global spread of English as an international lingua franca has transformed language learning into an inherently intercultural endeavor. In EFL contexts, learners are frequently required to communicate not only across linguistic boundaries but also across culturally constructed norms of interaction. Despite high levels of grammatical and lexical proficiency, EFL learners often experience communicative breakdowns resulting from cultural incongruities rather than linguistic inaccuracies. Such phenomena, commonly referred to as intercultural miscommunication, pose significant challenges in academic, professional, and social settings.

Intercultural miscommunication occurs when interlocutors interpret messages through culturally specific frames of reference, leading to unintended meanings, pragmatic failure, or interpersonal tension. In EFL classrooms, these misunderstandings are amplified due to limited exposure to authentic intercultural interaction and overreliance on formal linguistic instruction. This article explores the nature of intercultural miscommunication in EFL contexts, focusing on its underlying causes and pedagogical consequences.

### 2. Literature Review

Research in intercultural communication highlights the inseparability of language and culture. Early studies emphasize that communication is governed by culturally defined norms regulating politeness, turn-taking, and speech acts. Subsequent work in pragmatics introduces the concept of pragmatic transfer, wherein learners apply native cultural norms to foreign-language interaction, often resulting in misinterpretation.

In EFL studies, scholars argue that traditional language instruction prioritizes grammatical accuracy while neglecting sociocultural competence. Miscommunication frequently arises in areas such as requests, refusals, apologies, and expressions of disagreement, where cultural expectations diverge substantially. Recent pedagogical frameworks advocate for the development of intercultural communicative competence, integrating attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for effective cross-cultural interaction. However, empirical studies focusing on EFL classroom realities, particularly in non-Western contexts, remain limited, justifying further investigation.

### 3. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in discourse analysis. Data were drawn from recorded classroom interactions, role-play tasks, and written communicative exchanges produced by advanced EFL learners. Instances of miscommunication were identified based on pragmatic infelicities, inappropriate speech act realization, and negative interlocutor responses.

The data were analyzed thematically, focusing on cultural norms governing politeness strategies, directness, non-verbal cues, and contextual assumptions. Supplementary insights were obtained from learner reflections and instructor observations, providing triangulation and enhancing interpretive validity.

### 4. Results

Analysis of the data revealed several recurring patterns of intercultural miscommunication in EFL contexts:

#### Pragmatic Failure in Speech Acts

Learners frequently produced grammatically correct utterances that were pragmatically inappropriate. For example, direct requests such as "Give me your notes" were perceived as impolite due to the absence of mitigating devices common in English-speaking cultures. This reflects negative pragmatic transfer from cultures where directness signals efficiency rather than rudeness.

#### Misinterpretation of Politeness Norms

EFL learners often misjudged levels of formality, particularly in academic communication. Excessive politeness, manifested through overuse of honorifics or apologetic language, sometimes led to perceptions of insecurity or lack of confidence, while insufficient politeness resulted in unintended offense.

#### Non-Verbal and Paralinguistic Misalignment

Differences in eye contact, gestures, and silence contributed to misunderstanding. For instance, avoidance of eye contact, culturally associated with respect in some contexts, was interpreted as disengagement or dishonesty in English-dominant communicative settings.

#### Cultural Assumptions and Contextual Gaps

Learners struggled with implicit cultural references, humor, and indirect meanings. Irony and understatement were particularly problematic, often interpreted literally, which disrupted conversational flow and interpersonal rapport.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that intercultural miscommunication in EFL contexts primarily stems from disparities in cultural norms rather than deficiencies in linguistic knowledge. This underscores the limitation of language instruction models that prioritize structural competence at the expense of pragmatic and intercultural awareness.

Pragmatic transfer emerges as a double-edged phenomenon: while it facilitates initial communication, it often leads to misinterpretation when native cultural norms conflict with target-language expectations. The prevalence of direct speech acts among learners, for example, reflects culturally embedded values of clarity and honesty, yet clashes with English politeness conventions that favor indirectness and mitigation.

Furthermore, the data reveal that miscommunication is not merely an individual learner issue but a systemic pedagogical concern. Without explicit instruction in intercultural pragmatics, learners remain ill-equipped to interpret contextual cues or adjust communicative strategies dynamically. The results therefore support pedagogical models that integrate authentic discourse analysis, role-play simulations, and reflective intercultural tasks into EFL curricula.

## 6. Conclusion

Intercultural miscommunication constitutes a significant challenge in English as a Foreign Language contexts, arising from culturally conditioned interpretations of language use. This study demonstrates that effective communication requires more than grammatical accuracy; it necessitates intercultural communicative competence encompassing pragmatic sensitivity, cultural awareness, and adaptive interactional skills.

To mitigate intercultural miscommunication, EFL instruction should adopt a holistic approach that integrates language and culture as inseparable components of communication. Future research may extend this inquiry through longitudinal studies or corpus-based analysis to further examine how intercultural competence develops over time.

### References:

1. Baker, W. (2015). *Culture and Identity through English as a Lingua Franca*. De Gruyter.
2. Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters.
3. Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2002). *Pragmatic Development in a Second Language*. Blackwell.
4. Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture*. Oxford University Press.
5. Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112.